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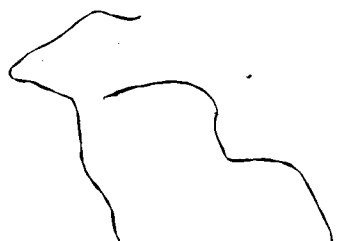

DIFFICULT MUSIC:

A TEXTUAL STUDY OF SAMUEL BECKETT'S FICTION

by

Allen Sutterfield

B.A., Missouri State University, 1963

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis views Samuel Beckett's fiction as radically different from traditional prose fiction, and attempts to locate the sources of this difference. The difference, it is argued, proceeds from a changed way of perceiving reality. In visual art a distinction has long existed between "realist" and "abstract" perceptual modes, but this has been much less true of verbal art, particularly in the novel. Prose fiction traditionally locates itself within the perceptual realism of subject/object separation, sanctioned by the conventions of omniscient narration, transparent language, and linear perspective. By contrast, Beckett's work is abstract: subject/object relation is present in a non-separated condition, implemented in the work through direct, non-omniscient narration, an opaque language, and a non-linear narrative method.

Critical methodology must acknowledge these changes, through approaching the Beckett text as an "action in language" rather than as a "language object." In this thesis the six works studied are

approached as a dynamic field of language, within which each has only a provisional separateness. The actional nature of the field is emphasized by a direct attention to literal text as both a 'speaking' and a 'writing,' and through focusing upon relations in the whole language field, rather than upon analysis of specific texts or of the field itself as a 'whole object.'

Though one hesitates to draw dogmatic conclusions, it seems clear that Beckett's work effects a break with a dominant tradition of prose writing, best understood in terms of a conflict between "abstract" and "realist" perceptual modes. As a different kind of writing, Beckett's work provides a unique experience unavailable in the traditional novel, and makes possible a whole revaluation of the traditional way of perceiving prose fiction.

DEDICATION

This essay is dedicated to Leslie
and to Kirk,
long and patient sufferers of its
completion.

"She felt, as she felt so often with Murphy, spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. It was like difficult music heard for the first time."

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INTRODUCTION

The Critics[1]

Much of the critical writing about Samuel Beckett's fiction runs quickly aground in a peculiarly obvious fashion. In an opening sequence Molloy describes two travellers, identified as "A" and "C". These travellers are mentioned by name only once or twice in the "Molloy" half of the book (8-15; 41), and not at all in the "Moran" half. Yet John Fletcher, a respected Beckett critic, writes as though "A" and "C" are present throughout, and identifies them with other, unnamed, characters in the work.

> The man C has a cocked hat which Moran describes, when he sees it later in the story, as 'quite extraordinary, in shape and color...like none I had ever seen', and he carries a stout stick which Molloy later calls a club...and it is with this club in hand that C approaches Moran in the woods.[2]
>
> (emphasis mine)

There is, however, no textual basis for these identifications. Molloy speaks of the hat "C" is wearing:

> It seemed to me he wore a cocked hat. I remember being struck by it, as I wouldn't have been for example by a cap or by a bowler. (10)

> But the hat, a town hat, an old-fashioned town hat, which the least gust would carry far away. Unless it was attached under the chin, by means of a string or an elastic. (13)

And Moran, later, speaks of the hat someone approaching him is wearing:

> I was thinking he could not be much over fifty-five when he took off his hat, held it for a moment in his hand, then put it back on his head. No resemblance to what is called raising one's hat. But I thought it advisable to nod. The hat was quite extraordinary, in shape and colour. I shall not attempt to describe it, it was like none I had ever seen. (146)

The reader does not, and cannot, know that it is "C" who approaches Moran, for the text does not mention "C", nor that the hat in question is a "cocked hat" since Moran gives no particulars about it. Even in Molloy's descriptions, is a "cocked hat" the same as "an old-fashioned town hat"? The reader can only decide these matters for himself. But Fletcher writes as though these are textual, narrative facts, and thereby distorts the work as it actually is, which ceases to be Beckett's Molloy text and becomes instead the critic's reconstruction of Molloy, a reconstruction which goes unacknowledged.

This is not an isolated instance.

> Both Molloy and Moran speak of a power, more malevolent than benevolent, which plays with their lives. Molloy refers to this power as 'they', but their only representative whom he sees is Gaber... 'They' pay him for writing his story, or alternatively scold him, through Gaber, when he fails to do so.

Molloy in fact does not encounter anyone named Gaber, nor mention anyone by that name at any point in his narrative, although Gaber, named as such, is an important figure in the "Moran" text.[4] Molloy says:

> 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. There's this man who comes every week. Perhaps I got there thanks to him. (7)

Gaber, named, is a definite being and has a natural place in Moran's well-ordered, clearly detailed world, so different from Molloy's, characterized by vagueness, forgetfulness, and uncertainty. These differences are not merely stated in, but reflected by the "Molloy" and "Moran" texts. One need only substitute the name "Gaber" for "this man" in the passage above to feel immediately the shrinkage that text (and with it, Molloy's world) undergoes, through such an exact identification. Once again, the reader can only decide that the man Molloy refers to is the 'Gaber' of the "Moran" text. There are suggestions in both texts that tantalize towards such an identification, but these only underscore the fact that probability has replaced certainty as the context for such conjecture. The uncertainty in Molloy extends beyond

the narrative into the reader's own situation, for the only "sure ground" available to the reader is the literal text itself, ground immediately abandoned when one provides names for unnamed characters.[5]

John Fletcher is not alone among Beckett critics in this sort of critical procedure. Similar difficulties are apparent in Northrop Frye's essay "The Nightmare Life in Death." Referring to Murphy, an earlier, more conventional novel than those of the Trilogy, Frye says:

> Murphy looks for communication in the eye of Endon, his best friend among the patients, but sees no recognition in the eye, only his own image reflected in the pupil. "The last Mr. Murphy saw of Mr. Endon was Mr. Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon." He then commits suicide.[6]

But it is not at all clear that Murphy commits suicide: his death is just as probably an accident. Frye's definite statement ("He then commits suicide.") implies that the book is explicit on this point, but the fact that the text leaves open the exact nature of Murphy's death makes this a decision the reader must make for himself. Unless this is acknowledged, Murphy is not being clearly seen, and an important dimension of the work is being ignored.[7]

Molloy is far more problematic than Murphy.

Writing of Moran, Frye says:

> He starts out with his son, whom he is trying to nag into becoming a faithful replica of himself, and he ties his son to him with a rope, as Pozzo does Lucky. The son breaks away....[8]

The "Moran" text, however, reads quite differently.

> I toyed briefly with the idea of attaching him to me by means of a long rope, its two ends tied about our waists. There are various ways of attracting attention and I was not sure this was one of the good ones. And he might have undone his knots in silence and escaped, leaving me to go my way alone, followed by a long rope, like a burgess of Calais. Until such time as the rope, catching on some fixed or heavy object, should stop me dead in my stride. We should have needed, not the soft and silent rope, but a chain, which was not to be dreamt of. And yet I did dream of it, for an instant I amused myself dreaming of it... (129)

The startling disparity between the critic's version and the actual text calls seriously into question Frye's critical approach, as well as evaluations arising from that approach, for how can these be trusted when it is apparent the text has not been clearly seen even on the most obvious level? The situation is further complicated, rather than clarified, by the allusion to Waiting For Godot, which is misleading in a double sense. Pozzo and Lucky are

linked together by a rope, but they are not tied together; rather, Lucky is driven before Pozzo, one end of the rope around Lucky's neck, the other in Pozzo's hand. Even in Act II, when Pozzo is blind, the rope is merely shortened.[9] For Moran, tying Jacques Jr. to himself is never more than a daydream.

These problems persist throughout the essay, and continually undermine the critical position. When we read "...Moran sees Molloy but does not realize who he is..."[10] we want to know where in the narrative this occurs, and what textual evidence is available for such an intriguing suggestion, but these are not provided. Again, in referring more directly to a structural concern, rather than to narrative contents, the same difficulty recurs.

> Moran's narrative, which starts out in clear prose, soon breaks down into the same associative paragraphless monologue that Molloy uses.[11]

This simply does not happen, even though one would almost expect it to. Merely glancing through the two texts comprising Molloy, even short of reading them, reveals the discrepancy here. "Molloy" has only an opening paragraph covering two pages, followed by a second paragraph of eighty-three pages.

"Moran" is much more orthodox: ten paragraphs of the first five pages are balanced by ten paragraphs over the concluding six pages, and the paragraphing in general is quite typical. Moran does slide into paragraphs several pages in length (four paragraphs over pages 140-54) midway through the book, during his crisis, but he never does succumb entirely to the "associative paragraphless monologue" of Molloy. Though very changed, he is still Moran at the end of his story, and this is reflected in his writing style as fully as in the statements and events of his life, once returned from his journey. While it is quite important to note where the writing in "Moran" is most like the writing in "Molloy," it is certainly not the case that Moran's 'style' is ever subsumed into Molloy's.

Unlikely as it may seem, these problems are common in the Beckett criticism, and their prevalence emerges as symptomatic of a general difficulty. Were they confined to one critical work, or even to one critic, they could be explained perhaps as simply a slip of the eye in reading, or a badly printed version of text, or a hurried

effort in order to meet a deadline, or an overweaning bias either for or against the author, or in support of some extreme critical viewpoint. There are examples of these in the criticism as well,[11] but the most unusual, frustrating, and puzzling aspect of the criticism in general remains the too-obvious distortion of textual statement through uncareful reading, and the seemingly unknowing and certainly unacknowledged substitution of personal conception of the work, for the in-fact text as it appears on the page. To some extent, of course, this occurs in the writing about any author, but rarely so blatantly nor embarrassingly as with Beckett. That this is not entirely accidental (even if we allow for the 'good intentions' of the critic) is suggested in a remark by Ruby Cohn, referring to the Trilogy:

> However, if details are glossed over, skeletal plot outlines may be attempted.[12]

Other critics immediately follow this lead, as when Edith Kern, writing of Molloy, says:

> Yet this bewilderment is easily disposed of, if we reverse the order of the two parts.[13]

An excellent example of what happens "when the details are glossed over" is provided by Frederick Hoffman in his discussion of Molloy, a typical statement from which is:

> Molloy speculates about another being, who is identified in part two as Moran, searching for and merging with Molloy.[14]

Example upon example can be cited, from the criticism in general and from specific works of individual critics, although space does not here permit an extensive examination of a large body of criticism.[15] It is a measure of the power of Beckett's work that critical essays are so revealing of their own authors, for the Beckett text provides an exacting guide against which to measure anything written about it.

But what sort of explanation can be offered for the kind of procedural error here noted? And why is it so prevalent? Much of the problem would seem to lie with the way a literary text is perceived. The tendency implicit in Ruby Cohn's remark, that of ignoring troublesome details in an effort to achieve some rounded off 'whole picture' of a work, is incidental to an approach that deflects attention away from the text itself, towards interpretational meanings only the critic can provide.

When the text is looked at closely, in fact literally, and its details are allowed to stand forth as they were written, in all their irresolvable complexities, a very different and much clearer picture of the work begins to emerge. Beckett's writing has difficulties of a specific kind which require a different sort of reading orientation than more traditional novels. Habits engendered by the bulk of prose fiction reading ill serve the reader who is confronted with a Beckett text. These habits include, tacitly if not explicitly, a number of assumptions about the nature of fiction, of reading, and of writing, assumptions generally shared by writer and reader alike but which Beckett's work directly challenges. These matters are discussed at more length later in this Introduction. The reluctance of many critics to deal directly, or more directly, with the Beckett texts perhaps stems from an intuited sense of the text as a threat to a world view they not only share but espouse. A major concern in the present thesis is to show how the Beckett Trilogy is a radical departure, in form, from the traditional novel, that Beckett's writing is revolutionary in this regard. To that end, it is first necessary to review some broad currents of twentieth century intellectual and aesthetic history.

"Realist" and "Abstract" Art

Dora Vallier in her impressive book Abstract Art locates a major change in twentieth-century consciousness by describing the conflicting views of reality designated by the terms "realist" and "abstract." The specific origin of this conflict she traces to changes in nineteenth-century physics, in which investigation shifted away from direct observation of the natural world towards the invisible realm surrounding the narrow range of phenomena immediately available to the senses. Perceptual norms established during the Renaissance, primarily those of linear perspective and a human-scale world centered in "man's confidence in the absolute power of his intelligence to achieve its mission of unveiling the external world,"[16] were directly challenged by the new order of wave mechanics and Einsteinian space-time. Max Planck articulated the displacement of the Newtonian system by quantum theory:

> Just as classical physics spacially disintegrates the system, considered in its smallest parts, and thereby reduces the movements of material bodies to the movements of their material points considered a priori as invariables, so quantum physics disintegrates every movement into periodical material waves...[17]

Similarly, the common sense realism of subject-object space, in which separate subject views separate object , each distinct unto itself in transparent space, vanished in the Einsteinian space-time continuum.

> Space and time were one. Though concretely measureable, this other space and other time which order our daily experience were shams, pure conventions. Perception was the victim of deception, while the intellect was aware that there was only a single shifting unity, of space plus time plus energy. There was only one bond between it and man: abstraction. Conceiving replaced seeing.[18]

A major consequence of this change was the disappearance of the 'object' itself, and with it the whole order of certainty constituted by the human scale of subject-object perception, as succinctly summed by Werner Heisenberg.

> This new situation in modern natural science shows us that we can certainly no longer consider as 'a thing in itself' the building-blocks of matter, which originally were held to be the objective reality, that they escape from any attempt to pin them down objectively in space and in time, and that still, fundamentally, the only object of science at our disposal is what we know of these particles...We find ourselves in the middle of a dialogue between nature and man, of which science is only one part, so that the conventional division of the world into subject and object, into inner world and outside world, into soul and body, is no longer applicable and gives rise to difficulties. For natural science...the subject

> of research is therefore no longer nature in itself, but nature subjected to human interrogation, and to this extent man... here meets only himself....For the first time in history, man finds himself alone with himself on this earth, without partner or adversary.[19]

The discoveries in physics were paralleled by the many changes in the styles of European painting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Impressionism through Cubism. Nonetheless, all those changes occurred within the precincts of subject-object perceptual realism: the human scale, the sanctity of the object, was maintained. Even in Cubism

> the central role of the senses remains uncontested. On one hand the painter, on the other reality. Between the two, to unite them, perception.[20]

It was only when this arrangement was abandoned that a real change, an actual break with the past, occurred: the change that was (and is) abstract art.

> Whereas formerly the senses established a definite bond between man and the outside world, abstraction...dug an abyss.[21]

Abstract art was not simply a "tendency" but "a phenomenon," even though this was not immediately apparent and is available as such only to the hindsight of half a century later. Vallier notes a historical division within abstract art itself. The initial phase, most prominently represented by Kandinsky and Mondrian, was more intellectual and idealistic, dominated by the search for "a geometrical absolute that would express the visual world." Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (1927),[22] however, ended such a hope, in science as well as art. After a period of inner retrenchment, a second phase of abstract art emerged immediately after World War II.

The new works were characterized by a "growth of the abstract within figuration;" explicit abstract intention is replaced by "abstraction...as an inner value inseparable from...substance."

> These artists...are certainly not abstract. ..and yet the forms they create do not contain a recognizeable reality. They are forms connected closely with reality - but what is this reality which is not the same as the one we see?...which inescapably disturbs the structure of our thinking, because it forces us to admit that figuration does not mean realism?[23]

> Just where, in appearance, an abyss separates creator from spectator, there is only proximity between the thing and its expression--a proximity inconceivable in the past...The initial, geometrical remote abstraction has been succeeded by a figuration-in-proximity, which defeats critical language. It does, in fact, figure the external world, but because it does not step back from this to see it at a distance, because it is attentive to the relationship which makes part merge into whole, it is, to the understanding, abstract. In this way, abstraction and figuration have become, in our day, reversible. They have infiltrated each other, while the words designating them continue to treat them as opposites.[24]
>
> (emphasis hers)

The alteration of a recognizeable content (and with it, the viewer's expectation of an apprehendable intellectual meaning) by "figuration-in-proximity" violates traditional spectator/creator relationship, sustained by the primary given of critical distance. With this new directness, a gap emerges between "sensibility, projected forward by plastic experiments that sharpen it," and "understanding, held back by its categories."[25] This gap is particularly felt in any attempt to analyze or describe either the work or the experience provoked by it, since the perceiver's experience is no longer separate from the work itself, in the traditional understanding of 'separate.'

The very term 'abstract art' contains a contradiction,[26] a contradiction representative of an inherent conflict between the language structures which are the primary means for describing experience, and the kind of experience abstract art provides. Marshall McLuhan has exposed this conflict in his lucid attack on the "tyranny of print culture."

> Not only does modern physics abandon the specialized visual space of Descartes and Newton, it re-enters the subtle auditory space of the non-literate world. And in the most primitive society, as in the present age, such auditory space is a total field of simultaneous relations... All values apart, we must learn today that our electric technology has consequences for our most ordinary perceptions and habits of action which are quickly recreating in us the mental processes of the most primitive men. These consequences occur, not in our thoughts or opinions, where we are trained to be critical, but in our most ordinary sense life, which creates the vortices and the matrices of thought and action.[27]

Technological innovations radically alter the <u>experience</u> of everybody (the atomic bomb and television are events of global consequence), yet the means for describing this change, at least in western literate culture, are still those of the past, the origins of which were the rise of literacy in the Renaissance, and the coincident elevation of the visual sense as supreme.

> The new physics is an auditory domain and long-literate society is not at home in the new physics, nor will it ever be.[28]

Language structures are the most intimate form of the old realism, the foundational perimeters of our traditional "way of seeing." Vallier correctly notes that critical language, as presently constituted, is at a dead end when confronted with recent abstract art, and McLuhan is right, one feels, in asserting that "long-literate society" will never be at home in the vast universe of the present. But Vallier is uncharacteristically short-sighted when she goes on to say:

> As an instrument for dealing with forms, language has become superannuated, and is of little use for communicating to a wider public plastic expression at the stage this has reached.[29]

Language itself, still the pre-eminent descriptive tool, is much more than the inherited forms of print-culture realism. Literacy is a phenomenon of language, and not the other way round. Language continually encloses literacy, something easily forgotten in visual-oriented, print-dominated culture: writing is a unique event in language but it is never a self-complete event. And language can hardly be thought

to be exempt from the changes ramifying throughout the whole of western consciousness and twentieth-century reality, although the language structures (and the forms of thinking they circumscribe) are the last to register the effects so obvious in every other area of contemporary life.

While the language forms to which we are accustomed face obvious difficulties when confronted with contemporary visual art, in abstract verbal art language immediately obtains more leverage, since the experience of a literary work is itself an experience of language in some major way. Writer and reader are less distinct than painter and spectator: they necessarily share a more intimate, if less immediate, experience. And since our language forms are very really "ourselves" in a more literal way than we might prefer, had we a choice, the resistance to non-realist perceptual ordering is understandably great, just as the capacity for actual change (even if we want to change) is less available, than with visual art. Television alone, with its many rapidly changing images (even though the contents of the images remain realistically representative), unconsciously conditions the eye for a readier acceptance of cubist painting, but there is nothing comparable

in our language environment. We have to consciously resist the resistance, as with the technique of suspended judgement, "by which we can transcend the limitations of our own assumptions by a critique of them."[30] To do so dynamically involves one in the indeterminacy signalled by Heisenberg's famous principle.

An even larger step is taken in Dora Vallier's convincing analogy between abstract art and gestalt psychology/philosophy, sofaras gaining access to a fuller participation in the implicit communication process initiated by abstract works of art. This analogy, quoted in full below, provides a comprehensive and evocative stimulus for exploring the new grounds of spectator/creator relationship. Caudwell's remarks on perception,[31] and Raymond Williams' descriptions of creative process and artist/viewer relation,[32] underscore the deep-level changes informing current understanding of perception itself, particularly when contrasted with the perceptual realism of the past. The analogy is as important for verbal as for visual abstract art, and establishes the implicit boundaries within which the present study of Beckett's fiction proceeds.

Since the experience of which an abstract work of art tells is centered on the specific means of expression of that art, its significance has to be read in the interaction of the forms, in the combination of the colors. Being subjective in the highest degree, every abstract painting and every abstract sculpture will be always at the same distance from our understanding, whether it is barely sketched or finished: unlike a realist work of art, it will not be more "clear" at the end than at the beginning. What then makes its structure attract and hold us? And what part of us does it attract and hold?

Gestalt psychology has undoubtedly given the most exhaustive answer to that question, because it has managed to discover objective beacons deep down in our most subjective experience of form--because it has been able to observe certain constants in the immediate reactions of our senses, apart from the understanding and not bound up with it in any way. By so doing it has completed classical psychology, which considered subjectivity as unsurmountable precisely because introspection could only increase unintelligibility; on that slope where a fall into the incommunicable seemed inevitable, Gestalt psychology applied a brake when it provided scientific proof that the ineffable is not necessarily incommunicable. And since the whole adventure of the abstract work of art takes place far away from what can be stated logically, it seems to me that the key to its message must be looked for in the Gestalt--that untranslatable German term for a form conceived as somehow including both the form-aspect and its experience. It seems, in short, that there is an infallible correspondence between pure form, taken in all its complex appearance, and our sensory structures by virtue of which we perceive it. What is more, we seem to be sensitive

to a balance or imbalance in forms, and this is spontaneously perceived through being a reflection of these same sensory structures--especially when we are dealing with forms produced by man (like those of art), because they have been created out of the man's sensory structure, which is like ours. That balance, felt on the sensory level, must give the spectator, it seems to me, the assurance which likeness gives him in a realist work of art; and it is at that level that communication probably takes place in abstract art--closer than words, closer than intellectual categories, within an area where there are only sensory data common to artist and onlooker. Gestalt psychology has noted that within this area the image organizes itself according to visual fields, obeying corresponding lines of force, and that optical permutations are accomplished in a way that does not vary from one individual to another. It has thus been able to distinguish, beyond the isolated form, wholes made up of forms in which each element exists only in virtue of the rest, so that we apprehend at once the whole and the part--that is to say, the relation uniting them. This immediate and complex experience, at one and the same time total and full of fine shades, is what abstract art offers us. Its clarification is the most advanced--and most disputed--point reached by Gestalt philosophy: it seems to me essential for the "comprehension" of abstract form--in itself a point in favor of this theory, which indeed is contemporary with abstract art since its earliest rudiments date from about 1920.[33]

Forces and Objects

The differences between writing which reflects an abstract perceptual orientation, and writing which reflects subject-object perceptual realism, are apparent in a comparison of representative texts, Beckett's Molloy and D.H. Lawrence's Women In Love. The specific sections chosen are an opening incident in Molloy concerning the two travellers A and C, comprising pages 8-15, and Chapter 26, "A Chair," from Women In Love. The particular concern is descriptive more than evaluative: it is not a matter of one text being better or worse than the other, but simply of how they are different, as pieces of writing, and what the implications of the differences are.

The visual sense is supreme in realist perceiving and in prose fiction which reflects that perceiving, with its corollary of silent reading.[34] Each chapter of Women In Love has its own title, in many cases referring to a specific object (1; 10; 11; 18; 26) or to a specific setting (2; 3; 5; 14). Like Van Gogh making a picture of a chair here, a table there, a person somewhere else, yet all linked through being done in a particular time/space period (Arles, 1888-89)

Lawrence offers a series of pictures which comprise a novel, even though this is not necessarily a consciously formal aspect of the work as novel. By entitling Chapter 26 "A Chair," however, he predisposes the reader to focus on the primary object in the incident described, and the chapter itself stands out as a separate picture, however much its contents remain enmeshed in the novel at large. The transparency of the language, a consequence of omniscient narration, is the equivalent of the invisible space between a viewing subject and any physical object in the field of vision. The words are invisible, only their contents are present, so present "one doesn't even know they're there."

> 'Look,' said Birkin, 'there is a pretty chair.'
>
> 'Charming!' cried Ursula. 'Oh, charming.' It was an armchair of simple wood, probably birch, but of such fine delicasy of grace, standing there on the sordid stones, it almost brought tears to the eyes. It was square in shape, of the purest, slender lines, and four short lines of wood in the back, that reminded Ursula of harp-strings.
>
> 'It was once,' said Birkin, 'gilded - and it had a cane seat. Somebody has nailed this wooden seat in. Look, here is a trifle of the red that underlay the gilt. The rest is all black, except where the wood is worn pure and glossy. It is the fine unity of the lines that is so attractive. Look, how they run and meet and counteract. But of course the wooden seat is wrong - it destroys the perfect lightness and unity in tension the cane gave. I like it though -'
>
> 'Ah yes,' said Ursula, 'so do I.'[35]

I will now offer a realist, objective 'new criticism' interpretation of the chapter, and then an 'abstract' commentary, in an attempt to differentiate between two ways of perceiving a text. The purpose is to show how the Lawrence text itself accommodates both approaches, whereas, in the discussion of the Beckett text which follows, it will be shown that the realist approach is rendered ineffectual by the writing itself, and that the abstract orientation alone makes any sense. Even though, for the moment, the emphasis is upon critical procedure, rather than the texts themselves, my argument is that Lawrence shares, with the realist critics, basic assumptions about writing, reading and reality, however far apart Lawrence and the "new critics" would have been intellectually. By contrast, Beckett does not share those assumptions, and the Beckett writing mocks any effort to make the kind of symbolic reading here offered for, and in at least some measure supported by, "A Chair." [36]

It is easy to understand a critical reading that would see the chair as a symbol of a major theme in the book--oversimply stated, perhaps, as the clash of old ways with new ways, and specifically the decline of qualitative old ways before the expediency of quantitative modernity. The chair obtains a particular significance from the fact that it is marred, by the wooden seat that has been nailed in to replace the original cane seat, and there is a great deal of textual evidence that would support viewing the chair as the centerpiece of a complex symbolism that includes descriptive statements and actions as well as objects and characters. Primary here is the titling of the chapter itself, which makes the chair a visual emblem of the actions and statements comprising the chapter, as some alternative title such as "The Jumble Market" or "An Argument" would not have done.

But the conflict of 'old versus new' is dominant throughout the chapter. Ursula is sick of the "beloved past," Rupert of the "accursed present," and this estrangement, never resolved and in fact irresolvable in any final way (as

shown later by the concluding pages of both the chapter and the book), is poignantly, visually summed in the imperfect chair. Just as the nailed in seat destroys the "perfect lightness and unity in tension" the cane seat had provided, Rupert's unresolved relation to Gerald Crich is a primary obstacle in his relationship with Ursula, and in his self-relation. Similarly, the argument so swiftly following the purchase of the chair mars the initial enthusiasm Ursula and Rupert had for a moment shared, just as the chair's passing immediately through their hands to the young city couple underscores, as action, the accelerating decline of the world that produced the chair. The very speed of the whole transaction, Ursula's remark "It's right for them," the implied surroundings the chair will now have contrasted with the rooms at the mill, the triumph of the mere utility of the object played against the image of a world in which beauty was not incompatible with function - all these events picture a world in decline, and are centered in the chair as a symbolic object. Prominent in the same theme are the young city couple themselves. The man's

mindless, rat-like sexuality and the woman's pregnancy are a kind of ironic rebuff to the sterility that afflicts Rupert and Ursula, and powerfully suggest the pullulent modernity that will easily overwhelm the kind of world Rupert and Ursula desire. "We've got to live in the chinks they leave us," Rupert says, and Ursula recoils at this adroit metaphorical reversal of the accustomed relation of "rat-hole" to "human abode." The linear perspective dominant in realist perception applies in time as well as space, for the "good days" of the chair, of Rupert and Ursula, and even of the young city man so in dread of forced marriage are all in the past, while the future, onpressing and dark, will obliterate even the 'chinks' eventually, vestiges as these are of a way of life unable to find effective ground for any vital implementation.

Such a reading of the chapter is consistent with the assumptions of prose fiction derived from a perceptual realism determined by 'the scale of the object.' Linear perspective, omniscient narration, and transparent language present and sustain a world of objects, implicitly separate and complete, however many lines of relation bind them together. But twentieth-century world is dominated by events and consequences effecting a very different perceptual scale, one which requires a re-thinking of what we mean when we use the term 'object.'

An abstract orientation to text begins with the rejection of the conventions of omniscience and transparency, and thereby a rejection of the critical distance crucial to realist perspective. The only 'thing' there is the language that is the work, and language has both oral and written dimensions. Every text is a speaking as well as a writing, and this is the thesis I am proposing to demonstrate that will explain the nature of Beckett's "difference", a difference which, once perceived, should lead to a more enlightened criticism of his work.

To approach the Lawrence text abstractly, is to approach it as an area of Lawrentian language, and thus not (implicitly) as an 'object' but as a dynamic field of forces. The chair is ~~not~~ a symbol for a theme such as "old ways vs. new ways" but is itself an instance of such a clash, a meeting ground of forces which pervade the chapter, the book, and the world outside the book, which is the world the reader is grounded in while he's reading. The chair, the argument, the descriptive statements, the characters, their dialogue - all are manifestations, in a particular area of language ("A Chair"), of forces we intuitively recognize as pervasive of human reality itself, and thus already a part of our "experience." The writer is not a producer of objects for the reader's consumption, but a vital presence in human reality, secured in language. "A Chair" and Women In Love are areas of Lawrentian language, indissolubly connected with every other piece of Lawrence's written work, the whole of which is a field of forces no different except in quantity. The individual works are not separate and distinct from each other, but only separable within the field.

But this is not to say that Women In Love is an abstract text, or that Lawrence was an abstract artist. There remains a fundamental distance between reader and text, inherent in the expressive means employed by Lawrence. The conventions of omniscient narration, linear perspective, and transparent language effect a decisive and obvious demarcation between texts, like Women in Love, reflecting the perceptual realism of the past, and texts like Beckett's Trilogy, a text written from, and not just interpreted from, an abstract perspective.[37]

Beckett, through the "narrator/narrated" innovation first fully realized in the Trilogy, reduces the distance between the expressive means and the work itself, achieving something very similar to Vallier's "figuration-in-proximity" description of post-1945 painting, and in this way effects a break with the dominant tradition so powerfully represented by Lawrence.

A and C are two travellers, observed from a height by Molloy, who meet on a road, in the evening. This incident is not separated out, even as paragraph, from the "Molloy" narrative: the reader must arbitrarily separate it out by noting where Molloy begins speaking of the two characters (8) and where he stops speaking of them (15). The whole incident is clouded by uncertainty. Molloy doesn't know whether he himself is seen by C (10,11); he confuses their identities at one point (11) though at other moments he is definite about which is which (9, 15); he offers variant descriptions of A (11); every 'certainty' he advances is shortly if not immediately undercut by a 'perhaps' (14, 15). This extends finally to the incident as a whole when, near its conclusion, Molloy says:

> And I am perhaps confusing several different occasions, and different times, deep down, and deep down is my dwelling, oh not deepest down, somewhere between the mud and the scum. And perhaps it was A one day at one place, then C another at another, then a third the rock and I, and so on for the other components, the cows, the sky, the sea, the mountains. I can't believe it. No, I will not lie, I can easily conceive it. (14)

There is no specific object in the A and C passage on which to focus attention, as there was with the chair in Lawrence's chapter, but there is an important image, not only for the incident itself but for the whole Molloy text: that of the road on which the travellers meet.

> At first a wide space lay between them. They couldn't have seen each other, even had they raised their heads and looked about, because of this wide space, and then because of the undulating land, which caused the road to be in waves, not high, but high enough, high enough. But the moment came when together they went down into the same trough and in this trough finally met. (9)

The image of "the road...in waves" is echoed later in a statement directly evocative of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.

> Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. (31)

The 'narrator/narrated' technique, with its welding of oral and written traditions, proceeds from and in terms of a "waves and particles" model, rather than a "subject-object" model. The "waves and particles" paradigm is dynamic and non-separatist, in direct

contrast to static, separated out realist perceiving. Although the "waves and particles" image may metaphorically guide the description of a realist text (the object as a meeting ground of forces, rather than separate entity), it is more than metaphor for an abstract text, which proceeds from markedly different assumptions about the nature of reality.

Linear perspective, for example, is upended, temporally, in the A and C incident when Molloy suggests he may have put the whole scene together with components from different times (14). Spatially, too, a non-linear orientation is apparent.

> It was on a road remarkably bare, I mean without hedges or ditches or any kind of edge, in the country....The road, hard and white, seared the tender pastures, rose and fell at the whim of hills and hollows. (8-9)

This description is echoed in the narrative action: when we map out the actual transits of A and C, the linear aspect suggested by their encountering each other face to face is considerably qualified in the larger context of A's having originally been going in the same direction, only to turn back, meet C, and then go on towards the town from which each had departed, whereas C apparently does not even stay on the road, following the meeting.

> Each went on his way, A back towards the town, C on by-ways he seemed hardly to know, or not at all, for he went with uncertain step and often stopped to look about him, like someone trying to fix landmarks in his mind, for one day he may perhaps have to retrace his steps, you never know. (9)

Their meeting is a "particle," viewable as such only in the momentary convergence of the separate "waves" of their walking, "waves" which resume, to the viewing eye, once the "particle" dissolves: but in fact "waves" and "particles" are merely contextual designations for one ongoing reality.[38]

The non-linear quality of visual setting and event is even more apparent in the aural counterparts of "event pattern" and "voice pattern," which comprise the "other half" of the 'narrator/narrated' technique. This double aspect of rhythm is completely entertwined in Molloy's narrative, through Molloy's being his own narrator. The rhythmic line of 'event' rises and falls, as when the whole incident is called into question (14) or, more subtly, when a description in the text ("I saw him only darkly, because of the dark and then because of the terrain, in the folds of which he disappeared from time to time, to re-emerge further on" (11)) is

immediately enacted (C 'disappears' for two pages, during which the attention is fixed on A). In addition, a second rhythmic line of 'voice pattern' also follows a "waves and particles" model, short, clear declarative statements followed by extended speculative loops of saying (12-13). Because Molloy is not separated out from, and only qualifiedly within, his narrating, the oral patterns imprint themselves directly, however unconsciously, on the reader, enacting the very actions and images reported in the text.[39]

The actual reading event becomes a "waves and particles" experience, through the double enactment of such a perspective, in the visual field of narrative contents characterized by a continual assimilation and dissolution, and in the impress of a voice whose rhythmic rising and falling effects the dislocations it reports. The fusing or oral and written modes overthrows the domination of the visual sense alone, and transcends the 'scale of the object.' The linked conventions of omniscient narration and transparent language vanish in the 'narrator/narrated' device, where there is no distance, and in at least one sense no difference, between speaker and text.

"All I know is what the words know," says Molloy (33), and that identifies the reader's situation as well, faced with a text which obliterates the distance traditional prose writing imposes and sustains through its very drive towards an ever greater transparency of language. By continually calling attention to himself as a speaker, and not just a writer, of his story, Molloy evokes an awareness of himself as "language-user," and this reverberates through the reader, who is a speaker as well as a reader.[40] As "language-users" reader shares with writer a much larger, and much different, environment than in the specific event of "reading-writing." Beckett's work evokes a fundamental disquiet through making the reader conscious of a sense of his own (the reader's) relation to language itself. Within such a disproportionate realm one can never entirely achieve a clear (i.e., a "separate") relation, since language has an almost a priori relation to consciousness, empirically if not philosophically. We are our language, to a very great extent, and we can't suddenly decide to be "non-language-users," either. But we can, perhaps, as Raymond Williams says, "learn new descriptions," which is precisely the

situation Moran faces when he says, near the end of Molloy:

> I have spoken of a voice telling me things...It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understood it, all wrong perhaps. That is not what matters. It told me to write the report. Does this mean I am freer now than I was? I don't know. I shall learn. (175-6)

Molloy, through enacting, and not simply reporting, a "waves and particles" experience, serves as nexus between reader and contemporary world, while Women In Love, at the root level of form, reflects a basically nineteenth-century way of perceiving. Dora Vallier writes:

> For realism goes far beyond the "good likeness" to which it is summarily treated as equivalent: it is always, still, the basis of our approach to visual art, even if likeness is rejected as a criterion of excellence....
>
> It is enough, nonetheless, to remember that, if realism acts on us, it does so through form, therefore for aesthetic reasons outside and independent of the

> object figured; once this is remembered, the fact of recognizing the thing a work of art represents is revealed as what it is - secondary. The other aspect of realism then comes to the fore, its limitative aspect. Realism, that traditional guarantee of communication, is also a brake upon the imagination.[41]

By contrast,

> The present-day figurative way of seeing is a total opening of the sensibility, an utterly direct approach to reality: amplifying the mental freedom of the cubists, it places itself altogether outside any likeness.[42]

With this "total opening of the sensibility" the scale of the object is left far behind, and probably permanently. Yet, as Vallier says

> Subjectivity disturbs us, objectivity reassures us. We need to believe in an objective reality, to see it in front of us.[43]

In an abstract work, as I believe Molloy to be, literal text provides just that kind of "objective reality," taking the place of the 'vanished' object. Approached in this way, no confusion arises as to whether "C" is the character Moran encounters, or whether Molloy's weekly visitor is "Gaber," con-

fusions so evident in the Fletcher and Frye critical writings earlier cited. The literal words on the page are the determiners of what "is there" and what "is not there." When A, C, and Gaber are directly named, they are present; if characters resembling them in certain ways are present, but not named, nor in any other way positively identified as appearing elsewhere in the text, then it simply cannot be said that the unnamed characters <u>are</u> the named characters. Even to say that Gaber is named in "Moran" and unnamed in "Molloy" is to impose an interpretation, since, in textual fact, there is only an unnamed character in "Molloy" who somewhat resembles a named character in "Moran."

The literal text is not merely a verifying tool, however. As a focus, it continually reminds that all writing is language, and thus a voice as well as a visual surface. This enables any text to open out as an actional language field, the ground of which is its own words. The abstract text makes a definite point of the facticity of the language, but, from an abstract viewpoint, any text is only a particular verbal field in the environment. The words of any

text are the tracery of a human action in language, making the text immediately and directly available in a dynamic interaction with the active verbal field that is the reader's own language consciousness. When Raymond Williams says the distinction between artist and reality is "a false meaning," it is easy to see that the distinction between reader and reality is an equally false one. Just as any one text is not an object complete unto itself but is only a separable area within the author's whole writing, any specific reading experience is only a separable area within the individual's whole reading reality, as that whole reality is only separable within, and not from, the individual's whole language experience. An abstract orientation to literature views literacy as a unique event within language, and literary art as a heightened articulation of particular ways of perceiving reality. The root level of the perceptual mode is latent in the curvatures of expression in the literal text, in its dual nature as a writing and a saying. The way of the writing/saying is quite literally a transcription of the author's way of seeing. The location and describing of the "way of seeing" is crucial, I

feel, for any convincing interpretation of the more accessible contents of the work. The literal text itself is the only significant guide in such an approach.

The Dialogues

The most cogent and comprehensive statement by Beckett himself, on the nature of art and the role of the artist, is found in the famous "Dialogues" with Georges Duthuit, dating from 1949.[44] My own understanding of Beckett's work, and to a large extent my critical position in general, owes much to Beckett's remarks in the "Dialogues," and so, to conclude this Introduction, I would like to give some extended attention to those remarks.

The "Dialogues" have been often alluded to in the criticism, but the central statements have rarely been dealt with directly. Even in Hugh Kenner's two book-length studies, abundant with lucid insights and brilliant articulations, clear and patient following of the statements in the "Dialogues" gives way to critical summation and digression. Kenner is pre-

occupied in particular with his notion of "Beckett in the role of clown," and if we read his remarks carefully--quite as carefully as the "Dialogues" themselves--it quickly becomes evident how this preoccupation shapes the critic's discussion. His account suffers as well from key omissions of Beckett's statements, and this double tendency of digression and omission leaves very little of Beckett's theoretical viewpoint revealed in the end.

The digressive pattern is quickly established. Kenner quotes the "Dialogues," then immediately deflects attention away from the quoted remark. We read of the clown, Shakespeare, Descartes, the Pythagoreans, and finally the clown again, but actual statements are not very successfully engaged. This pattern is reenforced by the selective quotation process, which omits many remarks crucial to the main points of the argument.

The first of these is Beckett's statement regarding the relation of artist to occasion. Kenner correctly notes that Beckett assails Duthuit's suggestion that the inexpressible is perhaps its own inevitable occasion. But then he misleadingly quotes Beckett, in summing the response to this parry.

Kenner says:

> For such an artist, consequently, art always fails; his wooing of the occasion, however sophistocated, is "shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it includes, all that it blinds to." And so...[45]

But when we check for the full context of the statement only half-quoted, we find:

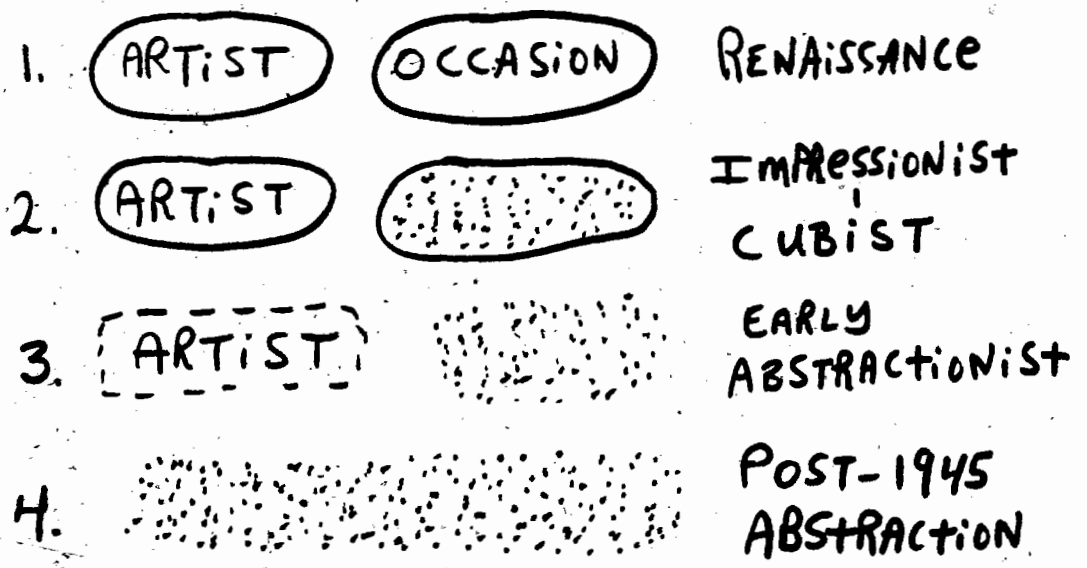
> But if the occasion appears as an unstable term of relation, the artist, who is the other term, is hardly less so, thanks to his warren of modes and attitudes. The objections to this dualist view of the creative process are unconvincing. Two things are established, however precariously: the aliment, from fruits on plates to low mathematics and self-commiseration, and its manner of dispatch. <u>All that should concern us is the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself</u>, 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.[46]
>
> (emphasis mine)

When we note what the critic omits (underscored above), we see that it is not "the wooing of occasion" that is "shadowed...", but the very <u>relation itself</u>. Kenner does not mention at all the prior remark that asserts the <u>artist</u> as an equally unstable term in

the relation. Unless that picture of the relation is allowed, the gist of Beckett's whole argument is lost, for these two omitted remarks set up a third, which acts as underpinning for the key assertion "that to be an artist is to fail."

> My case...is that van Velde is the first to desist from this estheticized automatism, <u>the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence of relation</u>, in the absence of terms or, if you like, in the presence of unavailable terms, the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living.[47]
>
> (emphasis mine)

Kenner never gets to "the incoercible absence of relation," (even to refute such an argument), and thus he misses the distinction made between the failure resulting from the very attempt to obtain "more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee," and the failure resulting from the recognition that expression itself is "an impossible act." The latter failure does not derive from the <u>relation of artist to occasion</u>--the very terms of which belong to "the plane of the feasible"--but from the <u>absence</u> of any such relation as traditionally understood.



The diagram illustrates the changing nature of artist-occasion relation implicit in Dora Vallier's brief account of recent art history, and explicitly suggested by Beckett's statements in the "Dialogues."[48] My interest here is in showing Beckett's position, whether or not one agrees with that position. His swipes at Kandinsky and Mondrian have as their basis perhaps the unwillingness of the early abstractionists to regard the artist as an unstable term in the process.

Their search for an absolute form was a search still conducted from within a basically Renaissance orientation to reality, the very epitome perhaps of such an orientation.[49]

Within the Renaissance 'way of seeing' puissance was the inevitable measure of expressive capacity, as possession and property were inevitable contexts of relation, for both artist and viewer. But Beckett works "with impotence, ignorance";[50] an implication of his concluding summation in the "Dialogues."

> I know that all that is required now, in order to bring even this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation. I know that <u>my inability to do so</u> places myself, and perhaps an innocent, in what I think is still called an unenviable situation, familiar to psychiatrists.[51]

Once again, this statement is omitted by Kenner, who glides instead to the very end of the "Dialogues," dubbing Beckett's final remark a "recanting" and, in so doing, affirming his interpretation of Beckett as clown.

> True to the clown's role, he simply recants, by prearrangement, ("Yes, yes, I am mistaken, I am mistaken.") and slips away.[52]

The statement which was omitted, however, makes 'recanting' a less likely interpretation for the final remarks, for Beckett does not recant in saying "I am mistaken," so much as affirm the position he has advocated throughout. On the logical plane of the feasible, self-cancellation is the only means available for effecting an awareness of the sense of reality Beckett seeks to communicate. By regarding this as a 'recanting' one falls into the very trap Beckett's statements continually step around, a trap also manifest in the concern with 'the role of clown.' It is not that the 'clown' is an inapt analogy, but that, through its very aptness, it clouds the real issue: that the world in which clowns are "real" is the world of "art and craft, good housekeeping, living"--which, for the artist Beckett describes, is a nonexistent world. The obstacle here is analogy itself. Kenner, through focussing on the rôle of the clown, subsumes the thought into digestible chicle, just as the many digressions, through becoming the subject of attention in themselves, deflect the sharp antinomies of Beckett's actual statements. In the "Dialogues,"

Beckett calls this "turning tail."

> But let us for once, be foolish enough not to turn tail. All have turned wisely tail, before the ultimate penury...There is more than a difference of degree between being short, short of the world, short of self, and being without these esteemed commodities. The one is a predicament, the other not.[53]

Let us think for a moment on the "more than a difference of degree" between being short of world, of self, and being without them. The remark in Molloy concerning "nameless things and thingless names" comes back, for in that sense of dislocation one is quite without bearings. What is perhaps the most paradoxical statement in the "Dialogues" has its place here. Duthuit asks what other plane can there be, for the maker, than that of the feasible, and Beckett replies, logically none.

> Yet I speak of an art turning 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 going a little further along a dreary road.
>
> D.- And preferring what?
>
> B.- The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.[54]

The disproportions of contemporary reality that are a manifest consequence of the changeover from a Newtonian space-time, human proportion world paradigm to the by comparison limitless Einsteinian universe, provide a context that makes this statement seem much less extreme than it appears at first glance. The world founded on 'the scale of the object' vanished with the object: a paradigmatic change is not simply an intellectual variation, but a thoroughgoing devastation. The change of perceptual paradigm from a 'realist' comprehendable scale to an 'abstract' immensity beyond all knowable bounds, is a change of "more than degree."

The relations that upheld, substantiated, the old paradigm, like those of artist to occasion, do not carry over into the changed reality. Or say rather that, if the relations themselves continue, the terms by which they were knowable, accessible, do not. The new reality, for the artist in this case, is best describeable in terms of "an incoercible absence of relation," perhaps, since the perspective is totally bereft of all that was previously known, or knowable. At such a pass, the artist recognizes that he cannot "succeed"--that there is no relation between himself and "the occasion" in any traditional

sense of relation; the terms of judgment, the scale of values, belong to the vanished world. There is "nothing to express, and nothing to express with," since all things belong to the world of "good-housekeeping, art, living"--both material and ideal things, since the ideals are born of the structures that comprise and sustain 'the plane of the feasible.' Neither is there power or desire to express, for those are qualities or motivations available only in a world in which they are possible. The immensity overwhelms both the sense of being able to "do it" and the sense of "wanting to" do it. Nonetheless there remains--and why Beckett does not pretend to answer, does not in fact know--"the obligation to express." That is all that remains. And if there is only an obligation to express, then one's actual doing is made in ignorance, not in knowing; it proceeds from, and not towards.

Thus Beckett tells Kenner[55] he himself doesn't know anymore about his characters than what appears in the books, since they appear as a consequence of a kind of direct articulation that emerges as a result of the whole unknowable complexity of the

artist's reality, and not as the outcome of a specific intention or the casting of some specific experience, nor as the affirmation of a general truth.

The "stripping away" so familiar in the contents of Beckett's works does not serve a specific existential ideology, nor is it a judgement. It is, in my view, more a consequence of the vanishing of the 'known' world, a vanishing that includes the loss of individual ego (the artist as unstable term), and with it, the whole superstructure of personal-world-proportions. Nothing was left with which to explain the world, since 'the world' itself was gone. Yet one went on living. Without having the slightest idea why. In this paradox of "living for no reason" resides the obligation to express, or at least a very close parallel exists. To not write, as a matter of conscious choice, is an eminently logical position--but unavailable here, since logic exists only in the gone world. Suicide, too, is a part of that world, and is rejected in Beckett's work.

To be an artist in such a disproportionate, chaotic world is to be one who fails, since there is no scale, internal or external, sufficiently

available for determination of "success." Rather than 'things' to be made, there is, for the maker, only a kind of outcry or 'sounding' within a non-separated condition that succeeds only through its actual manifestation, and, in any conventional sense not even then, effecting as it does inevitable doubts as to its own value, a consequence of implicit recognition that it is never a final nor self-complete act. Such work stands in no clear relation to some distinct set, thing, or system separate from itself. Yet, freed of the defeat logic itself would force upon a mind which saw the whole world vanished (Kirilov, in Dostoyevsky's The Possessed, comes to mind)--why indeed go on?--Beckett's work, through a daring acceptance of "impossible" conditions, sustained by an integrity of perspective more than a purposive conviction, emerges as affirmative, but as act and effort, and not as answer.

1. THE NARRATOR/TEXT RELATION

In Samuel Beckett's Trilogy it is the reduction of critical distance between the reader and the text that most singly differentiates this work from other prose fiction. This reduction is achieved through the major stylistic innovation of the "narrator/ narrated " technique, with its rejection of the dominant conventions of omniscient narration and transparent language. That this was not a sudden achievement[1] is revealed through a close examining of the relationship of narrator to text throughout the whole prose writing up to and including the Trilogy itself.

Raymond Federman has drawn attention of a conventional sort to the role of the narrator in the early writings.

> In the...early novels and stories, the narrator is merely a distant witness of the fiction...not an active participant. ...in fact these stories are not told by narrators, but are omnisciently controlled by the self-conscious author.[2]

This description does not really identify the specific difficulties posed by the texts themselves.

Those difficulties do begin to clarify, however, when the early work is approached as writing, and not just as 'story.'[3] "Dante and the Lobster," the first story in More Pricks Than Kicks,[4] will serve to illustrate.

Although the narrator intervenes sporadically (13; 15; 20) in the first person, the work reads primarily as third person narration. While it is true that the narrator is "not an active participant" in the story, he is highly present in the writing. The "first person" comments are injected into a predominantly "third person" narration, establishing a "first person voice" in relation to what I would call a "third person voice" but which Federman calls "the self-conscious author." There is a narrator present, but since he does not figure in the story which he tells, he is ignored by Federman, who then confuses the situation further by saying it is the "author" who is in control. The reference to author unnecessarily blurs the distinction available directly in the text, seen as a field of writing in which there are competing voices. It is more appropriate here to speak of a "narrative situation" than of a strictly defined entity known as 'narrator.'

This problem in "Dante and the Lobster" might go unnoticed, were it not for the difference one feels between the voice that irritates throughout with remarks like "I need scarcely say" (13), and the voice which so effectively concludes the story:

> Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all.
> It is not. (22)

This tension causes one to consider the curiously divided nature of the narrating in the story, and in the early writing in general. The strange power that the "It is not" evokes seems to come from some quite different source than the superficial interruptions.[5] The "first person voice" is only a tiny presence, almost on the level of a character, almost in competition with the voice speaking at the end and which dominates the narration. The source of the difference is not available in the narrative (there is only one ostensive narrator[6]), but in the text, the writing. The voices grate against each other throughout, and this distance, this tension, characterizes the 'narrative situation' in all the early writing.

The first step towards the eventual fusion of "narrator/narrated" requires the closing of the distance between "first person" and "third person" voices in a single text. This is approached but not fully realized in two different instances in More Pricks Than Kicks. The first two pages (36-8) of the story "Ding-Dong" are the earliest sustained direct first person passage in the whole writing. The subject of this speaking is not the narrator himself, however, but Belacqua. The second instance is the eighth story, "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux," written entirely in the first person but in a manner doubly removed from the book's narrative mainstream. The text is a letter written by a character other than Belacqua (the protagonist of the whole book) or the "first person voice" narrator of the other stories. Both these examples affirm a definite if somewhat eccentric presence of direct first person narration in the very early writing, the full importance of which will emerge presently.

Murphy, Beckett's second book of fiction and first novel, reveals only a slightly changed narrative situation from that of "Dante and the Lobster." The split between "first person voice" and "third person voice" is visible in the opening pages.

> For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind, as described in section six. (2)
>
> (emphasis mine)

The "first person voice" has a stronger presence than in the short story, referring to the characters (with the exception of Murphy) as "puppets" (122), but this very term indicates the persistent distance between 'narrator' and 'narrative,' the latter still dominated by "third person voice." The change from the first book is merely one of degree.

However, the next book, Watt,[7] shows a quite different, much more complex narrative situation. It begins with straight third-person narration. Watt himself is not introduced until page sixteen (whereas Murphy and Belacqua dominate page one, in each case). Then, suddenly on page seventy-nine, a narrator emerges, speaking of himself as "me" rather than "I" but nonetheless disrupting the third person narration dominant to that point.

> For there we have to do with events that resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them, when they recurred, though it seems probable that they recurred no more, at the period of Watt's revelation, to me, but were as though they had never been. (79)

Until this point there has been no indication that anyone in particular is telling this story, and it is still later that we encounter this narrator named.

> But whereas for Watt the important thing was the wind, the sun was the important thing for Sam. With the result that though the sun though bright were not so bright as it might have been, if the wind were high Watt did not audibly complain, and that I, when illuminated by rays of appropriate splendour, could forgive a wind which, while strong, might with advantage have been stronger. It is thus evident that the occasions were few and far between on which, walking and perhaps talking in the little garden, we walked there and perhaps talked with equal enjoyment. For when on Sam the sun shone bright, then in a vacuum panted Watt, and when Watt like a leaf was tossed, then stumbled Sam in deepest night. (153)

In this passage both voices are present: "Sam" and "I", in successive sentences, weld the third person/first person elements of the narrative situation, even though "third person voice" still dominates the book at large.

The naming of "I" as "Sam", the further embodying of the "I" as a character actively participative (however limitedly) in the story, and the absence of the popinjay characteristic of the "first person voice" in the previous books, all attest to the slow coming together of the disparate elements comprising the narrative situation in the early writing.

But this is only part of the narrative situation in Watt. There are two instances of "first person voice" other than Sam's: Arsene's statement (39-63), and Arthur's story (169-97).[8] Arsene's speech is the more important, principally because it is the first extended passage in the Beckett writing as a whole written as monologue. The writing style (not only of Watt to that point, but of all the writing to that point) changes abruptly, right in front of the reader, directly on the page. It is the more striking, because one has not yet encountered "Sam" or any suggestion of "first person voice." Within the monologue itself one is reading writing not very different from the writing one later encounters in the Trilogy. But the text here encloses Arsene's speech, conferring upon it an objective status (as a 'part of' the novel).

The original "first person voice," present in Watt as "Sam," has moved much closer to an identification with the "third person voice" it initially was set against. But now a different "first person voice" appears, present as Arsene's and distinct from both previous voices, and though it is 'kept down' by the bulk of the narrative in Watt, it is clearly anticipative of the dominant mode of the major writing that follows, for the Trilogy is all monologue.

"The Smeraldina's Billet Doux" may now be seen as a kind of unconscious precursor, in the writing, of that final mode. That story bears a relation to More Pricks Than Kicks similar to that of Arsene's monologue to the bulk of the Watt text, when we look at the whole writing as one stream.[9] The new "first person voice" of Arsene's monologue stands, when seen in relation to the more nearly fused original "first person"-"third person" voices, in a position analogous to that of the "first person voice" in "Dante and the Lobster:" a small but significant presence.

Much more will be said later about Arsene's monologue, for in it is first mentioned the particular experience which marks a turning point in the 'subject' of the thinking that dominates the Trilogy, dominates in fact the perspective behind all the later writing. This in turn lends more support to the regarding of the monologue as an important innovation in the narrator/text relationship, though an innovation with visible roots in the writing that preceded it, when that writing is approached as writing, and as a whole.

Mercier and Camier,[10] a short work located chronologically between Watt and Molloy, reveals, in its opening sentence, a further variation in the narrator/text relation.

> The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time. (7)

"Sam" has been replaced by an "I" who remains unnamed throughout the work. The "I" also assumes greater responsibility, since the device of his relating a story told to himself by the protagonists is dropped. This enables a much greater directness to emerge in the narrator's relation to text. "I was with them all the time" establishes a different situation from that in any of the previous works.

The manipulative role of "puppeteer" the narrator assumed in Murphy is refined in the stated narrative position, even though it is much more in evidence in the actual text of Mercier and Camier. (This is perhaps one more instance of an insight present in a small way but unfulfilled in the text in which it occurs: the opening sentence asserts a different narrator/text relation from any to that point, but the bulk of the writing falls back upon previous habits, just as in Watt the narrative encloses the 'radical new thing' in the writing--Arsene's monologue--within a conventional, though disordered form.) Contrary to what one might expect from this first statement, the narrator does not figure very prominently, or even frequently, in the work itself.

The distance is still largely there, in the actual writing, which remains predominantly third person, though the attitude towards the characters is much more aloof and objective than that of "Sam" in Watt. The "I" still resists, why we don't know, the direct capitulation to text already prefigured in Arsene's monologue, and evident from the first line in the next work, Molloy.

That first line reads:

> I am in my mother's room. (7)

Molloy makes the "jump" to direct first person narration. So does Moran, in his half of the book, though he begins characteristically with statements more objective and external:

> It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. I am calm. (92)

Despite the many differences in Molloy and Moran,[11] both are first person narrators, and their accounts are devoid of that "third person voice" present in all the previous fiction. The "first person voice" that occupied such a small place in "Dante and the Lobster" has now merged completely with the "third person voice" and with the character whose story is being told. Kenner notes the significant departure Molloy is, when seen against the previous writing.

> Molloy is Beckett's first venture in a new kind of character, what he once called in a letter 'the narrator/narrated.' It is a device he employs in all his subsequent fiction, bringing the ambient world into existence only so far as the man holding the pencil can remember it or understand it...and simultaneously bringing into existence the man with the pencil, who is struggling to create himself, so to speak, by recalling his own past or delineating his own present.[12]

The "narrator/narrated" is a crucial fusion of previously distinct aspects of the narrative situation, but it is not the final change in the narrator/text relation, even though Kenner is right in saying that Beckett employs this mode in all the fiction that follows. Malone Dies shows how the relation continues to change. In this novel appears the reverse of the situation in "Dante and the Lobster." There, the "first person voice" kept trying to get into the story; here, the "I" dominates the writing. Its presence is the root matter, and the "stories" are its adjuncts. At very least the "first person voice" is on a par with the stories here, the narrator being in a position similar to that of Murphy when the latter overthrows astrology.[13]

The distance between narrator and story in Malone Dies is a conscious choice on the part of Malone as narrator, made from the 'other side' of the fusion that characterizes the narrative situation in Molloy. The stories are a veiled reappearance of the old "third person voice," subordinate now. Unable to stand by themselves, they continually butt against Malone's presence as their creator and narrator, or dissolve into Malone's own story.

The "I" of Malone proves dominant over the "third person voice" but there is still a contest being waged: the opposition, or competition, between narrator and narrative is not satisfactorily resolved until the final book of the Trilogy.[14]

In The Unnamable the "I's" long conflict with narrative concludes in something of a Pyrrhic victory.[15] Stories drop away altogether, or remain as mere vestiges. As narrative drops away, however, so does "narrator," leaving a voice only in its place, and words only, in place of narrative. The "I" here denies it is here at all, confronting the absence conferred by the words themselves.

> I shall not say I again, ever again, it's too farcical....Where I am there is no one but me, who am not. (355)

Narrator has become text, and text, narrator.

> ...the words are everywhere, inside me, outside me, well well a minute ago I had no thickness, I hear them, no need to hear them, no need of a head, impossible to stop them, impossible to stop, I'm in words, made of words, others' words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, 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 flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder, wherever I go I find me,

> leave me, go towards me, come from me, nothing ever but me, a particle of me, retrieved, lost, gone astray, I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, those that merge, those that part, those that never meet, and nothing else, yes, something else, that I'm something quite different, a quite different thing, a wordless thing in an empty place...(386)

Saying replaces telling, the narrator/text relation is absorbed into the saying, thereby adding weight to the said, which is no longer a tracery of a relation existing outside itself (even if only relatively so within the text itself--Molloy seeking his mother, Moran writing his report, Malone waiting to die), but has become the relation itself.

Let us review, briefly, what has been said, approaching the seven books of fiction as one writing stream.

The "first person voice/third person voice" tension so disruptive in More Pricks Than Kicks and Murphy seems to be moving steadily, patiently towards an effective mergence in the presentation of "Sam" as narrator of Watt, and in fact this is the case. But when Watt is looked at more closely as writing, rather than

as narrative (which would see Arsene's monologue only as event), it becomes clear that this progression is not the only aspect of what I am calling the "narrative situation." Something else is there, not really present as such at any point previous in the writing stream: Arsene's first person monologue. This monologue cannot be accounted for adequately in terms of the "first person/third person voice" progression which is occurring simultaneously but in a different area of the field.[16] Similarly, in More Pricks Than Kicks we cannot discuss "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux" in terms of the conflicting voices in the "Dante and the Lobster" text.

There seems to be a kind of recognition of this in the writing stream itself, in the first sentence of Mercier and Camier, where the "I" asserts a direct relation with the story to be told and the protagonists of the story: "...I was with them all the time." This locates the "I" within the space of the "journey" which is to be the subject of the narrative, though it does so objectively and maintains a distance between itself and the protagonists.

When we look back over the whole writing stream from that point, we can see the "first person/ third person voice" tension, occurring where it does, and we can also see the objective instances of direct first person narration (made objective by the contexts surrounding them). These two strains seem to come together in the opening sentence of Mercier and Camier:

> The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time. (7)

We can see the direct first person "I" (no third person voice competition at this point), but what it is to relate is still objective, separate from itself: there is a recognition of "I's" sharing of the space in which the telling of the journey is to unfold, but there is retained a distance within that space. In this one sentence--importantly the first sentence of an obviously transitional work--we have a capsule statement of the textual situation at large in More Pricks Than Kicks and Watt. For each of those works, taken as a whole and viewed as writing, has within its own field both an "I" asserting itself as narrator in a narration it does not dominate, and, elsewhere, a separate, objectively enclosed instance of direct first person narration which is dominated utterly by its speaker.

These two strains persist but do not meet in any way until the opening sentence of Mercier and Camier. There is an almost tacit acknowledgement here of the competing quality of the narrator/narrative relation to this point, a competition that went on even though other instances in which it was already overcome exist in the same texts.

Effective fusion of both strains finally occurs in the Trilogy, but even there traces of the conflict linger. Molloy, curiously, retains the division in its overall structure, Molloy's own narrative being the "I" strain, while Moran's report (sic) is basically objective and, though a monologue, reads almost like third person narration. (Moran, after all, is writing the report about his "old self", to whom he now stands in a quite distant, objective relation.)

The conflict lingers in Malone Dies as well, though less noticeably than in Molloy, since Malone's stories are continually interrupted or broken off by Malone himself. However powerful in themselves, they are only traces of the old "third person voice," restive but controlled by the dominant "I".

Finally, even in The Unnamable, vestigial stories remain, making the old conflict an open subject of the speaking. In the early sections it is a quite objective matter of seeing Malone circulate like a dead satellite round the speaker. Later with the stories of Mahood and Worm the struggle is more intense, more immediate, more desperate. It is only in the last quarter of the book, particularly in the long concluding sentence of several pages, that a real fusion of all the competing elements of the original "narrative situation" occurs, although, in a general sense, this is true of the whole Trilogy, with the "narrator/narrated" monologues the dominant feature.

The purpose of this survey of the changing narrator/text relationship has been primarily to describe, in the technical dimension of style, how Beckett achieved the reduction of critical distance I regard as so crucial to any accurate interpretation of his work. The individual works cannot be understood successfully without some rather specific awareness of their place in the writing as a whole. Such

an awareness must be sensitive to the literal text in each case, and therefore to viewing the works, singly and totally, as a field of writing, in which story takes a necessarily secondary position. The text continually informs and guides all that can be said about the works. This approach does not agree with the attitude, almost a truism where Beckett is the subject of discussion, that 'everyone sees in the works what he or she wants to.' While ample evidence of this attitude is provided in the criticism, that hardly justifies the assertion itself. It is the 'easy way out' with Beckett, and quickly turns into self-mockery, when placed against the Beckett text. Some of the implications of my own more rigourously textual approach are filled out in the chapters which follow.

2. RELATION IN THE WRITING STREAM: "MURPHY'S MIND"/ THE TRILOGY

The primary concern in this thesis is an investigation of form in Samuel Beckett's prose fiction. In the discussion of the narrator/text relation, it was shown that the major narrative mode of the Trilogy--that of the 'narrator/narrated'--is already present in "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux." To locate in the writing prior to the Trilogy itself instances of expression that anticipate stylistic innovations more fully realized in the later work, is to follow up a major implication of the writing itself, i.e., that it is all "one writing." The 'narrator/narrated' forte is neither the end product of a consistent line of development, nor an entirely new thing, but more a realization through fuller integration of elements present from the first. This process is visible in areas of the work other than the strict technics of style. One such area is revealed in the tracing of a relation between "Section Six" of Murphy and the individual works in the Trilogy, which enact in writing what is merely stated as description in the early novel.

Murphy's Mind/The Trilogy

"Section Six" is singled out very early on (2;9) in Murphy. It deals exclusively with Murphy's mind, specifically Murphy's mind as pictured by Murphy.

> Happily we need not concern ourselves with this apparatus as it really was--that would be an extravagance and an impertinence--but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be. (107)

> There were three zones, light, half light, dark, each with its specialty.
>
> In the first were the forms with parallel, a radiant abstract of the dog's life, the elements of physical experience available for a new arrangement. Here the pleasure was reprisal....Here the whole physical fiasco became a howling success.
>
> In the second were the forms without parallel. Here the pleasure was contemplation....
>
> The third, the dark, was a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms. The light contained the docile elements of a new manifold, the world of the body broken up into the pieces of a toy; the half light, states of peace. But the dark neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change. Here there was nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion. Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He did not move, he was a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line. (111-12)

In discussing a relation between "Murphy's mind" and the Trilogy, it is good to keep firmly in mind Beckett's own dictum about the danger in "the neatness of identifications."[1] The relation here asserted is regarded as analogous to that already suggested in the narrator/text relation, where "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux" and Arsene's monologue are seen as early instances in the writing of a later dominant narrative mode. "Section Six" of Murphy, viewed as a portion of the whole writing stream, appears almost as an abstract of those dense specific areas of the later writing we identify as the individual works of the Trilogy.

Molloy

The first zone of Murphy's mind is characterized by the consciousness of the body/mind split.

> There was the mental fact and there was the physical fact, equally real if not equally pleasant.
>
> He distinguished between the actual and the 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.

> The mind felt its actual part to be above and bright, its virtual beneath and fading into dark....
> Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind....
> In the first zone...the pleasure was reprisal, the pleasure of reversing the physical experience. Here the kick that the physical Murphy received, the mental Murphy gave. It was the same kick, but corrected as to direction. (108-09; 111)

The first zone of Murphy's mind achieves full statement in the world of Molloy. The single statement "It contained forms with parallel in another mode." (108) does more to clarify, without removing, the ambiguity of the divided first novel of the Trilogy, than volumes of criticism written to that end. The distinction between the "actual part" being "above and bright," the virtual "beneath and fading into dark," neatly sums the differences in the worlds of the two narrators.

Of Molloy we read:

> And I am perhaps confusing several different occasions, and different times, deep down, and deep down is my dwelling, oh not deepest down, somewhere between the mud and the scum. (14)

> And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate....Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. (31)

Contrast Moran's situation at the beginning of his narrative:

> I remember the day I received the order to see about Molloy. It was a Sunday in summer. I was sitting in my little garden, in a wicker chair, a black book closed on my knees. It must have been about eleven o'clock, still too early to go to church....
>
> The weather was fine. I watched absently the coming and going of my bees. I heard on the gravel the scampering steps of my son, caught up in I know not what fantasy of flight and pursuit. I called to him not to dirty himself. He did not answer.
>
> All was still. Not a breath. From my neighbors' chimneys the smoke rose straight and blue. None but tranquil sounds, the clicking of mallet and ball, a rake on pebbles, a distant lawn-mower, the bell of my beloved church. And birds of course, blackbird and thrush, their song sadly dying, vanquished by the heat, and leaving dawn's high boughs for the bushes' gloom. Contentedly I inhaled the scent of my lemon-verbena. (92-3)

Moran remembers; Molloy forgets. ("Her name? I've forgotten it again....I've forgotten how to spell too, and half the words." (7)) Moran's world is bright and active, full of "the smug will to live."[2] Molloy's is dark, full of "dark forms crowding in a dark place." (23)

I am not seeking or suggesting an <u>exact</u> identification of "first zone" with "<u>Molloy</u>." But it is important to note that the terms of the proposed relation emerge from within the writing stream of the

work as a whole, affirming a much stronger connectedness than in cases where one of the terms of proposed relation is entirely outside the text in question.[3]

Malone Dies

> In the second were the forms without parallel. Here the pleasure was contemplation. This system had no other mode in which to be out of joint and therefore did not need to be put right in this. Here was the Belacqua bliss and others scarcely less precise. (111)

Malone Dies rests like an equals sign between the wild confusions of the hunter/hunted Molloy chase and the even more febrile trackings that dominate The Unnamable. The pleasures here are those of contemplation and dream, conferred by stasis. In the second zone of Murphy's mind, "It was pleasant to lie dreaming on the shelf beside Belacqua, watching the dawn break crooked." (112)[4] Malone is "on the shelf," and his book is more dreamlike than either of its counterparts in the Trilogy. He contemplates; he establishes the pace and tone of his narrative on the opening page.

> But it is just as well to let myself die, quietly, without rushing things. Something must have changed. I will not weigh upon the balance any more, one way or the other. I shall be neutral and inert....I shall be neither hot nor cold anymore, I shall be tepid, I shall die tepid, without enthusiasm. ...While waiting I shall tell myself stories....They will not be the same kind of stories as hitherto....They will be neither beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm, there will be no ugliness or beauty or fever in them any more, they will be almost lifeless, like the teller. (179-80)

Bedridden, Malone does not have to expend energy quieting the restless body. The advantage he has over Murphy in this regard is revealed in another passage from "Section Six" of the earlier novel.

> But motion in this world depended on rest in the world outside....His body lay down more and more in a less precarious abeyance than that of sleep, for its own convenience and so that the mind might move....As he lapsed in body he felt himself coming alive in mind, set free to move among its treasures....Thus as his body set him free more and more in his mind he took to spending less and less time in the light, spitting at the breakers of the world; and less in the half light, where the choice of bliss introduced an element of effort; and more and more and more in the dark, in the willlessness, a mote in its absolute freedom. (110-13)

But Malone still has a body, even if an inert one, and thus he is still subject to many of the tensions of the body/mind split characteristic of the first zone. Despite this, Malone Dies is a state of peace in the fractious Trilogy: the clashing "parallel modes" of the "Molloy" and "Moran" halves of the first book are no longer present, but, in fighting calmly down every sudden rise of deep emotion, an effort is required of Malone that is something of a residue of the physical world attachment, hence something still to be gone beyond.

The achievement of 'measured pace' in Malone Dies is due in large part to the format: the[8] textual surface is a congeries of small pieces, eighty-two in number. These pieces, which are not simply paragraphs, range in length from one word to eight pages.[5] But the more interesting and perhaps more important innovation here is that of the spaces which separate but also join the bits and pieces of the text. The "words/space," "words/space" rhythm is not unlike the breathing of an old sick man, particularly since the sections of words vary erratically in length. Malone at more than one point loses consciousness, and at all points is lapsing

towards physical disintegration. The spaces are a visible 'nothing' on the page, and words inevitably lose this battle: the last eleven pieces of text occupy only two pages of the book. The spaces also point up the puncturing of the illusion inherent in story telling, for, although Malone's stories merge at many points with his descriptions of his own situation, he resists this mergence as "author" in a much more obvious fashion than either Moran or Molloy did. The large space between the "parallel modes" of those self-complete narrations, that space which is such an important dimension of Molloy seen as a whole, is broken up into all these small spaces in Malone's book. Malone is author in, not just of, his narrative.[6]

The consciously asserted distance between Malone and his "creations" ("Nothing is less like me than this patient, reasonable child" (193)) establishes, or helps to establish, the "contemplative mode" of the book, and yet simultaneously enables, in certain passages of great lyrical intensity, where the strict boundaries between Malone and his characters dissolve, a kind of transcending of the condition of the contemplative.

When I stop, as just now, the noises begin again, strangely loud, those whose turn it is. So that I seem to have again the hearing of my boyhood. Then in my bed, in the dark, on stormy nights, I could tell from one another, in the outcry without, the leaves, the boughs, the groaning trunks, even the grasses and the house that sheltered me. Each tree had its own cry, just as no two whispered alike, when the air was still. I heard afar the iron gates clashing and dragging at their posts and the wind rushing between their bars. There was nothing, not even the sand on the paths, that did not utter its cry. The still nights too, still as the grave as the saying is, were nights of storm for me, clamourous with countless pantings. These I amused myself with identifying, as I lay there. Yes, I got great amusement, when young, from their so-called silence. The sound I liked best had nothing noble about it. It was the barking of the dogs, at night, in the clusters of hovels up in the hills, where the stone cutters lived, like generations of stone cutters before them. It came down to me where I lay, in the house in the plain, wild and soft, at the limit of earshot, soon weary. The dogs of the valley replied with their gross bay all fangs and jaws and foam. From the hills another joy came down, I mean the brief scattered lights that sprang up on their slopes at nightfall, merging in blurs scarcely brighter than the sky, less bright than the stars, and which the palest moon extinguished. They were things that scarcely were, on the confines of silence and dark, and soon ceased. So I reason now, at my ease. (206)

The section of text immediately prior (202-06) to this passage was itself a long lyrical account of the boy Sapo, in one of his visits to the Lamberts, a country family who comprise his only friends in the book. The writing, in mood and tone, scarcely changes from one passage to the other: Malone might just as easily be writing of Sapo here. This is one of those places in the writing where the "story" overflows into Malone's self-reflections, overwhelming the distance between "author" and "story." A passage in Proust is important here.

> The identification of immediate with past experience...amounts to a participation between the ideal and the real, imagination and direct apprehension, symbol and substance. Such participation frees the essential reality that is denied to the contemplative as to the active life. What is common to present and past is more essential than either taken separately. (55-6)

Beckett is there referring to 'involuntary memory.' In a sense the long passage just quoted from Malone Dies reads as "an identification of immediate with past experience," for Malone's own past takes over the writing and, as writing, becomes his own "immediate experience."

In Malone Dies the writing itself has moved towards the contemplative and away from the active mode present in Molloy, but both these modes are linked to the external world, as the two books themselves are linked (Kenner calls them "companion pieces" [7]), and as the first two zones of Murphy's mind are linked (or at least sit much closer to each other, than either does to the third zone). This points up why we need not seek "exact" identifications between "Murphy's mind" and the works in the Trilogy: both, when seen as passages or areas in the whole writing stream, are re-statings of something foundational to and present in the thought from the beginning: present in Proust as intellectual awareness, in Murphy as focal point in a narrative,[8] and in the Trilogy as embodiment in the writing itself. This gives added weight to the last remark in the above quote from Proust.

But Malone Dies reflects the fuller perspective stated in Proust, where Beckett goes on to say:

> Reality, whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic. Imagination, applied --a priori--to what is absent, is exercised in vacuo and cannot tolerate the limits of the real. Nor is any direct and purely experimental contact possible between subject and object, because they are automatically separated by the subject's consciousness of perception, and the object loses its purity and becomes a mere intellectual pretext or motive. (56)

This is what happens in Malone Dies, as is shown when we continue on from the point at which the long quotation concluded:

> So I reason now, at my ease. Standing before my high window I gave myself to them, waiting for them to end, for my joy to end, straining towards the joy of ended joy. But our business at the moment is less with these futilities than with my ears from which there spring two impetuous tufts of no doubt yellow hair, yellowed by wax and lack of care, and so long that the lobes are hidden. (206-07)

For a moment, there was

> reduplication, the experience...at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal. (56, Proust)

In that moment, "Death is dead because Time is dead." (56) Yet Time revives all too quickly: "But our business at the moment...." (207)

The vision was one of hearing, of listening, and on what does consciousness seize, when it reclaims attention? Ears, the auditory organs. Once out of the moment, withdrawn from the vision, one is returned to the temporal, physical condition, the fatal world of body, and there is no conscious means available

with which to bring back what is now past forever and forever receding, paradise lost a second time.[9]

When we look at Malone Dies as writing, and at its place in the writing stream, the long quotation (206) continues to resonate as a prominent passage of lyrical fusion, one such among many, in this novel and throughout the Trilogy. These instances stand out as "major events" in the writing, and impart a rhythm to the whole work, are a dominant chord in the whole writing space. The instances of "fusion" are those points of deepest absorption of the perspective in the substance of its "seeing," analogous to the moments (passages) of "involuntary memory" in Proust.

Malone has a body, and is a denizen of the "half light." He chooses, must choose, constantly, and the bliss he knows, and which we read as passages in the writing, is, if not itself the product of a specific effort, nonetheless still surrounded by all the routines of effort associated with the living, with living. "What matters is to eat and excrete. Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles." (185) The true dark, that "tumult of non-Newtonian motion" on the far edge of Murphy's rocking, is still beyond.

The Unnamable

The world of The Unnamable is perhaps nowhere better described than in the closing description of the Third Zone of Murphy's mind.

> ...a flux of forms...neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming...nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion.... the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line. (112)

The textual surface is at first like that of Malone Dies: sixteen little bits and pieces spread over fourteen pages. But the seventeenth consumes the remainder of the work, a one-hundred-ten page paragraph. This singular, radical stylistic feature sets up and underscores a textual situation of "ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line." The distraction of 'pieces,' of 'parts,' even of paragraphs, is eliminated, leaving no (textual) chance for either reader or narrator to catch his breath. Even in the opening section we get a good indication of what to expect.

> Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on....I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me. These few general remarks to begin with. What am I to do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?...The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter. (291)

We can see here at the outset "forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming," particularly in the last sentence.[10] The "affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later" are already present before this remark is made: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me." Commotion, "nothing but commotion," is manifest in the series of short questions that begin the work, and elsewhere throughout the passage. And this state of affairs persists throughout the whole text, with steadily increasing intensity, as the following quotes, taken nearly at random, demonstrate.

All this business of a labour to accomplish, before I can end, of an imposed task, once known, long neglected, finally forgotten, to perform, before I can be done with speaking, done with listening, I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. I have nothing to do, that is to say nothing in particular. I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak. (314)

But already I'm beginning to be there no more, in that calamitous street they made so clear to me. I could describe it, I could have, a moment ago, as if I had been there, in the form they chose for me, diminished certainly, not the man I was, not much longer for this world, but the eyes still open to impressions, and one ear, sufficiently, and the head sufficiently obedient, to provide me at least with a vague idea of the elements to be eliminated from the setting in order for all to be empty and silent. That was always the way. Just at the moment when the world is assembled at last, and it begins to dawn on me how I can leave it, all fades and disappears. (334)

> Perhaps they are somewhere there, the words that count, in what has just been said, the words it behoved to say, they need not be more than a few. 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. Or rather there is silence, from the moment the messenger departs until he returns with his orders, namely, Continue. For there are long silences from time to time, truces, and then I hear them whispering, It's over, this time we've hit the mark, and others, We'll have to go through it all again, in other words, or in the same words, arranged differently. (370)

But we cannot approach this novel, this writing, in the usual way: the extracting of quotations, however apposite in themselves, makes pieces of a text written in a manner entirely antagonistic to such a procedure. To begin to see how this work is like "the dark" of the Third Zone of Murphy's mind one has to attend to the text on the microlevels of statement, sentence, word. I will now go through a portion of one of the early sections (number three) line by line, in order to show how the writing "works" in this book, and why close reading is so necessary. The purpose is to

present a picture of this book that will document the suggested analogy between the Third Zone of Murphy's mind and The Unnamable as a piece of writing. For The Unnamable is an "end point" in Beckett's prose: none of the works which follow it charts any significantly new territory. The third book of the Trilogy is the cynosure of all Beckett's fiction; all the prior works lead into it, and all those which come after, follow from it. That is why it demands the closest attention in any study of Beckett's prose writing.

> I see him in profile. Sometimes I wonder if it is not Molloy. Perhaps it is Molloy, wearing Malone's hat. But it is more reasonable to suppose it is Malone, wearing his own hat. Oh look, there is the first thing, Malone's hat. I see no other clothes. Perhaps Molloy is not here at all. Could he be, without my knowledge? The place is no doubt vast. Dim intermittent lights suggest a kind of distance. To tell the truth I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on, I believe we are all here, but so far I have only seen Malone. Another hypothesis, they were here, but are here no longer. I shall examine it after my fashion. Are there other pits, deeper down? To which one accedes by mine? Stupid obsession with depth. Are there other places set aside for us and this one where I am, with Malone, merely their narthex? I thought I had done with preliminaries. No, no, we have all been here forever, we shall all be here forever, I know it. (292-3)

"I see him in profile."

The initial sentence of Section Three,[11] "Malone is there.", establishes both the primary subject of the section--Malone's presence--and the present tense which anchors the saying, anchors by providing a point to which the narrator continually returns from wanderings the actual describing sets in motion. "I see him in profile." is one of these present tense "points of return."

"Sometimes I wonder if it is not Molloy."

The simple position established in and by the previous sentence begins to slide towards complexity. Though still "present tense" grammatically, "sometimes" disrupts the simple present, this particular instance being only one of several such times. The verb identifies an 'inward' activity of the narrator, "wondering," rather than the relatively external one of "seeing" a physical object. And most importantly, the distinction between narrator and reader begins to blur. "I see him in profile." clearly enough belongs to the narrator:[12] even when we isolate the statement, it requires a considerable effort on our part to identify closely with the "I".

This is not the case with the second sentence, which applies as readily to the reader's situation as to the narrator's, since one does wonder, more than once, if Malone is not Molloy, and if Molloy is not perhaps Moran, and if the narrator of The Unnamable is himself not one, or both, or all three of these. The problem of identity, a major motif in the writing as a whole, is being touched on here. Certainly one can identify passages of and statements in each work, including The Unnamable, that, as writing, betray the presence of previous modes and habits of thought, action, and expression presented in the past as "Murphy" or "Belacqua" or "Molloy" or "Watt." The very situation here described--the narrator's wondering whether he is looking at Malone or Molloy--is a kind of replay of the "A and C" query Molloy has such trouble with in the opening pages of his narrative.

If, for instance, one stops to consider the possibility that all the "narrators" are really covers for one voice that is only just now beginning to emerge (a point touched on a few lines later in this same passage, and made an explicit concern a few pages after that (303)), one is then engaged in the same activity as the narrator himself.

If we insist that the sentence is simply a remark of the narrator, quite on par with the previous statement as simply a line revealing an aspect of the situation in the narrative, we are not giving real attention to the reading fact of saying over the "I." If we acknowledge the 'reading fact' but resist exploring the relation that quickly springs up in terms of one's own place re/the text--i.e., that we too wonder, sometimes, "who is who," "who is speaking"--we are denying a significant dimension of the Beckett writing as a whole.

This is an important point. I am not saying that the statement "Sometimes I wonder if it is not Molloy" in itself causes one to stop, wonder, pause over questions of identity or relations between oneself as reader and the narrator. Rather, this is a cumulative effect in the reading as a whole, triggered at more dramatic moments in the text.

> Or quietly, stealthily, the story would begin, as if nothing had happened and I still the teller and the told. But I would be fast asleep, my mouth agape, as usual, I would look the same as usual. And from my sleeping mouth the lies would pour, about me. No, not sleeping, listening, in tears. But now, is it I now, I on me? Sometimes I think it is. And then I realize it is not. (310)

Crises in the text become crises in the reading, when they are repeated often enough, and problems of "identity" beyond those of the contents in a text, problems perhaps common to or at least persistent in modern consciousness itself, begin to impinge upon the reader's personal security, provoking questions of self-identity. At these points one can begin to talk of the style as threat. Here, in a section of text not provocative in itself, we can see the unconscious build-up (in the reading) of what we might call "statements of identification with narrator" leading ultimately to a much more dramatic confrontation between reader and text, in statements of greater directness and intensity. In this the writing reflects, at the statement level (the most direct level of reader/text relation), those tendencies I have described elsewhere as "anticipation" in various other relations.

"Perhaps it is Molloy, wearing Malone's hat."

This sentence underscores the inability of the narrator to be certain at whom he is looking, and the reference to "hat" (repeated in the two following sentences) establishes a link with a major

Beckettian motif. The sentence here thus initiates a sudden emergence of that thread, which runs through the whole field of the writing.

"But it is more reasonable to assume it is Malone, wearing his own hat."

No one would argue this point, but the remark causes the "reasonable" to stand revealed as only a gambit of the mind, not at all a condition of certainty for resolution of the problem at hand. The very citing undercuts the authority of the "more reasonable" stance, making it simply part of a statement, like the statement before it, and not a ground. This aspect is further emphasized in that these two sentences, taken together, are a recurrent unit in the writing: the "perhaps/but" coupling is a mainstay of the text, and as such establishes one of the rhythmic movements in the whole space of the writing. Another kind of movement is shown through these two sentences being an immediate enactment of the activity announced in the sentence just prior, that of the narrator's "wondering": these sentences are the "wondering." But the next sentence, though it retains a link with these two through "hat", jerks the attention (of narrator and reader) back, first

in the return to the "present tense" that, as I have said, anchors the saying of this whole passage, and then, through its contents, further back yet, to the previous section.[13]

"Oh look, there is the first thing, Malone's hat."

In the previous section of text we read:

> And things, what is the correct attitude to adopt towards things? And, to begin with, are they necessary? What a question. But I have few illusions, things are to be expected. The best is not to decide anything, in this connexion, in advance. If a thing turns up, for some reason or another, take it into consideration. Where there are people, it is said, there are things. Does this mean that when you admit the former you must also admit the latter? Time will tell. The thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of system. (292)

The double concern of "things"/"people" is neatly joined in "Malone's hat." The "present tense return" is actually only a part of the situation in this sentence, for the "Oh look," is something new, peculiarly effective, somewhat startling, almost as if the speaker is himself a reader, i.e., distanced from the text he is speaking.

The point in this discussion is to see what is happening in the text as we move from line to line. In this stop-action manner we can see the many associations, both textual and narrative, present in each different statement. Each sentence shifts its ground a bit, underscoring the sense of the text as "a space filled with moving."[14] Distinctions between past/present, narrator/reader, character/character, et. al., become increasingly difficult to make or to hold to, once made. This is not as obvious when we are reading at the usual rate but it is still happening then, whether we notice it or not. Those places in which the ambiguity, confusion, shifting are more obvious--the dilemma as to whether it is Molloy or Malone circling about the narrator--are made more effective by the subtler, incessant microlevel displacements.

The real importance here, however, is not so much the establishing of the many cross-sectional tie-ups in themselves, but the emergent picture they afford of the text as a kind of music which must be listened to in order to begin to be understood. Understanding can only follow, not precede, the hearing of the text.[15] The writing as a whole is like a vast symphony. What I have called the

"present tense return" is like a single instrument, only audible in itself when focused on as I am doing in the present discussion. On a larger level, "monologue," only an extended passage in Watt, becomes a whole movement, later on. When we select out any given portion of the writing, we can find there, not just a dominant chord or motif, but all the small themes, associations, juxtapositions, etc., which comprise it, just as we could locate in a symphonic score the different parts assigned to the individual instruments. To note the three references to "hat" in the passage under consideration is to tune one's ear to one instrument not at all dominant--but clearly audible--in this passage, which elsewhere has center stage.[16]

But as with music, no one single "piece" of the symphony is primary: rather, the relations among the instruments, passages, movements, themes, et. al. account for the crucial instances of form and perception. The listener is, finally, left alone in his relation to the music itself, just as the Beckett reader is, in the end, left alone in his relation to the writing.

As with "hat," the reference here to clothes is an echo of a motif that has been given full play in many previous passages in the writing. When we single out this line, we can almost hear the distant melodic sweep of those passages, since we once did hear them much more dominantly. And when this theme gets more attention a bit later on (305), there is once more an upsweep. If we attend to the previous passages visually--Molloy in his night-dress, MacMann in his greatcoat, Moran in his straw boater and pepper-and-salt--distinct and powerful pictures rise up, and with them, attendant emotions. These pictures are contained in, hidden in, the line here quoted, powerful forces pressing beneath the innocuous surface, powerful because of the mergence in them of visual and auditory sensations. The line itself is a "way into" the surging field that is the writing as a whole.

Drawing back from that field, we look again at "I see no other clothes." trying to see it in its actual context in the present narrative: the striking thing is the absence. The rich fulness of the past is no longer here; the visual reenforces the thematic.

The narrator's present situation is starkly different from the situations of his predecessors, characterized relentlessly by absence rather than presence. "The only true paradise is the paradise that has been lost." (Proust, 14)

"Perhaps Molloy is not here at all."

Now the "wondering" resumes, after two sentences of "present tense return," and it is colored by the most recent words spoken, the new note of "absence" now extending itself to the larger concern of identity of "Malone-Molloy." The positive possibility, "Perhaps it is Molloy, wearing Malone's hat.", changes after the interpolation of "I see no other clothes.", to the negative doubt: "Perhaps Molloy is not here at all." These two statements particularize the earlier remark, "Sometimes I wonder if it is not Molloy.", which contains them both: the "sense" of that remark is, that he wonders if this is Molloy before him, but the literal expression includes the negative "not." Viewing the text as music, this little diversion is playing itself out quite inconspicuously but consistently within the larger passage.

If we want to talk about the text in terms of molecular structure, we can see here the persistent moving towards atomic dissolution, which leaves the individual "atoms" (or sub-atomic particles, to be more current) existing in a relation to each other which "is" the larger unit, a unit that is not an object in the usual sense but a space, an area, composed of particles and the spaces between them. This model characterizes the nature of that which we are discussing, no matter what the focus of the discussion itself, e.g., theme (whether concrete, as with "clothes," "hat," or abstract, as with "identity"); text (the "present tense return"/ "wondering" statements); character (who is the narrator? is he distinct from the others, or deluded in thinking so? is he "someone new" or "the same old story"?); and so on.

"Could he be, without my knowledge?"

With this remark there is a sudden deepening: the easy distances of the three remarks comprising the little divertissement just discussed are absorbed in this single statement. The possibilities of Molloy's being present were predicated

upon a localized "hereness," that of the narrator and his immediate space. But where is he, really? Where is the "here" of "Perhaps Molloy is not here at all."? Our tendency is to read "Could he be, without my knowledge?" as, "Could he be (here), without my knowledge?" But that is not what the text says. But isn't that what the narrator means? Quite likely, for what else could he mean? Well, then, can't we accept this as the "meaning" of the remark? Yes, but not without noting the divergence of "meaning" in this sense from the text as given. The text does not say "here;" even if the narrator means "here", where is that? The text splits off from the narrator, despite the fact that the narrator is the sole speaker of the text. The reader must choose, between siding with "narrator" as "probably meaning 'here'," and siding with "text," which clearly does not say 'here.'

"Could he be, without my knowledge?" If we side with text, what is a probable meaning? Something like, "Could he be (at all), without my knowledge?" There is neither one, nor an easy, answer to such a question, though the question is far from being an idle one: it touches the

ontological root that is a kind of throbbing nerve throughout the Beckett writing. If we answer "yes" then we corral the narrator into a definite location (The Unnamable), and assert that "Molloy" existed long before in a separate entity, Molloy. If we answer "no," then we see the narrator more consistently with the Beckett writing, the repository at the moment of all that went before, including the existence of Molloy, but we have fallen again into the 'here' impasse, through the back door as it were. Logic is of small avail here.

The second half of the statement further complicates (or reveals the complexities of) the situation, for we may read it three ways:

"without my knowledge?" (outside of)

"without my knowledge?" (from which he came)

"without my knowledge?" (of which he is made).

The text of course places no emphasis, and I am not assigning an emphasis either, but merely wish to call attention to the multiple possibilities latent in the expressions used, for the statement itself overtly identifies the ontological-epistemological dualism that is a fundamental attribute of the condition from which the writing as a whole emerges.

The possibilities of emphasis in "without my knowledge" are touched on here (and so far I have considered possibilities only in relation to the narrator; when relations to "author" or "reader" begin to be considered, a much greater multiplicity appears, although still tied to the single statement being considered) both because the text continually encourages the reader to reflect upon its particulars[18] and because the possibilities here are seen as radiations out from ~~the~~ contents of the sentence, especially as those contents relate to concerns in the writing as a whole. In asking, "Could he be, without my knowledge?" the narrator opens a much larger dimension than simply that concerned with whether the rotating figure is "Malone" or "Molloy." This dimension is opened through the actual words used in the text. The sentence itself stands as something like an event (this is the case throughout the Trilogy, and especially in The Unnamable). This opens it to all the avenues of interpretation in exactly the same way as any "action event" in a narrative--Murphy's death, for instance--is opened.

Wittgenstein's concept of "meaning"--that meaning is equivalent to usage or application of a term or statement--is important here.[19] The 'meaning' is not an object for which the word or statement stands, but a function within a context, the boundaries of which are deliberately or tacitly agreed upon by the speakers in a situation. This is why we cannot say absolutely that the "meaning" of "Could he be, without my knowledge?" is simply, "Could he be (here), without my knowledge?" That is one possibility, a strong one, for which support can be found in the context of the passage as a whole. But the absence of the word "here" in the actual text occasions a different situation, which can be equally well explored and documented, again in terms of the context in which the statement is found, as I will show in a moment. The crucial factor is the establishing of the boundaries by those discussing the statement itself. My only concern here is to show how the text itself encourages doing exactly that, and how, as a text, it has affinities with such 'wide open' perspectives on language and meaning.

Heidegger is helpful also in this regard:

> Multiplicity of meanings is the element in which thought must move in order to be strict thought.[20]

To suggest the possibilities of "meaning" through the placing of different emphases in the little phrase "without my knowledge," is not to lose sight of the relations of the meanings suggested to the context(s) of which they are a part. The Beckett text is generated from a perspective very much attuned to areas of consciousness articulated by both Wittgenstein and Heidegger, and there will be more said later in this essay about each.

"The place is no doubt vast."

"The place" would seem to mean "this place" but, as with "here" in the previous discussion, the text does not say "this" place, just as it does not read "The place is vast" but, "The place is no doubt vast." The words "no doubt" in fact express doubt, as the narrator acknowledges a few pages later.

> But, as I have said, the place may well be vast, as it may well measure twelve feet in diameter. It comes to the same thing, as far as discerning its limits is concerned. I like to think I occupy the center, but nothing is less certain. (295)

The problems discussed in regard to the "meaning" of the previous sentence, centering around a split between narrator and text, persist in the present sentence, and in the following one. By keeping the remarks general and open (and, in the case of "no doubt," unstable), the narrator keeps alive both the probable specific meaning, and the more abstract but equally probable possibilities of the text per se.

"Dim intermittent lights suggest a kind of distance."

The seeming clarity (despite the hesitancy of "suggest" and "a kind of") of this remark is undermined two pages further on, when he says, again speaking of the lights: "They are perhaps unwavering and fixed and my fitful perceiving the cause of their inconstancy." (294) When we look at the remark by itself, the narrator could as easily be speaking of the night sky, or memory, or the whole writing to this point, as of his immediate locale!

"To tell the truth I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on, I believe we are all here, but so far I have only seen Malone."

In viewing the text "as writing" rather than strictly as narrative, it became possible to talk of a separation between "narrator" and "text" in the discussion of "Could he be, without my knowledge?" The present statement, viewed as writing, reveals how a similar separation occurs between "narrator" and "reader." While the narrator has "so far...only seen Malone," we as readers have already been made aware of many of the previous characters and works in the writing stream. Molloy, for instance, is specifically 'there' in the text, for us, even though he is only a possibility for the narrator. Each time any of them gets named, it is a reappearance of that character, from the perspective that sees the work as 'a writing.' References to "hat" and "clothes" more subtly brought all the others to the reader's mind through the text. In this very statement "to tell the truth" is a phrase first associated with Molloy, who repeats it often enough for it to become a mannerism that inevitably evokes him, when encountered anywhere in the subsequent writing.

The bifurcation of narrator and reader is present here in more overt instances as well. "but so far I have only seen Malone" establishes a kind of empirical veracity for the narrator's own speaking, providing one kind of limit that enables a momentary particularity to emerge around his speaking to this point. The intense identification between "reader" and "I" suggested earlier in the discussion of "Sometimes I wonder if it is not Molloy." separates again here, as clearer boundaries emerge for the moment. This recurs throughout the text, as the relation now makes itself distinct, now moves towards a new fusion. When we view the narrator/reader relation as a line, we see more clearly the affinity between The Unnamable and the Third Zone of Murphy's mind.

> nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming...nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion....the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line. (112)

We could trace, from sentence to sentence, passage to passage, the rise and fall of this line, but in the examples we would quote to do this there would be innumerable other such lines manifesting

and dissolving all the while. In the sentance now being considered, "Murphy" is mentioned by name; "to tell the truth" is a Molloy mannerism; "I believe they are all here...I believe we are all here" is one of the technical repetition devices common to the Trilogy as a whole; "at least from Murphy on" cites a relation between the "I" and the writing stream itself (as contrasted with a relation between the "I" and another character in the stream); and so on. This is the case for almost every line. It is one of the effects occasioned by the writing making itself felt, known, perceived, as writing, which opens up the vastness of writing as a surface both of language and of consciousness.

> But how much more pleasant was the sensation of being a missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion. So pleasant that pleasant was not the word. (Murphy, 112-13)

But I do not wish to imply that the Beckett work, in whole or part, would be "solved" or its problems "resolved" even were we to construct a model showing the actual coursing of all these "lines" through every statement of text. My own investigations are not specifically concerned with explanation

or any sort of whole taxonomy, nor are my descriptions intent upon a "completeness" rendered illusory by the text itself. The primary concern here is that of opening a way into the text, and not with the development of a "system" that can only end as a reduction of text. The writing is simply not reducible to "object." All the lines of relation happening continually together in a true tumult of cohesion and dissolution create a vast music, difficult music.

"Another hypothesis, they were here, but are here no longer."

The last sentence discussed seemed to locate the narrator in a fairly definite place ("...I believe they are all here....I believe we are all here") (emphasis mine), but such security is quickly disrupted by "Another hypothesis...." The term "hypothesis" casts its shadow on the previous statement, which we did not regard as a "hypothesis" while reading it. When we do regard the two statements as hypotheses, the location of the speaker shifts to some place other than where we thought it to be (i.e., in the place where the statement itself was). The

species of assurance, slender as it is, in "To tell the truth I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on, I believe we are all here, but so far I have only seen Malone.", is now undercut by the forced regarding of that sentence as only a hypothesis, not something 'substantial' in itself, and made from a location invisible to us.

"Another" is a key term here: it suggests the narrator himself did not think of the first statement as a hypothesis until this point. And perhaps it was not, until this point.

"...they were here, but are here no longer.", is a negative counter to the previous statement (repeating the earlier positive/negative movement in the statements about Molloy). The two sentences, seen as hypotheses, are one more instance of the "wondering", though of a more general and abstract nature.

"I shall examine it after my fashion."

This is one of the "present tense return" sentences, although the "shall" makes for a slight variation, and the contents refer to an internal

operation rather than external positioning. But technically the sentence serves as a kind of "rest," a point of drawing back from the all-absorbing involvements that characterize the sentences between the statements of "present tense return."

"Are there other pits, deeper down? To which one accedes by mine? Stupid obsession with depth."

These lines seem to belong together, forming a sudden little "musical phrase" all their own, but what they "do" in the passage is much more complex. In Malone Dies we read:

> Perhaps after all I am in a kind of vault and this space which I take to be the street in reality no more than a wide trench or ditch with other vaults opening upon it. But the noises that rise up from below, the steps that come climbing towards me? Perhaps there are other vaults even deeper than mine, why not? In which case the question arises again as to which floor I am on, there is nothing to be gained by my saying I am in a basement if there are tiers of basements one on top of another. (219)

Molloy says, early on:

> ...and deep down is my dwelling, oh not deepest down, somewhere between the mud and the scum. (14)

And long before, in his first book (Proust), Beckett says:

> ...the only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction....The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. (46-8)

The three sentences thus show a movement back towards the very origins of the writing stream, in a highly ordered manner. The first brings the most recent book, Malone Dies, directly to mind. The bad pun on "mine" is a trait characteristic of the early writing in Murphy and More Pricks Than Kicks (i.e., of the "first person narrative voice"), writing located chronologically between the Trilogy and Proust. The word "stupid" also reflects something of the sophomoric cockiness of the early first person voice, although it is more pivotal in the third sentence, which seems to place the speaker at the very beginning of the whole writing, a placing the self-censuring remark itself supports. The sentence counters the descent to which the whole work attests, by relegating it all to nothing more than an "obsession." "Stupid obsession," at that. The realisation of distance, or proportion and relation, here, is quite startling, made even moreso

when we recognize that we have come no further than the first story of More Pricks Than Kicks.[21]

> "Where were we?" said Belacqua....
> "Where are we ever?" cried the Ottolenghi
> "where we were, as we were." (20)

"Are there other places set aside for us and this one where I am, with Malone, merely their narthex? I thought I had done with preliminaries."

The first sentence here reveals an instinctive shift away from the "stupid obsession with depth," through contents that suggest a horizontal possibility: "Are there other places set aside for us...." "Narthex," a powerful word among basically bland sounds, triggers further associations in this regard. But narthex means "casket" as well as "vestibule," and in any case replacing "depth" with a "lateral" direction would not help.[22] The narrator realizes this, and shifts again: "I thought I had done with preliminaries." No time to start a whole new direction! And yet, has any of it been anything but "preliminaries"? The sentence places the narrator back from the direction he had just started in, and in one sense, back from the whole stream to that point. For all the works may

be seen as "preliminaries," certainly stand as that to this exacting present moment, just as the very questions here being asked are preliminaries in a new "examination" doomed to end in a dead end, as all the others have before it. The past tense verbs convey a mood of resignation and weariness, in sharp contrast to the mood of "I shall examine it after my fashion.", the sentence immediately prior to the five-sentence-set just concluding.

These five sentences form a quite distinct rhythmic pattern within the passage as a whole, keyed by the two which begin with "Are there other...," anchored by the two declaratives. "To which one accedes by mine?" establishes the needed variation. As a group they set up the concluding statement, both rhythmically and in terms of mood, and help to determine as well its contents.

"No no, we have all been here forever, we shall all be here forever, I know it."

The verbs are important. The present perfect tense ropes in the present moment (i.e., the immediate focus since "Are there other pits...," and the section as a whole) as only another gasp of

'what has always been.' The future tense here closes, rather than opens: all past futures--this present moment being the most recent--have ended, ultimately, in the same impasse. (Molloy: "It's for the whole there seems to be no spell." (27)) And the present tense "I know it," unlike the instances of "present tense return" noted throughout the passage, does not stand clearly by itself, but is attached to these past and future conclusions, crowded out by them, almost lost in the crushing negations. As "present tense" it is a gesture of holding ground; but its contents--what the narrator "knows," at this one point--are the very negatives to which it is attached, the precedent contents of the sentence itself.

The passage concludes darkly, negatively. All the various beginnings, the conjectures, observations, questions, seemingly possessed of energy with which to continue, crumble at the end into frustration, defeat. The final remark is more one of desperation than of resolution.[23]

The Beckett text demands excruciatingly close attention, pushing the reader towards other kinds of meaning, reliability, awareness, than those dependent upon the accustomed contents of narrative surface. But technique, however dazzling, never betrays its own contents, which uniquely inform and drive technique, even as it "opens" them in a manner immeasureably fuller than they own as contents qua contents. The dynamic interchange between the contents of the words and the arrangements, relations, velocities of the words, visible in the microlevels of text, centers the dialectical moving that "sustains" the space of the whole writing field. The stasis is one of pure moving, like Murphy bound in his ever-faster-moving chair. Clear boundaries between "position" and "motion" dissolve, as in Heisenberg's famous principle. When we stop the text to make a point, we discover the text itself never stops. There is no solid anything, once we step into the text, and we inevitably do that when we focus on any portion of its moving surface. We are then "more and more and more in the dark," are ourselves become "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom."

3. THE TEXT AS AN INSTANCE OF ITSELF

In Chapters One and Two, I have discussed Beckett's work from the viewpoint of the writing as a whole. In the present chapter, attention shifts to individual texts, in particular those written prior to the Trilogy.

We can distinguish among the individual works quite easily, for each new text is an abrupt departure, in structure and form, from the work immediately precedent. This in itself is unique, as is quickly apparent when we compare the Beckett oeuvre with that of writers like Celine, Genet, or Robbe-Grillet.[1] In contrasting his work with Kafka's, Beckett has said:

> You notice how Kafka's form is classic, it goes on like a steamroller--almost serene. It seems to be threatened the whole time--but the consternation is in the form. In my work there is consternation behind the form, not in the form. At the end of my work there is nothing but dust--the nameable.[2]

This restless perspective unifies the whole writing, not as an object, but as an action. Though this qualifies any easy sense of a particular work as separate and complete, it simultaneously enables

clear description of each specific work's separateness withfn, not from, the field of the whole writing. Thus we can see each work as an 'instance of itself,' and yet intimately connected with all the other works, through being only an isolated area of an actional whole.[3]

By 'instance of itself' I mean a picture of the work derived from the text directly, in the text's own terms.[4] The 'guidewords' suggested for each text are not to be understood as labels for discrete objects, but heuristically, as indicators of the particular shape of that area of the whole writing that is the specific text.[5]

Murphy as Closed System

Murphy is the most traditional of Beckett's novels. It has the well-established beginning, middle, and end, a variety of unlikely but likable characters, the whisper of a love story, the unforeseen point of crisis for the protagonist, and ultimately the confirmation of this hero through his death. The pace is lively, the surface untroubled. The very fact that it is in every way a "well written novel" indicates the essentially closed nature of the book itself.

Closed systems abound in Murphy.

> Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain....Murphy was content to accept the partial congruence of the world of his mind with the world of his body as due to some...process of supernatural determination. The problem was of little interest. Any solution would do that did not clash with the feeling, growing stronger as Murphy grew older, that his mind was a closed system, subject to no principle of change but its own, self-sufficient and impenetrable to the vicissitudes of the body. (107-09)
>
> (emphasis mine)

> And now Neary lay on his bed, repeating: "The syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary." (200)

> She increased the flow of tears, partly to show how offended she was, partly because the kisses she was now getting were quite a new experience.
>
> When the effect of shedding tears finally became greater than the pleasure of having them kissed away, Miss Counihan discontinued it. (124-5)

> All four are now in position. They will not move from where they now are until they find a formula, a status quo agreeable to all. (233)

> He never left his room, except of course when absolutely obliged to, nor allowed anyone to enter it. He took in the tray that Miss Carridge left twice daily at his door, and put it out when he had eaten. Miss Carridge's "Never still" was an exaggeration, but it was true that he did spend a great deal of his time ranging his room in every direction. (69)

> Cooper was the perfect size for a servant so long as he kept off the bottle and he moved incorruptible between his corruptors with the beautiful indifference of a shuttle, without infamy and without praise. (198)[6]

> For two days and three nights they did not leave the house. Neary, because distrusting his associates singly and as a pair he feared lest Murphy should arrive while he was absent; Wylie and Miss Counihan, for the same reason; Cooper, because he was forbidden; Celia, because it did not occur to her; Miss Carridge, because she had no time. It seemed as though none of them would ever go out again, when relief arrived in the shape of an assurance from Dr. Angus Killiecrankie that so far as the fear of missing Murphy was concerned, they might all take the air without the least anxiety. (256)

And in the end Murphy's birthmark (on one of his buttocks) is the sole means of identifying his charred remains:

> "How beautiful in a way," said the coroner, birthmark, deathmark, I mean, rounding off the life somehow, don't you think, full circle, <u>you</u> know, eh, Angus?" (267)

Suk's Horoscope (32-4), Mr. Endon's chess game (243-5), Murphy's ritual dessert (96), and numerous other instances of statement and event continually reenforce the overall "bodytightness" of the world-as-closed-system.

Narratively, everything is neatly wrapped up at the end. Neary writes four checks immediately after the viewing of Murphy's remains (including one covering the expenses of Murphy's cremation), thereby closing the relations of the group that had been held together through the course of the book by Murphy's absence. Cooper, able to sit and wear a hat now that Murphy is dead,[7] is fittingly entrusted with the latter's ashes and fittingly dispenses with them (275), not in the manner Murphy had wished, but in a manner perhaps more appropriate in a closed-system world most obvious at the physical level. And the last that is said of Celia, "She closed her eyes." (283), brings full circle the love affair initiated by those same eyes (12,13). The ranger's cry, "All out.", ejects everyone from the park, which now is dark. The bright show of Murphy is at an end.

"Closed system," however, is more than an insistent aspect of the narrative contents. It describes the form of the novel as well. The opening sentence of the work is instructive.

> The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. (I)

That Murphy, seen as a piece of writing, exemplifies this "nothing new" can best be seen when we place it in the writing stream, where it rests chronologically between More Pricks Than Kicks and Watt.

When we compare Murphy with its immediate predecessor, significant advances appear, both in the technical writing and in the cohesion of random impressions towards a definite point of view. Ten stories converge into a novel of thirteen "sections," just as Belacqua's belief "that the best thing he had to do was to move constantly from place to place" (36) coheres, as a method of 'coping,' into Murphy's practice of binding himself naked to a rocking chair, appeasing his body so that he can "come out in his mind." (1-9) But these are changes of degree only. Similarly, even a brief glance at Watt, the most experimental[8] of Beckett's novels, reveals Murphy to be, in terms of form, a cul-de-sac.

In Murphy the élan of the style curiously contradicts the implications of the viewpoint, betraying a distance between the conceptual and the actual, in the perspective behind the writing. This conflict is visible in the book, through a contrast of "Section Six" (the description of Murphy's mind) with Murphy's last (and in one sense, first) encounter with Mr. Endon (248-53). Gazing closely into Mr. Endon's eyes, Murphy cannot prevent himself from speaking aloud:

> "The last Mr. Murphy saw of Mr. Endon was Mr. Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy."
>
> A rest.
>
> "The relation between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon could not have been better summed up than by the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself."
>
> A long rest.
>
> "Mr. Murphy is a speck in Mr. Endon's unseen." (250)

"Murphy's mind" is strictly a conception of Murphy's, with the which he largely entertained himself, prior to his job at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Once there, however, he does not "succeed in coming alive in his mind anymore" (189). The last encounter with Mr. Endon is his first actual contact with what he has been pleased to call the "Third Zone," the zone of the Dark. This touch punctures his vaunted self-

sufficiency. His immediate responses--leaving the MMM, stripping away his clothes, lying naked in the grass--seem to be positive ("Murphy felt incandescent"); but when he is unable to "get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human" (252), he nearly panics, and certainly draws back from the depths of the Dark he has encountered in Mr. Endon's eyes.

> Scraps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes, lines and colors evoking nothing, rose and climbed out of sight before him, as though reeled upward off a spool level with his throat. It was his experience that this should be stopped, whenever possible, before the deeper coils were reached. He rose and hastened to the garret, running till he was out of breath, then walking, then running again, and so on. He drew up the ladder, lit the dip sconced in its own grease on the floor and tied himself up in the chair, dimly intending to have a short rock and then, if he felt any better, to dress and go, before the day staff were about, leaving Ticklepenny to face the music, music, MUSIC, back to Brewery Road, to Celia, serenade, nocturne. albada. Dimly, very dimly. (252)

He dies the same night,[9] death being the positive expression <u>within the closed system</u>, logic-tight as well as bodytight, of the "gap" into which Murphy has tumbled.

The rounding off of the novel after Murphy's crucial experience, rather than concluding on the note of that experience itself, is the final touch of the conventional that renders the work (and therefore the perspective at that point in the stream) itself a "closed system." However, latent within the work is the experience that begins to be dealt with in Watt, about which there will be more to say presently.[10]

Belacqua's "Beethoven Pause"

The first two books of fiction are closer in more ways than any other two in the stream. Nonetheless each remains a separate text, clearly distinct enough to disallow our talking of one in terms of the other, or subsuming the first--irrespective of differences of quality[11]--to the second. If "closed system" identifies Murphy as an "instance of itself," some other term entirely is needed for More Pricks Than Kicks, and one which most strongly suggests itself is what Belacqua calls his "Beethoven pause."

> He was pleased to think that he could give what he called the Furies the slip by merely setting himself in motion....The mere act of rising and going, irrespective of whence and whither, did him good....The simplest form of this exercise was boomerang, out and back; nay, it was the only one that he could afford for many years....He was at pains to make it clear to me...that it was in no way cognate with the popular act of brute labor, digging and such like, exploited to disperse the dumps,... for which he expressed the greatest contempt. He did not fatigue himself, he said; on the contrary. He lived a Beethoven pause, he said, whatever he meant by that. (36-8)

Narratively, the "Beethoven pause" is simply one of these spontaneous gambols. Belacqua is only Belacqua, in the way that has any real meaning, when he is engaged in the "Beethoven pause." The passivity characteristic of the later Beckett protagonists is in evidence even in this action, in ways other than the appending of a cultural tag suggests.[12]

> Not the least charm of this pure blank movement...was its aptness to receive, with or without the approval of the subject, in all their integrity the faint inscriptions of the outer world. Exempt from destination, it had not to shun the unforeseen nor turn aside from the agreeable odds and ends of vaudeville that are liable to crop up. This sensitiveness was not the least charm of this roaming that began by being blank, not the least charm of this pure act the alacrity with which it welcomed defilement. But very nearly the least. (38)

How, though, does the phrase have meaning for a clearer view of the _form_ of the book taken as a whole? The literal arrangement of the text--in this case ten stories--is the beginning point for this kind of investigating. In a study of form it makes a great deal of difference whether a text is composed of ten stories or thirteen sections or two paragraphs totalling ninety pages.

Each of the stories is a kind of excursion, in narrative contents as well as into the realm of the Beckett writing itself. The contents are certainly "faint inscriptions of the outer world," just as the writing act _per se_[13] is very like "this roaming that began by being blank." The little turns Belacqua takes are not related except through his being the person taking them, just as the stories are all separate, only loosely related through Belacqua's presence, or, in the eighth and tenth, his absence. The "Beethoven pause" is as much as we are ever given of Belacqua's _essential_ self, and as such, is very slight, but nonetheless this information is, for the same reason, the most important in the whole text. The narrator remarks of his "sometime friend Belacqua:"

> He was an impossible person in the end. I gave him up in the end because he was not serious. (38)
>
> (emphasis his)

The book certainly suffers in any comparison with the later writing, or even with Murphy, written only a few years after. The stories are slight, like Belacqua himself. That the "Beethoven pause" characterizes the book "as an instance of itself" effectively indicates the sort of book it is. Still, the text as a whole, as well as in its particulars, bears both interesting and significant relation to the other works in the writing stream, as can be shown without making undue claims for it.[14]

Watt and The Fall Off The Ladder

The closing lines of Wittgenstein's early (1918) book, The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, disclose an image which has become famous.

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them--as steps--to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions and then he will see the world aright.[15]

A few pages into Watt, Mr. Hackett, one of the obscurer Beckett characters,[16] says:

> It was there I fell off the ladder... What age were you then? said Tetty. One, said Mr. Hackett. (15-16)

This remark might almost pass unnoticed were it not later repeated, considerably amplified, in Arsene's monologue:

> But in what did the change consist? What was changed, and how? What was changed, if my information is correct, was the sentiment that a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place. What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away. This I am happy to inform you is the reversed metamorphosis. The Laurel into Daphne. The old thing where it always was, back again. (44)

In Murphy the ladder image is utilized directly but somewhat superficially. This is in keeping with the more idealistic perspective at that point, however, for Murphy, like More Pricks Than Kicks, is a book in which the thought still looks basically upward.[17] This accounts for its brightness, despite the weight of certain events in the book. Murphy's death affects us as does Mercutio's--disappointing, rather than tragic.

The only means of access to Murphy's garret is by ladder. At first bolted down, he insists that it be unbolted, and Ticklepenny complies.

> Ticklepenny had unscrewed the ladder, so that now he could draw it up after him. Do not come down the ladder, they have taken it away. (188)

One of Murphy's last reported acts involves this ladder.

> He rose and hastened to the garret, running till he was out of breath, then walking, then running again, and so on. He drew up the ladder, lit the dip sconced in its own grease on the floor and tied himself up in the chair, dimly intending to have a short rock and then, if he felt any better, to dress and go, before the day staff were about, leaving Ticklepenny to face the music, music, MUSIC, back to Brewery Road, to Celia, serenade, nocturne, albada. Dimly, very dimly. (252)
>
> (emphasis mine)

Once one's ladder is pulled up, there is no way to come back down. To attempt to do so (or think of doing so, as Murphy does) is to fall, back into the reality away from which one was climbing. Murphy's death is a fall into a condition of the world he sought to leave: predictable end of predictable sequence of (logical) "closed system." Murphy is only a corpse (i.e., unreachable) for the other characters, all of whom are still on the physical plane.[18]

Murphy dies but the world in which he dies goes on, as the book does. A fanciful picture of what he might have been like had he lived is provided by Watt, who succeeds Murphy as protagonist in the Beckett writing. Watt's first appearance, as well as his way of walking, emphasize the consequences of what we might call the "re-entry crisis."

> On the far side of the street, opposite to where they sat, a tram stopped. It remained stationary for some little time, and they heard the voice of the conductor, raised in anger. Then it moved on, disclosing, on the pavement, motionless, a solitary figure, lit less and less by the receding lights, until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the dim wall behind it. 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. (16)

> Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again

> to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination, and could sit down. So, standing first on one leg, and then on the other, he moved forward, a headlong tardigrade, in a straight line. (30)

When the ladder is taken away, nothing remains in its place: nothing is there where the ladder was. The central problem with which Watt must come to terms during his stay at Mr. Knott's house, and ever after, is "the experience of a nothing." The first "and perhaps the principal incident" of this nature is that of the Galls, piano tuners come to tune Mr. Knott's piano. (70-2) Prior to this time Watt "had experienced literally nothing, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen, of which in retrospect he was not content to say, That is what happened then." (73) But suddenly the world changes, and the incident of

the Galls, "the first and type of many" (76), disturbs Watt because he cannot say this of it.

> What distressed Watt in this incident ...was not so much that he did not know what had happened, for he did not care what had happened, as that nothing had happened, that a thing that was nothing had happened, with the utmost formal distinctness, and that it continued to happen, in his mind, he supposed, though he did not know exactly what that meant....Yes, Watt could not accept ...that nothing had happened, with all the clarity and validity of something....(76)
>
> If he had been able to accept it, then perhaps it would not have revisited him, and this would have been a great saving of vexation, to put it mildly....But to elicit something from nothing requires a certain skill and Watt was not always successful, in his efforts to do so. Not that he was always unsuccessful either, for he was not....No, he could never have spoken at all of these things, if all had continued to mean nothing, as some continued to mean nothing, that is to say, right up to the end. For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and as the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realized that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite. But if Watt was sometimes unsuccessful, and sometimes successful,...he was most often neither the one, nor the other. For Watt considered...that he was successful, when he could evolve, from the meticulous phantoms that beset him, a hypothesis proper to disperse them....For to explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt.

> And he considered that he was unsuccessful, when he failed to do so. And he considered that he was neither wholly successful, nor wholly unsuccessful, when the hypothesis evolved lost its virtue, after one or two applications, and had to be replaced by another, which in its turn had to be replaced by another, which in due course ceased to be of the least assistance, and so on. And that is what happened, in the majority of cases. (76-8)

But it is impossible to know whether, when speaking of such an incident, Watt refers to the "unique hypothesis" that began the series, or the latest number in the series, for

> it sometimes happened that the hypothesis in question, after a sufficient period of rest, recovered its virtue and could be made to serve again, in the place of another, whose usefulness had come to an end, for the time being at least. To such an extent is this true, that one is sometimes tempted to wonder, with reference to two or even three incidents related by Watt as separate and distinct, if they are not in reality the same incident, variously interpreted. (78)

There are no examples available of Watt's failures,

> For there we have to do with events that resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them, when they recurred, though it seems probable that they recurred no more, at the period of Watt's revelation, to me, but were as though they had never been. (79)

The incident of the Galls is, then, one of Watt's "partial successes." The narrator has already drawn a distinction between the incident itself and Watt's relating of the incident: as for its meaning, "as related by Watt" (79), is this the original meaning it had at the time, subsequently lost but recovered; or was the original meaning quite different from that provided in Watt's relating of the incident;

> Or did it have no meaning whatever for Watt at the moment of its taking place, were there neither Galls nor piano then, but only an unintelligible succession of changes, from which Watt finally extracted the Galls and the piano, in self-defence? These are most delicate questions. (79)

They certainly are, for here we have an elaboration of what Arsene has earlier said in describing that momentous event in his own experience:

> my personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw. (43)

Watt provides a kind of concrete example of this sort of situation.

> Watt spoke of it as involving, in the original, the Galls and the piano, but he was obliged to do this, even if the original had nothing to do with the Galls and the piano. For even if the Galls and the piano were long posterior to the phenomena destined to become them, Watt was obliged to think, and speak, of the incident, even at the moment of its taking place, as the incident of the Galls and the piano, if he was to think and speak of it at all, and it may be assumed that Watt would never have thought or spoken of such incidents, if he had not been under the absolute necessity of doing so. (79)

It is not surprising to find a multiplicity of meanings emerging as conclusion.

> But generally speaking it seems probable that the meaning attributed to this particular type of incident, by Watt, in his relations, was now the initial meaning that had been lost and then recovered, and now a meaning quite distinct from the initial meaning, and now a meaning evolved, after a delay of varying length, and with greater or less pains, from the initial absence of meaning. (79)

Nor, as a final word on the matter:

> Watt learned towards the end of this stay in Mr. Knott's house to accept that nothing had happened, that a nothing had happened, learned to bear it and even, in a shy way, to like it. But then it was too late. (80)

Watt's relation to words, particularly to 'names' and to the spoken word, makes a crucial difference in this acceptance. He thinks of Arsène and Arsene's speech, delivered just prior to Arsene's departure, an event occasioned by Watt's arrival.

> He wondered also what Arsene had meant, nay, he wondered what Arsene had said, on the evening of his departure....He had realised, to be sure, that Arsene was speaking, and in a sense to him, but something had prevented him, perhaps his fatigue, from paying attention to what was being said and from enquiring into what was being meant. (80-1)

The key portion of what Arsene said had to do with an experience Arsene had undergone, very like Watt's experience of the Galls.

> It was a slip like that I felt, that Tuesday afternoon, millions of little things moving all together out of their old place, into a new one nearby, and furtively, as though it were forbidden. And I have little doubt that I was the only person living to discover them. To conclude from this that the incident was internal would, I think, be rash. For my--how shall I say?--my personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw.

Everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened happened outside it. I trust I make myself plain. I did not, need I add, see the thing happen, nor hear it, but I perceived it with a perception so sensuous that in comparison the impressions of a man buried alive in Lisbon on Lisbon's great day seem a frigid and artificial construction of the understanding.

...

But in what did the change consist? What was changed, and how? What was changed, if my information is correct, was the sentiment that a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place. What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away. This I am happy to inform you is the reversed metamorphosis. The Laurel into Daphne. The old thing where it always was, back again.

...

But how did this sentiment arise, that a change other than a change of degree had taken place? And to what if to any reality did it correspond? And to what forces is the credit for its removal to be attributed?....I shall merely state, without enquiring how it came, or how it went, that in my opinion it was not an illusion, as long as it lasted, that presence of what did not exist, that presence without, that presence within, that presence between, though I'll be buggered if I can understand how it could have been anything else. But that and the rest, haw! the rest, you will decide for yourself, when your time comes, or rather you will leave undecided, to judge by the look of you.

> For do not imagine me to suggest that what has happened to me, what is happening to me, will ever happen to you, or that what is happening to you, what will happen to you, has ever happened to me, or rather, if it will, if it has, that there is any great chance of its being admitted. For in truth the same things happen to us all, especially to men in our situation, whatever that is, if only we chose to know it. (43-5)

Watt regrets being unable to recall what Arsene said, or meant, not only because it might help him to understand his present situation in the employ of Mr. Knott, but because his cohort in Mr. Knott's house, Erskine, is extremely taciturn, redoubling Watt's sense of isolation.

> Not that Watt desired information, for he did not. But he desired words to be applied to his situation.... For Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance. And the state in which Watt found himself resisted formulation in a way no state had ever done....Looking at...one of Mr. Knott's pots...it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot....It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted. It was in vain that it answered...all the purposes and performed all the offices, of a pot, it was not a pot. And it was just this hair-breadth departure from the nature of a true pot that so excruciated Watt.

> For if the approximation had been less close...then he would have said, This is something of which I do not know the name. And Watt preferred on the whole having to do with things of which he did not know the name, though this too was painful to Watt, to having to do with things of which the known name, the proven name, was not the name, any more, for him....For the pot remained a pot, Watt felt sure of that, for everyone but Watt. (81-2)

The gap, the space, between the "name" and the "thing" becomes even more distressing, when applied to Watt himself.

> As for himself, though he could no longer call it a man, as he had used to do, with the intuition that he was perhaps not talking nonsense, yet he could not imagine what else to call it, if not a man. But Watt's imagination had never been a lively one. So he continued to think of himself as a man, as his mother had taught him, when she said, There's a good little man....But for all the relief that this afforded him, he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn.
>
> It was principally for these reasons that Watt would have been glad to hear Erskine's voice, wrapping up safe in words the kitchen space.... Not that the fact of Erskine's naming the pot, or of his saying to Watt, My dear fellow, or, My good man, or, God damn you, would have changed the pot into a pot, or Watt into a man, for Watt, for it would not. But it would have shown that at least for Erskine the pot was a pot, and Watt a man.

> Not that the fact of the pot's being a pot, or Watt's being a man, for Erskine, would have caused the pot to be a pot, or Watt to be a man, for Watt, for it would not. But it would perhaps have lent a little colour to the hope, sometimes entertained by Watt, that he was in poor health, owing to the efforts of his body to adjust itself to an unfamiliar milieu,[19] and that these would be successful in the end, and his health restored, and things appear, and himself appear, in their ancient guise, and consent to be named, with the time-honoured names, and forgotten. 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 abandonned, by the last rats....But... these were rare, particularly in the early stages of Watt's stay in Mr. Knott's house. And most often he found himself longing for a voice, for Erskine's, since he was alone with Erskine, to speak of the little world of Mr. Knott's establishment, with the old words, the old credentials. (82-5)

But, as no words come from "outside," Watt is eventually forced to provide the necessary words himself, and he succeeds, as with the dog and the Lynch family (91-117).

> Not that for a moment Watt supposed that he had penetrated the forces at play, in this particular instance, or even perceived the forms that they upheaved, or obtained the least useful information concerning himself, or Mr. Knott, for he did not. But he had turned, little by little, a disturbance into words, he had made a pillow of old words for a head. Little by little, and not without labour. (117)[20]

It is perhaps this capacity to turn "a disturbance into words," to make "a pillow of old words for a head," that enables Watt to finally accept the happening of a "nothing."

The "fall off the ladder," through being mentioned directly in the narrative, provides a feasible enough starting point for describing events and situations in the narrative. But once again one must ask, point blank as it were, what is the relation of this phrase to the _form_ of the book? How may the form be described in terms of "a fall off the ladder?" This necessarily involves placing _Watt_ in the writing stream and comparing it with the works on its either side.

In the stream _Watt_ represents a major transitional zone between two relatively complete, successful articulations: _Murphy_ and _Molloy_.[21] The book maintains a quite traditional sense of overall order, within which, however, a great many experimental oddities--stylistic, narrative, linguistic, _et. al._--continually clash, creating a very hectic surface.

These features include: the surface reversals of Watt's syntax and spelling in Section 3 (159-69); the bewildering narratorial situation, previously discussed;[22] the footnotes scattered through the text; the Addenda after Section Four; the mixed choir (34-5); the frogs' chorus (137-8); Arsene's monologue (39-63); Arthur's long story (171-98); the objective frame enclosing the work (7-24; 222-46), especially when played against "Sam" as narrator; and of course, Mr. Knott himself and his curious establishment, together with Watt's personal idiosyncrasies of walking and reasoning.[23] Such obvious restlessness among the contents of a work reveals a terrific conflict occurring in the perspective behind the work, but an equally intense repression forces an ordering <u>around</u>, if not of, the contents, and prevents a direct capitulation to anarchic tendencies.

However, there is disorder of another kind visible in the deeper layers of the book, a disorder proceeding from an attempt to resolve a dilemma on a level other than that on which the dilemma itself occurs. In the book's own metaphor, it attempts to present a "change of other than degree" in terms of a change <u>in</u> degree. Perhaps the means for doing otherwise were unavailable at that point.

A remark by Heidegger helps to clarify this feature of the writing in Watt, and, in the stream as a whole.

> One of the exciting experiences of thinking is that at times it does not fully comprehend the new insights it has just gained, and does not properly see them through.24

Murphy's experience of looking into Mr. Endon's eyes (248-53, Murphy), with its disastrous consequences, anticipates, in the writing stream, the "experience of a nothing" that is such a prominent concern in Watt (equally for Arsene and Watt himself). What is only latent in Murphy gets objectified as 'event' in Watt, but an essentially subjective occurrence is still being dealt with in objective terms. Watt succeeds in establishing, at the narrative level, an experience the consequences of which will pervade and shape the whole writing from this point. But the writing in Watt cannot deal with the event on, or in, its own terms, resulting in a disorder, a tension, much more fundamental than the eccentric rearrangements of surface features, and perhaps even responsible for that grating clamour.

This disorder is reflected in both the character Watt and in the writing itself. Although Watt is much less idealistic than Murphy, he is still, at least in the beginning, quite insistent that the world somehow order itself in his terms, even when his direct experience controverts any such expectation.[25]

> And Watt could not accept them for what they perhaps were, the simple games that time plays with space, now with these toys and now with those, but was obliged, because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what they meant, oh not into what they really meant, his character was not so peculiar as all that, but into what they might be induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity. (75)

Compare Molloy on such a point:

> 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. (64)

Watt's difficulties in this regard ultimately result, once he leaves Mr. Knott's premises, in those frantic reversals of his actual speech (159-69), perhaps the clearest indication of his being trapped on a purely objective level.[26]

This disorder manifests in the text as Arsene's monologue, which as the first extended passage of direct first person narration in the writing as a whole, is the only real 'breakthrough' in an expressive sense. Yet the basic narrative of Watt acts as a 'holding ground' against the implications of this part of the writing. The isolation of the monologue in an essentially third-person narration parallels, in the text, Watt's own situation in the narrative. This emerges quite clearly when we compare Arsene's monologue with Arthur's.

Watt himself regrets not remembering what Arsene said, much less what he might have meant (80-1), and Erskine's taciturnity dramatically emphasizes the particular aloneness Watt feels, partially at least as a result of not having grasped what Arsene was saying. When Arthur replaces Erskine, this situation is somewhat alleviated, for Arthur is more voluble and in that way is closer to Arsene.

> Arthur was a very nice open fellow, not at all like Erskine. (198)

Of Arthur's long story, told in the garden in the presence of Watt, the gardener Mr. Graves, and Mr. Knott himself, it is said:

> Watt...could truly say, as he did, in after times, that of all the things he ever saw or heard, during his stay in Mr. Knott's establishment, he heard none so well, saw none so clear....He understood it all too, very well....He enjoyed this incident too, at the time, more than he had enjoyed anything for a long time, or would enjoy anything again, for a considerable time. (197-8)

The story, though a monologue, is not a monologue like Arsene's: Arthur himself is not present as an "I" in the story, which is almost entirely consumed by its objective contents. It is precisely this feature that enables it to succeed, for both Arthur and Watt.

> Watt learned later, from Arthur, that the telling of this story, while it lasted, before Arthur grew tired, had transported Arthur far from Mr. Knott's premises, of which, of the mysteries of which, of the fixity of which, Arthur had sometimes more, than he could bear....
>
> In another place, he said, from another place, he might have told this story to its end....
>
> But on Mr. Knott's premises, from Mr. Knott's premises, this was not possible, for Arthur.
>
> For what stopped Arthur, and made him go silent, in the middle of his story, was not really fatigue with his story, for he was not really fatigued, but the desire to return, to leave Louit and return, to Mr. Knott's house, to its mysteries, to its fixity. For he had been absent longer from them, than he could bear.

> But perhaps in another place, from another place, Arthur would never have begun this story.
>
> For there was no other place, but only there where Mr. Knott was, whose mysteries, whose fixity, whose fixity of mystery, so thrust forth, with such a thrust.
>
> But if he had begun, in some other place, from some other place, to tell this story, then he would very likely have told it to the end.
>
> For there was no place, but only there where Mr. Knott was, whose peculiar properties, having first thrust forth, with such a thrust, called back so soon, with such a call.
>
> Watt sympathised with this predicament. Had not he himself, in the beginning, resorted to similar shifts?
>
> Was he finished with them now? Well, almost.
>
> Fixity was not the word he would have chosen.
>
> Watt had little to say on the subject of the second or closing period of his stay in Mr. Knott's house. (198-9)

Most of this "second period," in the writing, is taken up by Arthur's long story (171-98), so very different from Arsene's monologue, which was a first person narration of a primal experience. But Arsene was speaking just prior to leaving Mr. Knott's establishment--that is, at the end of the second period of his stay there, whereas Arthur has only recently arrived, and is in the early days of the first period of his employ.

The two monologues stand on either side of Watt's first period at Mr. Knott's. He is unable to really pay attention to Arsene, for Arsene speaks of things of which Watt does not yet know: Arsene speaks at the conclusion of his own stay at Mr. Knott's, which is ended by Watt's arrival. But Watt has himself become the senior servant by the time of Arthur's story, and has accustomed himself in some measure to the weirdness of the situation that is Mr. Knott's establishment. Arthur on the other hand is still close enough to the world outside Mr. Knott's--in time the world before arriving at Mr. Knott's--as to be torn between the two. For Arthur, the story is a direct transport to that 'old world,' a relief from the pressures he feels in his new situation at Mr. Knott's:

> ...the telling of this story, while it lasted...had transported Arthur far from Mr. Knott's premises, of which...Arthur had sometimes more, than he could bear....(198)

For Watt, it is more a simple diversion in itself, something understood, and thereby enjoyed, for itself. It is nostalgic ("Had not he himself, in the beginning, resorted to similar shifts?"), not because

it revives the world before coming to Mr. Knott's, but rather because it is the kind of thing he himself used to do, in the early days of his stay at Mr. Knott's. Watt has progressed considerably beyond that necessity now ("Was he finished with them now? Well, almost."), in his "acceptance" of, for him, the "experience of a nothing." He knows, in a much fuller sense than Arthur can at this point, that [27]

> there was no other place, but only there where Mr. Knott was....
> there was no place, but only there where Mr. Knott was....(199)

Knowing this, he can enjoy Arthur's story for what it is; and, knowing this, he need not speak very much of his own "second period" at Mr. Knott's.

As a piece of writing, Watt is almost more intriguing than the more successful works, precisely because of its transitional place in the writing stream. It provides an exact (and exacting) picture of the process of change in perspective between Murphy and the Trilogy. This change consists primarily in the search for and discovery of a means for presenting subjective experience directly on the

page, rather than through traditional objective screens. The approach is intuitive, rather than conscious and analytical. The problem is visible in Watt: the difficulty of speaking about nothing in some way other than as something. The writing, (the text) Watt, reveals only the conflict, although within the writing, the seed of the solution is present (Arsene's monologue), but goes unrecognized. But even once recognized, the full "solution" is achieved only by stages, as I will show in a moment. To see clearly what is happening in Watt, we must place it in the stream, between Murphy and the Trilogy. In doing this, it will be very helpful to keep in mind a statement by Wittgenstein.

> And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.[28]

Watt marks a quite definite departure from the world of Murphy. Murphy begins, literally, with the sun shining (1); Watt, "in the failing light." (7) Murphy, a novel of action, concludes in death of the protagonist; Watt, a novel of contemplation, concludes in insanity, of one sort or another, of the protagonist.[29] Murphy presents itself as "neat closed system," a work in which the conceiving mind

has its own way, a novel of Idealism. Watt, in its broken surfaces, recognizes or acknowledges "reality" as a friction between mind and body, thereby admitting a tension between Ideal and Real.

The protagonists differ accordingly. Whereas Murphy is quite "self-sufficient" in his self-conception, sole dweller in his "bodytight" mind, Watt recognizes a need to be recognized (82-5), and is genuinely disturbed by something he cannot explain. Murphy ascends, but Watt falls, twice:[30] once on his way to Mr. Knott's, and again on his way from Mr. Knott's. Strangely, though, Murphy retreats, or at least seems to want to, from the experience of Mr. Endon's eyes, while Watt, reluctance notwithstanding, when faced with "the experience of a nothing," persists on through it as best he may, until he is finally able to accept it in some manner.

Watt presents the "experience of a nothing" objectively, as an explicit concern in a narrative. This experience continues to figure in the Trilogy, not as overt incident in the narrative surface, but through a subtle absorption into the form. The distance such an experience imposed between Watt and the world around him (as well as within him) is retained in Molloy, in the space between the discrete but overlapping halves.

Each half tends to cancel out the other. Moran is not mentioned at all in the "Molloy" text; and, although Molloy is mentioned in the "Moran" text (in particular, pp. 111-15), and figures prominently as the motive for Moran's journey, his only textual appearance is in Moran's mind. The non-encountering on any physical level[31] is the crux of the dilemma for materialistic, objective Moran.

This points up the crucial difference between Watt and Molloy as writings: the distances in Watt are less disturbing, because visible before us on the page, whereas Moran and Molloy encounter nowhere except in the reader's mind.[32] This means that the "experience of a nothing" has occurred in, rather than merely been presented in, the writing.

The two monologues of Molloy are a refinement of the Arsene/Arthur monologues in Watt. Textually, they follow the same order; narratively, too, the 'pure subjectivity' of Arsene's statement is carried through in the "Molloy" text, while Arthur's story of 'pure objective contents', though not duplicated exactly in the "Moran" text, is very nearly so. Moran writes a report, while Molloy writes pages;

Moran notes and remembers, while Molloy forgets everything. The subjective/objective dilemma in Watt is still active in Molloy, but its resolution is much closer.

Malone Dies represents a new stage in that resolution. The "objective contents" are here corralled by a dominant subjectivity: the stories are playthings of Malone. There is no fearful, unknowable other dimension present somewhere just waiting to cancel out the perceived real, as there is in Molloy for each protagonist (if we take the book as a whole, rather than either half by itself[33]). Even Malone's words about himself, his situation, and particularly, his "inventory," are things of which he is in charge. His tone of calm and resignation, when he is seen as the embodiment of the perspective behind the writing stream, is analogous to Watt's "acceptance of a nothing," perhaps reflecting a final acceptance of mortality itself, on the part of the author.

Seen as writing, Malone Dies presents the old "experience of a nothing" in a particularly interesting fashion: through the alternation of pieces of text and blank spaces. The "spaces" are a kind of "graphic nothing," the "nothing" that indeed surrounds the

only "something" of the author, his writing. It is as though the writing itself has finally admitted, come to accept, the presence of "a nothing."

Even so, however, it is still an objective nothing, a "nothing" objectively present as a "something." The tension between the "nothing" and the "something" continues in the uncertain beginnings of The Unnamable, where small pieces of text alternate with blank spaces. Then comes the resolution of the dilemma. Whereas the objective spaces prevail in Malone Dies (eleven pieces of text on the last two pages, until text vanishes entirely), here it is the subjective speaking which absorbs the spaces, manifest textually in that densest of all sections of the writing stream, the one-hundred-ten page concluding paragraph of the Trilogy. Rather than a "nothing" spoken of as, or present as, a "something," here it is an obvious something (words, text, voice speaking) that has become a nothing. Existence is now presented, not through words, but as words.

The title points the way: it is the un-namable that is the concern, the focus. Language, at root always a naming, cannot be the "unnamable," but it can be The Unnamable which, as nothing but a speaking of language, severs the relation between language and things, and evokes the relation of language to consciousness itself. The reader is left in a relation to language itself, a situation with deep reverberations in self-consciousness itself, far beyond that of merely reaction to a book qua book. Watt's difficulties are finally being dealt with subjectively, not on the plane of familiar objective forms, where only reversals of the familiar are possible. The text itself (visibly at the surface levels through the self-cancelling negations) is not speaking about a "nothing" but is become "a nothing," forcing the reading experience to become "an experience of a nothing." The book comes very close to illustrating a remark by Heidegger.

> No matter how we put our questions to language about its nature, first of all it is needful that language vouchsafe itself to us. If it does, the nature of language becomes the grant of its essential being, that is, the being of language becomes the language of being.[34]

To speak of a work "as an instance of itself" is to suggest a relation between an essential statement in the work, available directly in the text, and the form the work assuems as an extension in space. A particular shape emerges in this relation, specifically, the shape of the materializing, in and through the text itself, of the essential statement. The "essential statement" is perhaps better termed, simply, 'guideword,' for it is often only a phrase. Nonetheless, it is a phrase whose relation to the work is an essential one, providing as it does a capsule indication of the specific, unique nature of any given text, that is, a capsule indication of the form of a text.

'Guidewords' taken from the text itself inevitably yield much more precise and reliable information about the text, than do terms brought to the text from some outside source. No terms from outside can begin to yield up adequate pictures of the form of a text, since the form of a text is deriveable only from the experience of reading a text.

One's experience in reading is an experience of language, just as one's experience in writing is, or in any discussion one has about either. To take some "piece" of the text and discuss the text in its terms is to take some words from the text. That the contents of these words inevitably and decisively figure in any such discussion need not obscure the fact that after all we are only taking some words from the text, a piece or some pieces of language to guide a discussion of a language experience and necessarily initiate a further experience in and of language, that of the discussion itself.

What the text actually says is the only reliable ground for any lucid, or meaningful, discussion of text, and the text always actually says only one way. Form is singular; meanings, like contents, are plural, because they also are contents; interpretations are multiple, but meaningless, they are actually proto-forms but go unrecognized as such.

I have tried to show the guideword/form relation in each of Beckett's first three books of fiction: "Beethoven pause"/More Pricks Than Kicks; "closed system"/Murphy; "the fall off the ladder"/Watt.

Previously, I described the three books of the Trilogy in another kind of relation (but still in terms from within the writing stream), that between themselves and the description of Murphy's mind. But the works of the Trilogy can also be discussed as "instances of themselves," of course, though there is not time/space here for more than suggesting the guidewords themselves. These are: "waves and particles"/Molloy; "light and dark"/ Malone Dies; and "a matter of voices"/The Unnamable. Again, it is important to remember that, even though form is singular, these words are not in themselves absolute: there is no one-to-one interchange being suggested here. Rather, these terms, whose single value, qua labels, is that they emerge from the texts to which they refer, are seen as 'gathering points' for the kinds of experience the text seems to describe and provoke.

Once one has a set of reliable guidewords for the various works in the writing stream that is the whole work of any one author, one can begin to get a sense of the shape of the whole field. Such a 'sense of shape' gives the perceiver a non-objective grasp of the work as force, rather than as object.

Time is brought into the perceiving of the whole field, because changes are included in one's viewing as that viewing emerges into an overall "shape" determined by the various guidewords of forms composing the field. This provides a dynamic awareness of the work: for the shape necessarily incorporates movement, since it is composed and re-composed of the relations outlined by and summed in the guidewords themselves, which are only points of light or definitive resonance within the whole field. This kind of awareness is not simply a super-refined aestheticism (though it certainly affords a heightened pleasure of literary art), but rather provides a thoroughly reliable "ground" for whatever comments, judgments or descriptions, one wishes to make. A much more reliable ground than that of any discipline originating outside literary art itself. In fact, this kind of approach more effectively opens up literary texts to relations with all other disciplines, the key word being "relations." (For instance, the relation of Murphy to Cartesianism is one thing, referring to Murphy as a Cartesian novel quite another.)

In the Beckett writing stream, once we have 'guidewords' for the six works here being considered, we can see immediately how the first three books are a kind of happenstance forerunner of the later Trilogy: the movement from More Pricks Than Kicks through Murphy to Watt is very similar to the movement from Molloy through Malone Dies to The Unnamable. Simultaneously, however, one has the sense of linear descent forming a line through the whole stream. In addition, relations suggest themselves between any of the books per se (even the first and last), or any parts of any of them. The movement implicit in the relation "Beethoven Pause" to "A matter of voices" provides a base from which to discuss the work in terms of any discipline or concern: psychoanalytic, political, aesthetic, sociological, et. al. But always such a line maintains the work as one complete term in any such relation, and provides both a particular and a holistic awareness of the work: little that is viable can be said of the Beckett writing that does not take into account the mobile aspect of a field whose particulars are continually a part of what is happening there as a whole.

CONCLUSION

On the opening page of his narrative, Molloy, in speaking of a past lover, says:

> Her name? I've forgotten it again. (7)

Three sentences later he adds:

> I've forgotten how to spell, too, and half the words. (7)

'Forgetting' runs throughout the "Molloy" narrative (11;18; 20; 25; 34; 42; 44; 55; 57; 66; 68), and is one of the protagonist's distinctive traits. But 'forgetting' is not so much a theme which can be extracted from the text, as it is a textual presence, actively a part of 'what is happening on the page.'[1] "I forget" or "I don't remember" are locations in a present which simultaneously evoke some previous situation: as temporal statements, they contain implicitly a movement. These statements represent a departure in the Beckett perspective, which for the first time looks back, rather than forward. The early protagonists look upward, look ahead, and

even Watt "moved forward, a headlong tardigrade, in a straight line."[2](30) 'Forgetting' has not previously appeared as a specific trait of a narrator, but neither has the situation of a character telling his own story, although 'first person narration' is present from the beginning. 'Forgetting' emerges as an active force with the concentration of the narration in the protagonist.

Visual fixtures in the Beckettian landscape such as the parrot, the bicycle, the hat, the bum legs, the garden, have verbal counterparts in a variety of statements repeated even more frequently: "I forget;" "I don't know;" "To tell the truth;" "The reason for that was perhaps this;" "This is how I went about it;" "I don't know why;" and so on.[3] These repetitions, of both types, in effect hold the work together, standing in a figure/ground relation to the non-repeated areas of text. They stabilize the uncertain narrative field (we can be surer of Molloy's "I don't know why" than of whether "A" and "C" really met), and simultaneously break up the flow of the writing which, through its intense lyricism, often threatens to run away with itself and become simply 'writing' *per se*.

This is particularly the case when statements or phrases carry over from one work to some other,[4] disrupting the reader's sense of the work as a self-contained unit, i.e., an object, and compelling instead an awareness of the text as words. Coming across the single word/expression "Good," something of a secure foothold in Molloy (7; 8; 19; 72), amid the wild fluctuations of The Unnamable (352, and mentioned only this one time) creates a startling effect, at once disturbing and reassuring. Similarly, it is with something of a wrenching like that at the conclusion of "Dante and the Lobster" that one reads of Belacqua's death, after having spent some time with Molloy's "forgetting," since that death is an accident occasioned by simple forgetting.[5]

> By Christ! he did die! They had clean forgotten to auscultate him! (174)

But the kinds of 'forgetting' are different, and this difference is as important as the fact that 'forgetting' figures in both texts. Belacqua does not narrate his own story, and so the situation of 'forgetting' happens to him, and in this is quite consistent with the possibilities of the narration

at that point. But 'forgetting' is an aspect of Molloy's self-awareness, and, as he is his own narrator, it figures directly in the text itself. The latent movement in "I forget" is tapped, imparting a much greater sense of motion among the contents of the "Molloy" text. In noting the different kinds of 'forgetting' we get a sense of movement in the whole field: we can see the "coming together" of elements in the writing that makes the Trilogy a much more powerful work, simultaneous with seeing the relation of phenomenal contents over widely separated areas of narrative surface. The field is both changing and unchanging, at the same time.

Statements in the early work return in the later, often almost verbatim, as when the narrator of "Yellow," speaking of Belacqua, says:

> But he will make up for it later on, there is a good time coming for him later on, when the doctors have given him a new lease of apathy. (162)

Much later in Molloy we read:

> And what I have, what I am, is enough, was always enough for me, and as far as my dear little sweet little future is concerned I have no qualms, I have a good time coming. (46)

This provides a sudden glimpse of Molloy from outside his own narrative but still through his own saying, just as the importance 'forgetting' assumes in the later writing, played against the manner of Belacqua's demise, adds a dimension to "Yellow" that story cannot achieve by itself.

Throughout this study Beckett's prose fiction has been approached as a single language field. The presence of a narrator causes even the first stories to be both a 'speaking' and a 'writing,' and the stylistic forte of 'narrator/narrated' is, at its simplest, a fusion of these two modes. Any area of the writing, whether a passage or a whole text, is both a reported event and a reporting of event. Repetitions, both subtle and overt, are a singly important means of unifying the field as an action, through their evocation of the oral dimension, for repetition is a characteristic of speech but not of writing.[6] The interactional dynamic of the two modes unsettles the habitual sense of the

text as object, and wakens the comparatively more open sense of text as 'event.'

Critical perspective dependent upon a sense of the work as object cannot provide adequate descriptions, simply because the Beckett text rejects conventions which such perspective shares with traditional prose fiction, specifically that of critical distance, implemented through omniscient narration and transparency of language. Because such distance is lacking in the actual reader/text relationship, the critic interposes it artificially, through substituting the 'object' that is his own conception of the text, which is then written about as though it were the text. The license of "interpretation" does not hold here, for actual comparison of the critical reporting of text, against the text itself, reveals discrepancies prior to any interpretation offered.

Beckett's work requires a different perceptual orientation than traditional prose fiction, and not simply a different interpretation of a presumably stable 'thing', seen alike by all, however differently described by each. Just as Kandinsky's abstract

watercolor (1910) marked a break with the whole tradition of painting derived from the Renaissance, in that representation within the perceptual 'scale of the object' was abandonned (and not just violated, as with the Cubists), replaced by the action of the painter alone, Beckett's writing marks a decisive break with prose fiction written within the confines of perceptual realism, the most obvious conventions of which are omniscient narration and transparent language. Beckett's writing is abstract, an action more than a product, and requires, to be seen accurately, an abstract orientation of the reader. The experience the text imposes, though not the one described in the text, is one of abstractly perceived reality.

The implications extend beyond the accurate describing of Beckett's work itself. By making his own work one long monologue, Beckett wakens the sense of all authors as narrators, and not just writers, of their works. The author is inevitably the speaker of his text, no matter how the text itself is arranged. In this sense, all texts are monologues, for they are both a speaking and a writing.

In Beckett's work an abstract perceiving replaces the perceptual realism based on subject/object separateness. The bleakness and the anguish in the work are a measure of the impact of just such a changed perceiving of the world. The change is not described in the work, but is recorded there, through an absorption of the shock in the language itself, enabling a direct transfer in the reading experience. Language is sensation here, and not a vehicle of cognition. Beckett has indicated something similar himself:

> My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else. If people want to have headaches among the overtones, let them. And provide their own aspirin.[7]

There is no "going back" to the world made possible and sustained by the perceptual paradigm of subject/object separateness, just as there is no going back to the pre-atomic world before the splitting of the atom. Beckett's writing effects a similar "before/after" awareness in reading consciousness, when attended to in its own terms, and occupies an analogous place in modern literature.

The modern world is pictured, not in the work's phenomenal contents, stark though these be, but in the experience occasioned by its less visible but more unsettling form. It is the way of the writing that finally is the "what" of the writing, and that makes all the difference.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Introduction

[1] In this discussion I have concentrated on a particular kind of procedural error, that of a rather flagrant discrepancy between the critic's impression of text and the literal text itself. The quarrel is not with critical interpretation per se, but with an actual distortion of what the text literally says, revealed immediately when the critical summation of text is placed beside the Beckett original. Though only a few critics are actually mentioned here, this problem, possibly unique to Beckett criticism, is widespread, leading one to conclude that it is symptomatic of a general way of perceiving a text, rather than the fault of a particular critic or the insufficiency of a specific bias. This, in turn, somewhat corroborates a major assertion of this thesis, that Beckett's prose works are generically different from almost all other prose fiction.

There are, of course, some excellent studies of Beckett which do not make this sort of error. These include, in particular, Theodor Adorno's essay "Towards An Understanding of Endgame;" Richard Coe's Beckett; Hugh Kenner's Samuel Beckett and A Reader's Guide To Samuel Beckett; Ludovic Janvier's two essays "Molloy" and "Style in the Trilogy;" and Charles Peake's essay "'The labours of poetical excavation'." (Full listings are given for all these works in either the Bibliography or Supplementary Bibliography.) Beyond these few, however, the error here specifically noted litters the critical writing, and, for myself at least, qualifies at base the critic's effort, no matter how serious or interesting the theses are. One may disagree with interpretation, in any case, but until the critic shows that he or she is accurately reading the text as the text is, there is no common ground for either agreement or disagreement.

[2] John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 121.

[3] Fletcher, p. 144.

[4] Three types of reference are necessary for the first novel of the Trilogy. Molloy, underlined, refers to the whole work; "Molloy" and "Moran" in quotes refer to the separate texts comprising the book; and Molloy and Moran without quotation marks or underlining refers to the characters themselves. The edition of the Trilogy referred to throughout is the Grove Press paperback Three Novels By Samuel Beckett (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965).

[5] Even if we allow that the man in "Molloy" is Gaber, it is important to note that he is unnamed: this keeps clear the distinction between the two texts and the two protagonists, a distinction essential for obtaining any accurate impression of Molloy as a whole. But to identify the character in "Molloy" as Gaber in any way remains a purely personal impression and not an objectively verifiable feature of text.

[6] Northrop Frye, "The Nightmare Life in Death," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J. O'Hara (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 28.

[7] On textual evidence it would seem more probable that the death was accidental (pp. 252-3). Suicide is not a viable option for a Beckettian protagonist (it is mocked in "Love and Lethe," and in Molloy), the crux of the dilemma being that no such definite conclusions are available.

[8] Frye, p. 31.

[9] Allusion is always risky in writing about Beckett, even when another Beckett text provides the content of the allusion. The surer way is to deal directly with the individual text in its own terms, each time. Allusion itself lends authority to a point - seldom do we check the source. But, as here, this often contributes to a further blurring of details, and it is the details in Beckett that are important.

[10] Frye, p. 31.

[11] Frye, p. 31.

[12] Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 115.

[13] Edith Kern, "Moran-Molloy: The Hero as Author," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. J. O'Hara (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 41.

[14] Frederick J. Hoffman, Samuel Beckett The Man And His Works (Toronto: Forum House Publishing Company, 1969), p. 121.

[15] Further examples include:

a) confusion of characters in Malone Dies, Nathan A. Scott, Samuel Beckett (New York: Hillary House Publishers, 1969), p. 65.

b) "Molloy and Moran are paralytics; they live in a world where dreams, imagination, and reality mingle, and where no decisions are required of them." Maurice Nadeau, "Samuel Beckett: Humor and the Void," in Samuel Beckett A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 35.

But why go on? One could enumerate hundreds of textual slips and gratuitous assumptions in no way supported by the Beckett texts. The reader is referred to almost any study mentioned in the Bibliography of this paper, which, if checked against the Beckett text to which it refers, will quickly reveal the kind of discrepancy here noted. The great confusion and "mystery" rampant in the criticism, and the consequent image of Beckett as a 'difficult' author, unfathomable even, result largely from an uncareful attention to text. Beckett is difficult, but he is not obscure. If critical responsibility does not begin with a clear reading of text, where, then, does it begin?

16 Dora Vallier, Abstract Art, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: The Orion Press, 1970), p. 288.

17 Max Planck, quoted by Dora Vallier, p. 292.

18 Vallier, p. 294.

19 Werner Heisenberg, quoted by Dora Vallier, pp. 297-8.

20 Vallier, p. 292.

21 Vallier, p. 297.

22 "To illustrate his thesis Heisenberg pictured an imaginary experiment in which a physicist attempts to observe the position and velocity* of a moving electron by using an immensely powerful supermicroscope. Now, as has already been suggested, an individual electron appears to have no definite position or velocity. A physicist can define electron behavior accurately enough so long as he is dealing with great numbers of them. But when he tries to locate a particular electron in space the best he can say is that a certain point in the complex superimposed wave motions of the elctron group represents the probable position of the electron in question. The individual electron is a blur--as indeterminate as the wind or a sound wave in the night--and the fewer the electrons with which the physicist deals, the more indeterminate his findings. To prove that this indeterminacy is a symptom not of man's immature science but of an ultimate barrier of nature, Heisenberg presupposed that the imaginary microscope used by his imaginary physicist is optically capable of magnifying by a hundred billion diameters--i.e., enough to bring an object the size of an electron within the range of human visibility. But now a further difficulty is encountered. For inasmuch as an electron is smaller than a light wave, the physicist can "illuminate" his subject only by using radiation of shorter wave length. Even X-rays are useless. The electron can be rendered visible only by the high-frequency gamma rays of radium. But the photo-electric effect, it will be recalled, showed that photons of ordinary light exert a violent force on electrons; and X-rays knock them about even more roughly. Hence the impact of a still more potent gamma ray would prove disastrous.

The Principle of Uncertainty asserts therefore that it is impossible with any of the principles now known to science to determine the position and the velocity of an electron at the same time--to state confidently that an electron is "right here at this spot" and is moving at "such and such a speed." For by the very act of observing its position, its velocity is changed; and, conversely, the more accurately its velocity is determined, the more indefinite its position becomes."

*In physics the term "velocity" connotes direction as well as speed.

Lincoln Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1959), pp. 33-4.

The reader should keep this description of the Uncertainty Principle in mind, during the discussion later in the Introduction of the "A and C" incident in the opening pages of Molloy.

[23] Vallier, p. 287.

[24] Vallier, p. 304.

[25] Vallier, p. 304.

[26] The contradiction is that in the ordinary distinction of 'abstract' from 'concrete' phenomena: since any art work is a concrete product in some sense, including abstract art works, the reader or viewer cannot but feel a disparity when confronted with a work lacking representational content with which he is familiar in his ordinary perceiving. The external physical world offers a check, of 'likeness,' for a painting of a barn, but no such check is available for a painting which pictures only the painter's impression of a barn. Or at least not readily available. It takes a mental, conscious effort, a re-orientation to the nature of painting and the nature of reality itself, to accommodate abstract art. My suggestion is that language structures are the last to register the changes in the environment that make human reality itself more abstract, resulting in a sharply felt conflict in the attempt to describe the experience of an abstract art work, for instance. This is one possible explanation for the discrepancies noted in the Beckett

criticism, for it is my contention that Beckett's novels are abstract art, whereas almost all other prose fiction (William Burroughs being one type of exception) is basically realist art. By 'realist' here I mean perceptually realist, not ideologically realist. The 'scale of the object' allows for incredible variation, in the writing of novels, but the apparent differences between writers as diverse as Jack London and Nabokov or Osline mask an underlying perceptual sharing, and it is at this level that Beckett's work effects a difference, a departure. Thus, critical procedure which may deal effectively with "To Build A Fire" will be at a loss when confronted by the Beckett text: a different procedure is needed, centering in an exact attention to the text as a writing. Interestingly, the critical writing immediately reveals, no doubt to the embarrassment of its authors, whether such attention is given or not.

27 Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1969), pp. 41-2.

28 McLuhan, p. 37.

29 Vallier, p. 304.

30 McLuhan, p. 42.

31 "Perception is not the decoding of tappings on the skin. It is a determining relation between neural and environmental electrons. Every part of the body not only affects the other parts but is also in determining relations with the rest of reality. ...Of this multitude of relations...we distinguish a certain group, changing as the world changes, not with it or separately from it but in mutually determining interaction with it. This selection, rich, highly organized, and recent, we call the consciousness, or our ego. We do not select it out. In the process of development it separates out, as life separated out, as suns and planets and the elements separated out from the process of becoming....But in separating out, it does not completely separate out, any more than any element did."

Quoted in Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), pp. 20-1.

32 "Art cannot exist unless a working communication can be reached, and this communication is an activity in which both artist and spectator participate...The artist shares with other men what is usually called the 'creative imagination': that is to say, the capacity to find and organize new descriptions of experience....The artist's impulse, like every human impulse to communicate, is the felt importance of his experience; but the artist's activity is the actual work of transmission. There can be no spearation, in this view, between 'content' and 'form', because finding the form is literally finding the content--this is what is meant by the activity we have called 'describing.' ....The creative agony, sometimes thought of as hyperbole, is literally true...The state often noticed in artists, when the struggle for adequate description--an actual manipulation of words or paint--seems primarily of personal importance, without regard to its effect on others, is to be understood in this sense. For unless the description is adequate, there can be no relevant communication. To think merely of making contact with others, rather than of making contact with this precise experience, is irrelevant and distracting. Genuine communication depends on this absorbed attention to precise description, but of course it does not follow that the description is for its own sake; the attention, rather, is a condition of relevant communication....The actual process...is neither subject working on object, nor object on subject: it is,rather, a dynamic interaction, which in fact is a whole and continuous process."

Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), pp. 25-7.

33 Vallier, pp. 301-03.

34 Again, I am using the term 'realist' to denote a perceptual mode, and not a kind of literature. 'Abstract' art proceeds from a different way of perceiving reality, not merely an effort to write a different kind of book. It is possible that the term 'novel' is only applicable to works done within the 'realist' mode; abstractly, perhaps, we can only speak of 'writings'. But 'writing', a 'writing' is not to be confused with some new 'genre;' instead, it points only to the fact of a certain kind of human action.

35 D.H. Lawrence, Women In Love (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969), p. 400.

36 Any text is available as 'a writing' and so an abstract orientation to Women In Love is possible, just as a symbolic reading is possible, consistent with the text, even if it is acknowledged that Lawrence was not a conscious symbolist. We can argue against the deflective, symbolic interpretation, but our argument would not be textual, in the way that it would be textual with Beckett's work. The Lawrence text has all the attributes of an object, it is "a novel," its assumptions make it so. But Molloy is not an object in that way, for it disallows the distance necessary to perceive any object. This distance is specifically implemented by conventions like omniscient narration. The rejection of this kind of convention precludes the abstract text's being described in a 'realist' manner, even though of course it still can be described, and thus has a 'realism' of its own. Beckett's work makes possible in literature an abstract realism, a realization which makes available a different orientation to all texts written within the confines of the realism of the past. But the reverse of this--a traditionally realist description of Beckett's work--cannot be said or done.

37 A line is drawn between the text as such and an abstract orientation to the text. Even though the awareness of text as a historical object is itself a carryover from the visual-dominated, linear, objective, mode of perceptual realism, it still is a factor in our experience, even though it is only one aspect of that experience. The "total field of simultaneous relations" McLuhan described as characteristic of the "auditory space" of the present overwhelms any strictly linear sense of history, although 'linear' as a term continues to effect a context, a boundary, for a given discussion or investigation within the multiplicity. In a 'realist' orientation Lawrence's work can be little more than nostalgia, but seen abstractly and non-categorically, it is available in a heightened and direct manner in our immediate experience. We have no choice about being outside the subject-object realism of the past.

38 In "A Chair" the spatial organization is clear and events follow a straight chronology. Ursula and Birkin go down to the market, buy the chair, give the chair away, and go home from the market. There is no confusion as to whom is being written about at any given moment.

This kind of certainty is not present in "Molloy." One has to read, and re-read, very closely to even notice that A and C originally were going in the same direction. This close involvement of reader with text is just as important, perhaps moreso, as the determining of exact relations in the narrative surface. One cannot avoid some self-laughter at the minute tracing of the movements of A and C, especially when Molloy eventually pulls the rug from under the whole incident. That the effort to "pin down exactly" the events in the text--however necessary this is in order to actually see the text as the text presents itself--is both required and futile, is, I feel, a crucial dimension of the work, and has to be admitted. But this perhaps stings too closely the critic's vanity, who in an over-serious regard for nailing down some definite 'truth' becomes the butt and not the perceiver of the humor.

39 Raymond Williams has suggested the power of rhythm as an aesthetic means:

> ...It seems clear from what we already know that rhythm is a way of transmitting a description of experience, in such a way that the experience is re-created in the person receiving it, not merely as an 'abstraction' or an 'emotion' but as a physical effect on the organism--on the blood, on the breathing, on the physical patterns of the brain....The dance of the body, the movement of the voice, the sounds of instruments are, like colours, forms, and patterns, means of transmitting our experience in so powerful a way that the experience can be literally lived by others. ...it is more than a metaphor; it is a physical experience as real as any other.
>
> Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), pp. 24-5.

[40] That is, the reader away from the text, is a language-user in both ways - speaker and writer - in addition to being an inner speaker of the text, as its silent reader. This realization is not available in prose fiction utilizing omniscient narration, where the main emphasis is upon an invisibility of language. No matter how many situations depicted in Lawrence's work may have a direct relevance in my own reality, they nonetheless will all appear objectively, as scenes, pictures, things, and evoke a similar objective picturing in myself of my own situation: the relation is a relation between objects. But in Beckett this is not the case, for one is not there confronted with an objective world of "things" but only with the language of a speaking/writing narrator, and speaking/writing are acts common to myself per se. The common bond the reader has with Molloy is that of language-user, and beyond that, whatever differences appear are entirely secondary. One does not read "about" Molloy, one reads Molloy directly, as it were. The boundaries of conventional reader/text relation dissolve in a peculiar intimacy that carries beyond the reading of a book of fictional events, through affecting directly one's own reading habits.

[41] Vallier, p. 300.

[42] Vallier, p. 301.

[43] Vallier, p. 290.

[44] The "Dialogues" were originally published in Transition fortynine, No. 5 (1949). They thus date from Beckett's main creative period (1945-50), during which the Trilogy and Waiting For Godot were written. Although Beckett wrote out the "Dialogues", they apparently are fairly faithful extracts of lunch-time conversations Beckett, Duthuit, and a number of others had, on a regular basis, at the time. Deirdre Bair treats more fully of this in the recent biography, in the chapter dealing with the particular time period.

[45] Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett A Critical Study (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 32.

I am quoting Kenner exactly, but the word "includes" is itself a misquote, probably a printing error; nonetheless, an unfortunate one, since the Beckett remark reads "excludes."

[46] Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, "Three Dialogues," in Samuel Beckett A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 21.

[47] Beckett and Duthuit, p. 21.

[48] Beckett and Duthuit, p. 21.

[49] I find it interesting that Vallier singles out Kandinsky and Mondrian as representative of the early abstract movement, while Beckett mentions these two painters specifically as still being representatives of "the plane of the feasible." I think it is clear, in any comparison of their work with the work of the post-1945 artists, that a spiritual-intellectual ambience of the former vanishes into an impenetrable, actional quality of the abstract expressionists. Duchamps, perhaps, of the early abstractionists, chose the only really available path "in the world", by giving up painting altogether. That action was very similar to what I understand Beckett to be saying when he asserts that expression itself is "an impossible act." Duchamps was immediately cognizant of, and resistant to, the possibility of being trapped by "self-image", and took conscious action to avoid repeating himself. Beckett does the same, for in each new work the old work is cast aside. This makes for a major difference when comparing Beckett's work with Celine's, who, by contrast, once he found his "three dots", had nothing further to offer, even though he did keep on offering the same old thing. I am not impugning Celine's merciless self-awareness here, but am making an aesthetic distinction. While it can be said of Celine, and of writers like Genet and Borges, that, once you've read one of their books you've read them all (since the format doesn't change), this cannot be said of Beckett's prose works, up to and including How It Is. This is one of the most manifest differences between Beckett's work and the work of other prose writers. The only other major writer of this century with a similar distinction is Gertrude Stein. Differences, of course, can be noted in the works of other writers, Lawrence in Lady Chatterly's Lover is "different" than Lawrence in Women In Love (the chapters aren't titled, for instance), but there is no change at the deep level of form itself, such as one finds in Beckett and Stein.

50 quoted in Kenner, p. 33.

51 Beckett and Duthuit, p. 21.

52 Kenner, p. 33.

53 Beckett and Duthuit, p. 20.

54 Beckett and Duthuit, p. 17.

55 Kenner, p. 10.

Chapter 1

[1] Nonetheless, it may have been a sudden realization. There is a difference in the writing in Molloy, even when compared with the "Three Stories" of the same time period, that cannot be entirely explained by a technical device alone. Molloy, and especially "Molloy," is characterized by a directness and depth that is a leap beyond what had been previously written, but the very experience of having written Molloy affects the writing of the later books, even though the "narrator/narrated" device is retained throughout. It is as though the realization occurs in the writing of Molloy, giving the writing there an immediacy not available before or after. That the Trilogy closes with a 110-page paragraph, after opening with an 83-page paragraph in "Molloy," suggests, fancifully at least, that the fragmented writing between unconsciously reflects both the after-effects of an unanticipated realization and the effort to know anew, if not actually recapture, a further reach of such an experience. The two paragraphs are, in the style, like the crests of two waves. Originally there was no thought of writing the third book, insofar as Beckett was conscious of a design (see Bair in the appropriate chapters). There are actually four texts in the Trilogy, when we count "Moran" separately. The Unnamable seems to have been a surprise, even to the author. My own interpretation is simply that the third book completes a perceptual change inaugurated by Molloy (specifically, "Molloy"), and the two long paragraphs that open and close the Trilogy are the textual basis for such a view. It is not a surprising view, when we consider the Trilogy as one writing, that is, one long soliloquy, an approach for which there is also ample textual basis. And once we've done that, it is not difficult to see the four books prior to Molloy as "one work", set against the Trilogy, when both are approached as manifestations of one writing stream. By no means am I saying this was Beckett's "plan," consciously or unconsciously: it is simply an interpretation arising from the texts as they exist. But I believe such a picturing of the work is necessary, if any accurate assessment is to be made.

[2] Raymond Federman, "Beckettian Paradox: Who Is Telling The Truth?" in Samuel Beckett Now Critical Approaches To His Novels Poetry and Plays, ed. Melvin J. Friedman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 116.

[3] The very distance between narrator and "story," noted but unexamined by Federman, requires, I think, some term other than "story" if one is to talk about the whole text. The term "writing", especially in view of Beckett's later work, and also in view of what is actually facing one as a reader, I find the most appropriate. The text "Dante and the Lobster" is, afterall, a writing. This implicitly acknowledges an author, a writer, behind the text, but avoids the confusion of Federman's explicit appeal to author to resolve a felt difficulty. It is the "distance" which makes story secondary, and text primary, in my approach.

[4] More Pricks Than Kicks is Beckett's first book of fiction (1934). Strictly speaking each of the ten stories must be taken as a separate text. The "narrative situation" here described, however, applies in nine of the ten, the important exception being "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux."

With the exception of the Trilogy, the edition of Beckett's works referred to throughout the thesis is the Grove Press Collected Works Edition (1970). Murphy was published in 1938; Watt was written during the War but not published until 1953.

Mercier and Camier, written after Watt but prior to Molloy, was not published in English until 1974. The edition referred to is the Grove Press paperback (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1975). Beckett translates all his works himself, with the exception of Molloy, in which he collaborated with Patrick Bowles.

[5] The remark may be seen as a mergence of both strains, hence its power. Kenner has noted the effectiveness of the remark. (Hugh Kenner, A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), p. 51.)

6 The presence of a narrator is a necessary qualification of the illusion attendant upon third-person omniscient narration: someone has to be there telling the story and admitting he is doing so, in an almost Brechtian sense. But Beckett does not realize until much later that it is with the narrator--and not the narrative--that the importance lies. While he is intellectually aware of this (Proust), he is unable to implement it in his writing. The narrator ultimately subsumes all other elements, enabling the frightening immediacy to emerge.

7 Watt was written during the war but not published until 1953.

8 Arthur's monologue hardly counts as "first person" in any direct sense, since its contents are entirely objective and narrative, contrasting with Arsene's monologue, which is subjective and confessional.

9 Arsene's speech is the first direct manifestation of the oral dimension of language in Beckett's work, whereas the Smeraldina's effort is still an instance of writing (a personal letter). Though Arsene's speech is rendered 'an object' by its context (the speech of a character to a character in a novel), within the speech itself the world of Watt is absent.

10 Mercier and Camier I have not included in the main body of work discussed, despite its transitional importance in the writing. Beside the other novels, it is a tentative, disappointing work, quite obviously experimental, perhaps more properly seen in relation to the plays. It brings curiously to mind John Steinbeck's "novel-dramas" of the 1940's in a reversed sense: Burning Bright is more novel than drama, and Mercier and Camier more drama than novel, though neither succeeds very happily.

11 Viewed as pieces of writing, the two texts are very different, and, since they are first person monologues, the protagonists are equally different. The critical muddle over whether the two characters are one and the same person, or different beings, is a simpleminded irrelevancy. Of greater importance is the showing of the relation of these texts to other areas of the writing: to the two monologues in Watt, for instance, or to the "first person/third person voice" conflict in the early writing.

12 Hugh Kenner, A Reader's Guide To Samuel Beckett (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 94.

13 "The more his own system closed round him, the less he could tolerate its being subordinated to any other. Between him and his stars no doubt there was correspondence, but not in Suk's sense. They were his stars, he was the prior system. He had been projected, larval and dark, on the sky of that regrettable hour as on a screen, magnified and clarified into his own meaning. But it was his meaning." (Murphy, 183; emphasis his)

14 "Satisfactorily" because only provisionally resolved, even there. One of the realizations in The Unnamable is that there isn't an end. This in fact is the conclusion of the book and this realization enables it to stop, though not end in any more definite sense. Simultaneously this enables writing to resume in the future, although Beckett himself wasn't at all sure that would happen, at the time of finishing The Unnamable.

15 The "first person voice" in the early stories is here identifiable with "I." The mergence of first person/third person voices, as in "Sam" in Watt, ie., narratively, was not sufficient, thus "I" emerged in a different place. It is only when the "I" can fuse with text that any breakthrough occurs, but even this can only be an intermittent success. Later in the paper, in the discussion of text in The Unnamable, text and narrator diverge at some points, even though the whole text is spoken by the narrator. In the long quote here, the intermittency is shown in another way.

16 The streaming text becomes a 'field' when we focus on it, spatialize it. It is important to keep in mind the dynamic nature of the whole stream. The text becomes an 'object' only conveniently for us.

Chapter 2

[1] "The danger is in the neatness of identifications." This is the opening sentence of Beckett's essay "Dante...Bruno. Vico...Joyce.", in Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 3. This book was first published in 1929.

[2] Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1970), p. 5.

[3] This points up a main stumbling block in much of the criticism, particularly that which attempts to explain or describe Beckett's work in terms of other texts or archetypal symbols. A representative example of precisely the wrong way to approach Beckett is:

Dieter Wellershoff, "Failure of an Attempt at De-Mythologization: Samuel Beckett's Novels," in Samuel Beckett A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 92-107.

[4] "Belacqua" here does not necessarily refer to the protagonist of More Pricks Than Kicks, at least not only to him, but to Dante's Belacqua, after whom he is named.

"He is named for the lazy old friend Dante encountered in ante-Purgatory (Purg., iv, 97-135), 'lazier than if Sloth were his very sister', and waiting in the shadow of a rock till as many years shall have passed as he lived on earth: the perfect type, for Beckett, of a man reliving his whole life at a remove." Hugh Kenner, A Reader's Guide To Samuel Beckett (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 50.

5 This book plays enticingly with symmetry. #41, the longest single piece, is the centerpiece, linking the two halves of Malone's story of Sapo and MacMann. In the 120-page Grove Press hardback, this section concludes on p. 60. Symmetry would provide an excellent topic for study in Beckett's works (Molloy speaks of his "mania for symmetry"), particularly in relation to the very a-symmetrical last paragraph of The Unnamable.

6 In Malone Dies the 'author's' situation (sui generis) becomes concrete subject for the first time, differing from Molloy in this regard. This is an almost inevitable prelude to "writing the writing dilemma itself", which becomes the issue in The Unnamable.

The spaces in Malone Dies also, quite literally, break the illusion of the smooth flowing 'complete' surface of narrative, picturing (qua text) the writing/reading reality in terms of its interuptions.

7 Hugh Kenner, A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 101. Deirdre Bair refers to it as "the most autobiographical of all Beckett's fiction." (Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett A Biography (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 376.

8 "Murphy's mind is after all the gravamen of these informations." (107)

9 "...and he thinks how absurd is our dream of a Paradise with retention of personality, since our life is a succession of Paradises successively denied, that the only true Paradise is the Paradise that has been lost, and that death will cure many of the desire for immortality." Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1970), p. 14.

It takes a very long time for Beckett to actually incorporate this awareness into his own writing perspective, for it is not until Molloy that the perspective looks back, actually confronting the "succession of lost Paradises."

10 Or even earlier, in which one phrase sets a direction ("Keep going, going on,") cancelled in the same sentence a second after ("call that going, call that on"), nipping in the bud as it were "possible forms."

11 Considerations of length were a partial consideration, so far as not using all of Section Three in the analysis, but primarily it is simply not necessary to extend the discussion quantitatively, since the essentials are revealed in any given portion of text.

12 Of course, in saying the "I" we do assume the narrator's place, and the cumulative effect of this identification is important: but there remains an immediate difference here.

13 Present tense verbs have not been abandonned in the "perhaps/but" sentences: but the "present tense return" refers to a specific vantage point, and not just the verb.

In the movements here we see a textual example of "forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming." First, there is the clear declaration of seeing "him," then the exploration of "real identity," but this crumbles in the next sentence, where attention is directed (or distracted) to the "hat," then falls further back, to the already stated position about "things." Yet simultaneously through the very same three sentences, there is a little musical motif--keying on "hat"--that, in the text at large, provides one of the stabilizing strands. When we note as well the rhythmic features of the "perhaps/but" and the complicated "jerking back" of the next sentence--aurally or visually as line or choreography--we then begin to get a picture of the "text as event," rather than as "object," and we can sense why the text, read in anything like an ordinary manner, is so difficult and painful. The "ordinary manner" does not accommodate movement in this fashion. The Beckett text reveals its "substance" as one of motion, not materiality. There isn't any ground on which or against which all this is happening; it is merely an attribute of a way of writing.

14 "I am always trying to tell this thing that a space of time is a natural thing for an American to always have inside them as something in which they are continuously moving....it is something strictly American to conceive a space that is filled with moving, a space of time that is filled always filled with moving...." Gertrude Stein, "The Gradual Making of The Making of Americans," in Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1972), p. 258.

15 Not that hearing is simply a means to an end, either, but that "understanding" is an aspect of experiencing something--and one cannot experience this text unless one hears it.

16 For instance, Murphy's suit (Murphy, 71-3); MacMann's coat (Malone Dies, 227-9), etc.

17 The line, in its directness, is a "pure" example of "present tense return," contrasted with the variation of the previous line. It is almost a sensing of the variation, and a 'rhythmic' adjustment to it.

18 This is noted by Adorno.

"Beckett...develops a tendency of the modern novel to its final consequence. Reflection, which aesthetic immanence tabooed as too "abstract," is reintroduced, welded together with elements of pure representation; the Flaubertian principle of the pure, self-contained object is undermined."

Theodor W. Adorno, "Towards an Understanding of ENDGAME," trans. Samuel M. Weber, in Noten zur Literatur II (London: Jonathan Cape Limited, 1961), pp. 82-114.

19 " 'But might there not be such 'general' samples? Say a schematic leaf, or a sample of pure green?'--Certainly there might. But for such a schema to be understood as a schema, and not as the shape of a particular leaf, and for a slip of pure green to be understood as a sample of all that is greenish and not as a sample of pure green--this in turn resides in the way the samples are used.

Ask yourself: what shape must the sample of the colour green be? Should it be rectangular? Or would it then be the sample of a green rectangle? --So should it be "irregular" in shape? And what is to prevent us then from regarding it--that is, from using it--only as a sample of irregularity of shape?" (emphasis throughout his)

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 35e.

20 Martin Heidegger, What Is Called Thinking?, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, 1968), p. xv.

[21] And yet we have been "travelling," simultaneously, as is shown when we place the texts of the first and seventh books side by side. That both things are true--we both have and have not 'moved'--is the real crux, the cruel and damning paradox: "The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express." (Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, "Three Dialogues," in Samuel Beckett A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 17.

[22] The reflecting touches almost on panic here, the "lateral" option (impossible in any case) suggesting a conscious desperation, but one which is after all successfully resisted. "The thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of system." (The Unnamable, 292)

[23] It is more a "physical act" than an "answer." The capacity for stopping the flow is no longer available in Section 17; or perhaps it should be seen as the last, one of the last, things abandonned.

Chapter 3

[1] Of course, no writer repeats himself exactly; each new book is in some measure different from the author's other books. But that immediately recognizeable quality that identifies a work on its very first page as belonging to a particular author, is unavailable in Beckett. The reader who enjoys Murphy will not easily recognize Watt as being by the same author, much less his very next book. Exactly the opposite is true, however, for the reader opening Death On The Installment Plan after Journey to the End of the Night, and it remains true for all the later Celine books. Gertrude Stein long ago noted how everybody is always repeating everything, and consciously avoided doing that, in her writing, just as Beckett has done, even though the popular impression of each is just the opposite. Once one is aware of the repetitive limits within which an author traces himself or herself--an awareness which comes fairly quickly with the examination of four or five works by the author--one gets a sense of the shape of the language field represented by that author, and this cannot but inform one's interpretation of the ideas and events given expression in that field. Even without being obtusely reductive, one has to admit the limitations which quickly appear in most, if not all, such fields. But the orientation to text interested in this kind of awareness is not, finally, intellectual, but sensuous, tactile. Thus the whole concern with cognitive meanings is, though not ignored, secondary. As Kierkegaard said, "Live first--understand afterwards." The present approach does not recognize more than a convenient separation between "intellectual" and "sensuous" aspects of response.

Kenner has noted Beckett's resistance to repeating himself. See A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, p. 12.

[2] Beckett made this comparison in an interview with Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," New York Times, 6 May 1956, sec. 2, pp. 1,3. It is quoted in: J. O'Hara, Introd., Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, ed. J. O'Hara (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 19.

3 'Closed system,' the guideword offered for Murphy, is not applicable for any other Beckett work, and this is true for all the guidewords. It would be the same were we to locate guidewords for the works of any author, since the concept of 'guideword' involves the relation of a text to itself.

4 I am following, somewhat, Beckett's distinction between Baudelaire and Proust.

> The Baudelarian unity is a unity 'post rem,' a unity abstracted from plurality. His 'correspondence' is determined by a concept, therefore strictly limited and exhausted by its own definition. Proust does not deal in concepts, he pursues the Idea, the concrete....For Proust the object may be a living symbol, but a symbol of itself. The symbolism of Baudelaire has become the autosymbolism of Proust.
>
> (emphasis his)

Thus the 'guideword' is not a symbol for the work but is, literally, a 'guide' to or within the work. The relation of Murphy to 'closed system' is entirely internal: the words 'closed system' are literally a part of the text. The relation of Murphy to Cartesianism is, by contrast, external, for Descartes is not mentioned in the text, nor Cartesianism itself, however much certain descriptions in the book may match tenets of Cartesian thought. This distinction is analogous to the differentiation, in the Introduction of this paper, between 'Gaber' as a named personage in "Moran", and Molloy's unnamed visitor. And, not surprisingly, the same kind of critical muddlement exists, where this type of distinction is not made in reference to Cartesianism or any other external system, text, ideology, impression, etc.

The quotation is from: Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1970), p. 60.

[5] 'Shape' is of primary concern to Beckett.

> I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them.... It is the shape that matters.

Quoted in J.D. O'Hara, Introd., Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, ed. J.D. O'Hara (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 18.

[6] Cooper neither sits nor takes off his hat (54; 118-19), until Murphy's demise allows an opening for him in 'the big world' (254; 260).

[7] Not causally, but one of those freak coincidences, one of those "games time plays with space" (Watt, 75).

[8] I use "experimental" advisedly. Watt was written during the war years, and its disjointedness is no doubt in some ways a reflection of the general chaos. But it can also be seen as an attempt to break out of the 'dead end' of the 'closed system' of Murphy.

[9] Northrop Frye contends that Murphy commits suicide, but I think the text in these pages (248-53) seriously challenges such a conclusion. Murphy's intention seems to be to calm down and go back to Celia. See Introduction, p. 5 .

[10] "Murphy's mind" is clearly what wants to be written about, and is written about. The experience with Mr. Endon opens a new dimension, or threatens to, the full implications of which cannot be dealt with in Murphy. A conflict is visible between what is 'known' (the self-satisfied air of Murphy), since what is 'known' is inevitably 'closed', and what is 'unknown,' present in the narrative as this experience with Mr. Endon's eyes. Mr. Endon already abides in the 'Third Zone' of Murphy's mind, metaphorically speaking, and the writing after Murphy intuitively seeks a more direct formulation of that kind of experience.

[11] An investigation of the structure of a text need not concern itself with the quality of the writing. Form, too, bears no exact relation to quality of expression, however much it affects the estimation of quality.

12 The reference to "Beethoven" shows how far removed Belacqua actually is from "himself": he objectifies, with this cultural reference, his only authentic action, "self." As first of the protagonists in the writing stream, he is wholly objective.

13 Belacqua himself is not a writer. I mean simply that the writing act itself is accurately pictured in this description.

14 Kenner is his usual accurate self (at least as regards his writing about Beckett's works) in assessing More Pricks Than Kicks:

"The book will chiefly interest students. With carefully directed attention, we can perceive latent within it his later directions. Other claims should not be made." (Hugh Kenner, A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 49.)

15 Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, quoted in Anthony Kenny, Wittgenstein (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 102.

16 Obscurer, but important perhaps in a number of connexions, such as: the direct reference to the ladder; several points of connexion, running both ways, with Malone Dies; the similarity in the names Hackett-Beckett; etc. Mr. Hackett is sometimes cited as a counter to Watt (Jacqueline Hoefer, "Watt," in Samuel Beckett A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 73-4.), but this suggestion needs more careful scrutiny than it has received. I think the textual presence of Mr. Hackett far too slight to justify any such large-scale associations.

17 For instance, this tendency in relation to the "closed system" nature of the book manifests in Murphy's moving from the room he and Celia share all the way to the garret, while Celia herself (closest to Murphy as a serious character), behind Murphy in the parallel 'ways upward,' moves only to the next floor above. This direction "upward" is an ironic (and perhaps unconscious) contradiction of the description of Murphy's mind, in which the desireable direction is downward.

Despite the sense of "upwardness" in the book, Murphy as writing is consistent with the "descent" leitmotif: that is, it is below More Pricks Than Kicks (in the stream, not in quality), but still far above Watt. For instance, Belacqua dies in the midst of a group of doctors and nurses, but Murphy dies alone.

18 The explicit references to Wittgenstein's famous remark establish an obvious link between Murphy and Watt, but differences in the mentionings are worth noting. In the former, it is an objective comment, a cultural reference added to the narrative through the "third person voice." In Watt the remark appears each time as direct first person speech by a character, an "I" form rather than a "they." The form of the reference is different in the two "writings," indicating a different relation between the substance of the reference and the perspective behind the writing.

Significantly, Watt himself (who, as protagonist, represents in the writing the basic objective picturing of the perspective) does not make these references. Nor does Sam, the "narrator." This suggests, in the viewing of Watt as writing, that the changed relation is still largely an unconscious one, present in the writing but not in the narrative.

19 Remarks like this lend support to the view of Watt as a "bodily" reincarnation of pure-mind Murphy.

20 The conflict is really one of operational versus referential language.

21 I am of course simplifying here. Several works, including Mercier and Camier, come between Watt and Molloy. (Of especial interest are the "Three Stories" which are viable first-person narrations much like the writing in the Trilogy, although still more concerned with objective contents than the works of the Trilogy. But chronology is not too exact, regarding exactly when they were written.) But nothing really major gets done between Watt and Molloy. The groping nature of the writing between these books is best indicated perhaps by Watt's surprising appearance in the closing pages of Mercier and Camier, the only instance of a former character appearing bodily in a subsequent work.

Watt's oddness as a book persisted in its publishing history, since it did not appear until 1953, after the Trilogy had already appeared.

22 See Chapter One, pp. 19-23.

23 All these features, taken collectively, may be seen as a kind of "last gasp" of all the irritating narratorial interuptions of the earlier books, the "too visible" first person narrator.

24 Martin Heidegger, On The Way To Language, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 72.

25 Murphy and Watt differ in their conceptions of their minds, Murphy knowing quite exactly what he means by "his mind" but Watt not at all sure what such a term means (76).

26 And since the protagonist is here regarded as the embodiment of the perspective behind the writing, this suggests Beckett himself was similarly "trapped" at that point.

27 Not simply nostalgically. It is because Watt can never be where Arthur is, again, and he knows this, that he is now able to enjoy the story for what it is. The 'objective contents' provide a substitute world for Arthur, momentarily; but they make a thing, for Watt, not unlike his own "pillow of words" - but without the attendant labour.

28 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 32e.

29 Watt cannot function in the regular world, after his stay at Mr. Knott's. He meets Sam in some sort of mental hospital, and his progressive deterioration of ability to communicate using the familiar syntax and orthography of "the ordinary world," reflects a kind of "insanity," though the word is perhaps too strong.

30 He doesn't exactly fall, rather, he is knocked down by some other character. Watt has a certain obduracy of presence that contrasts markedly with Murphy, whose absence proves so pivotal in his novel.

31 The "Molloy affair" en toto is the event which dislocates Moran's sense of reality, rather than any physical encounter. His discomfiture begins immediately, rather than after the "crisis" on the road.

32 To say "in Moran's mind" doesn't really help, if we are talking about the experience of the whole book itself. There is no solid ground available for saying anything definitively about the Moran-Molloy relation. Text offers itself as the only reliable means for establishing a boundary for discourse, but even here one must proceed as much in terms of what is not said, as in terms of what is.

33 This is an important distinction. Molloy, and not "Molloy," is the reality in the writing stream at this point. The objective world is renounced but not entirely denied. In Malone Dies a further step is taken, through the reduction of the objective world to the writing situation, per se, but it is not until The Unnamable that outright denial of objectivity occurs.

34 Martin Heidegger, On The Way To Language, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 72.

Beckett does not regard language as positively as does Heidegger, but Heidegger's "description" he might be willing to accept as a starting point.

Conclusion

[1] The reader bears witness to this, for memories of "what happens" in Molloy are notoriously unreliable. One's only recourse is to re-read, closely, the text.

[2] Watt's memory is untroubled before he enters Mr. Knott's employ.

> And he had experienced literally nothing, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen, of which in retrospect he was not content to say, That is what happened then. (73)

[3] The verbal repetitions appear mainly in the Trilogy, where the narrators speak the whole text directly. They add greatly to the sense of the text as a 'speaking,' as does the extensive use of cliche. The cliches, culturally codified repetitions, are a kind of bedrock of conventional perceiving ('wisdom literature,' so called), which Beckett turns inside out by placing them in contexts where they apply literally as well as abstractly. The cliche is a primary means by which the Beckett text "reaches beyond itself" into the reader's non-reading environment, so consciously aware does one become of their double applications. Nothing is met with more frequently in daily speech, one's own and other peoples. The very fact that the cliche is "dead writing" gives it an oral vitality, so common a factor is it in speech, and Beckett's text owes much of its directness of effect to his adroit usage of it.

[4] This tendency increases in the Trilogy, but many examples can be found of such carry over between widely separated texts, extending even to the many brief little writings Beckett has published in recent years. Compare:

> There is nothing at first sight to distinguish him from the others.... (60)
> (The Lost Ones, Grove Press Inc., 1972)

with, from Molloy: People pass too, hard to distinguish from yourself. (8)

[5] Since the writing is viewed as one language field, chronology ceases to be a factor: Balaqua's death affects one markedly, if one has read Molloy, less so perhaps if not. I am speaking from an orientation to the field as a whole, and not from a desire to make the early writing 'better' than it in fact is.

[6] It is the repetitions in a writer's work, from book to book, that enable the following of the work as voice, in particular repetitions of incidents, scenes, descriptions, kinds of characters, etc. Sherwood Anderson, for instance, is essentially a short story writer, even in a novel like Many Marriages which, seen as a novel, was universally condemned. In Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance and Scarlet Letter, the character trines of Zenobia, Hollingsworth, and Priscilla, in the former, and Hester, Dimmesdale, and Pearl, in the latter, duplicate each other, and provide an interest, so far as Hawthorne's 'form' is concerned, quite outside the immediate narratives. Hemingway is an obvious example of a writer telling the same story over and over (and worse each time, in the novels), whereas Faulkner's individual texts vary greatly in shape, repeating themselves in other ways, e.g., relation between commentary and dialogue.

But what I am speaking of is a quite obvious factor that should surprise no one, who thinks for a moment of the limits of any one individual so far as a range of expression is concerned. Oneself is the always-at-hand ready example. The emphasis I place upon "voice" in respect to the structure and form of a literary work has primarily to do with turning attention to the experiencing of the work, and away from an abstracting that dessicates experience. The works, any works, are directly, physiologically apprehendable, and will never be apprehended in any significant way until this dimension of literary experience is allowed for. "Meanings" rise out of experience, although one would never know this, listening in on most any classroom in North America, at any level. The awful proof is demonstrated in the bulk of academic criticism.

[7] Quoted in Martin Esslin, Introd., Samuel Beckett A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 1.

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