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The Dance of the Bees

Samuel Beckett's Radical Approach to Minimalism

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FOREWORD

The main body of the book is a collection of my four articles on Samuel Beckett published in various academic magazines. The book additionally includes a new unpublished text. The thesis binding the entirety of my research can be captured in the following statement: The foundation and driving force behind Beckett's radical approach to minimalism lies primarily in his relentless search for the fundamental pattern on which life is predicated. Pattern, in this instance, can be defined as the primal characteristics of what we are as a species. Indeed, the said characteristics constitute the very *footfalls* of existence which are obscured by the world of representation.

As to the title of the work, it relates to Beckett's novel *Molloy* in which Moran gains enjoyment from contemplating the intricate dance of the bees, as well as his realisation that he could spend his whole life thinking on the subject without ever finding an answer. I think the point Beckett is making here, and what Moran fails to recognise, is that the complex pattern made by the bees is part of their innate behavioural characteristics. The simple act of *naming* this sequence of movements a form of dance adds a set of significations that obscure or hide the true nature of the pattern. We can easily say the same of Beckett's moribund characters who are forever dogged with the failure of pushing on even when purpose and hope are all but gone. These characters leave their own

intricate steps which we can observe obliquely from within a world of representational forms.

The articles within this book are not placed chronologically, but in a way that best represents the developing thesis and its supporting argument. Chapter One, for example, was published 2019 in *Conversatoria Litteraria* (247-257) and entitled "Beckett a Critical Problem". The article itself is a retrospective look at the types of criticism on Beckett published in the latter part of the twentieth century. This is of significant importance because it helped shape the field of Beckett Studies. It is at this point that we see a tendency to push the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer to one side replacing him with, for example, Heidegger, whose *Being and Time* (1927) was very popular in Beckett studies during the period in question. There are a number of reasons for this, including the rather mistaken identification of Beckett's art as essentially belong to an existential way of thinking. However, if only one takes the time to look one can clearly locate the powerful and lasting influence that Schopenhauer's ideas have on Beckett's theatre and prose writing. Indeed, even today there is a tendency to see Schopenhauer as having influenced mainly Beckett's earlier works. However the articles published here will clearly demonstrate that this was not the case. Schopenhauer's ideas had a profound effect on Beckett's entire artistic output, especially in terms of the way he splits the world into Will and Representation.

Representation (associated with the act of knowing) in Schopenhauer's thinking constitutes the phenomenal world, the one we see every day as soon as we open our eyes. However, this is underpinned by reality itself, which is the

Will (associated with the known). Beckett uses this split in his plays and novellas in terms of his minimalist approach, and we see this most clearly in his later works where he increasingly strips away the representational elements in order to find the base pattern on which life is ultimately predicated.

It is clear that Schopenhauer came up with his philosophical position in an attempt solve the problem set out by Kant: How can we step beyond our own sense perception and subjectivity to grasp the thing-in-itself? According to Schopenhauer we can come to know the thing-in-itself over time if we take base reality as the fundamental drives and patterns of behaviour that shape our lives and are nothing to do with our thinking or knowing. Thus over time we can come to know the thing-in-itself when we trace the patterns that our own lives form. In Chapter Three I have compared this to modern chaos theory where we can observe a similar focus on repeating patterns in a moving system, or as with fractal geometry in terms of self-similarity.

Schopenhauer's ideas, which Beckett clearly adopts as a key part of his own approach to artistic production (as outlined above), do not lend themselves to an existentialist position because in a sense we have essence or, in this case, underlying pattern before experience. However, this is far from Dante's medieval Christian point-of-view (Beckett plays on *The Divine Comedy* throughout his writings) where the essence is the 'intelligible soul' (see Chapter Four). Here we see that Schopenhauer essentially re-works Plato's ideas in that rather than having *ideal form* as the underlying reality we have, instead, repeating patterns that give shape to everything – from cloud formations to different species etc.

Here we see Beckett's adoption of the Schopenhauerian split (for want of a better word) in his later plays such as *Rockaby* and in his final two novellas: *Ill Seen Ill* Said and *Worstward Ho*, where he attempts to strip away the representational elements, with the risk of completely alienating his audience (as always), to the bare minimum in order to expose the true nature of the Bekettian hero.

As for the other articles contained within this book: Chapter Two was published 2021 in *Prace Literaturoznawcze* (289-299) and entitled "The Will to Live: A Study of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*". Chapter Three is based on material (as yet unpublished) which I intended for two separate but closely interrelated articles. However, given the space a book offers, I decided to rework them into one chapter entitled: *An Imaginary Author*. Chapter Four was published in 2017 in Młoda Humanistyka and entitled "The soul of Representation: A study of Samuel Beckett's 'Text for Nothing'". Chapter Five consists of an article published in 2020 in *Prace Literaturoznawcze*, entitled "The death of Representation: *Rockaby*, *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho*" (161-172), where I discuss the striking similarities between the novellas in terms of Beckett's attempt to reduce the representational to the bare minimum. In fact, I argue that these two novellas constitute an apothe-osis of all his work from the *Trilogy* on. Especially in the case of *Worstward Ho* it is as if Beckett has reworked all of his previous writings and reduced them to this one text. Now, before the final silence, little more than pin figures are to be seen that indicate the starts and stops, comings and goings that trace the final stark arabesque of Beckett's characters beneath the veils of representation.

CHAPTER ONE

Beckett: A Critical Problem

Introduction

The reason that the heroic and uncompromising enterprise undertaken by Beckett in creating his extreme aesthetic has not been satisfactorily explored is mainly due to the nature of the criticism he has historically attracted. Though much of this critical work is both excellent and interesting, nevertheless, it seems to be more preoccupied with setting its own agenda in either too rigidly narrowing its scope, or being concerned to both validate itself and Beckett's work in terms of modernity, without fully responding to the true nature and intentions of his aesthetic. In respect to this I will take an historical retrospective in order to discuss some of the major critical works on Beckett and outline two broad categories which are the most representative of the critical approaches to Beckett's work. In terms of this polarisation of critical approaches it is also both curious an unfortunate that Schopenhauer is either ignored or pushed to one side. And this, despite the fact that it was on Schopenhauer's gloomy philosophy that Beckett largely formulated his approach both to writing and to the theatre.

Even a casual glance at the body of critical work surrounding Samuel Beckett's writings reveals that there are two broad approaches to his oeuvre. The first and largest body has tended to see Beckett's work in the formalist sense as a largely self-referential linguistic circuit, whose language like the mind of Murphy, is hermetically sealed. The second and generally more recent approach has been to locate Beckett as the perfect site for applying poststructuralist textual theory, as if his work intentionally exemplified and represented Postmodernism per se.[1]

The Formalist Approach

Of the first or formalist approach arguably the most representative and most quoted is Brian Fitch's *Beckett and Babel*,[2] even though the work was published as early as 1988.

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[1] Anna Smith notes this problem when she claims that outwardly at least Beckett's fictions bear a striking resemblance to deconstruction's conception of identity as a mesh of difference (A. Smith, "Proceeding by Aporia: Perception and Poetic language in Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho*" in the *Journal of Beckett Studies*. Vol. 1.3, Horida State University, No. I. Autumn 1993, p.23). Smith is applying this statement from her understanding of Jakobson's theory of 'poetic language'; i.e., ᵗpoetic language reflects the instability of representation by an overt hostility both to closure of meaning and to fixed, substantial identities (Ibid.). Smith in a footnote of her own goes on to explain that 'according to Jakobson, poetic language occurs when the referential content of a speech is overridden by an emphasis on the message as form.'(p. 35. Also see R. Jakobson, *Linguistics and Poetics, in Selected Writing III*, The Hague: Mouton 1981).

[2] For early discussion and debate on the positioning of Beckett's work within Postmodemism, see Breon Mitchell's "Samuel Beckett and the Postmodernism Controversy"; Sel. Papers Presented at Workshop on Postmodernism at the Xlth International. Compar. Lit. Cong, Paris, 20-24 Aug. 1985. Publ. in *Exploring Postmodernism viii*, Eds. Calincescu Matei & Fokkema Douwe, Benjarnins. Amsterdarn 1987, pp. 109-121; B.T. Fitch, *Beckett and*

Fitch, perhaps a little unfairly considering the stated aim of his work, is frequently criticised for the extreme position he adopts.[3] For example, in setting up the theoretical framework for his study he argues that:

> [...] *the second versions of Beckett's texts (those written in translation) have, in my opinion, to be considered part of an intra-textuality of his work and to be seen as participating in a dynamic interaction between different texts. For if the concept of 'the complete works' of a writer has largely been discredited in the context of what the French have termed 'La modernité', it has its contemporary equivalent in that intra-textuality, a variant of textuality. On the level of texts as texts in the strict sense of the term there exists a whole range of interplay through which the texts of a writer comment on one another without any intervention on the part of the author* [...][4]

Fitch's attempt to outline this process of 'intra-textuality' is difficult to follow. However, he seems to have applied this rather awkward concept in order to express the extra dimension exhibited between the original French or English versions of Beckett's fiction and those retranslated by the author into either language. Not only is Fitch considering

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Babel: An Investigation into the Bilingual Status of the Work, University of Toronto Press 1988.

Christopher Ricks, for example, in criticism of Fitch adopts a tone of near disdain when he writess 'In such discourse' Fitch's *Beckett and Bablel*, as it calls itself, we are in another world than that of Beckett's geatness, his being an art which never is so complacent as to deny the existence of the without 'pregnable' as it fertilely is'. C. Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Word*, Clarendon Press. Oxford 1990, p. 151.

[4] B.T. Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*, p. 29–30, notes that "inra-textuality" is a modification of the term "inter-textuality'.

the way that original and translation refer to each other but in 'taking them on the level of text as texts in the strict sense of the term' and their tendency to 'comment on one another' to the exclusion of any 'intervention' suggests a rather limited concern in looking at these 'works' primarily as part of an enclosed linguistic field.

However, the reason for such a clear cut hermeneutic response is suggested by the full title which Fitch gives to his study, *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual work*. It is in part the very fact that Beckett has just such a bilingual 'status' that he attracts the kind of criticism which tends, in its most extreme form, to look at the works primarily in terms of a linguistic and intertextual process, marginalising or excluding most other areas of exploration. This tendency to look at Beckett's work in such a narrow way was set as early as 1964 in John Fletcher's highly influential *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* in which he refers to the 'hermetically sealed perfection of *Texts for Nothing*' [5] and later in the study makes the following revealing observation on *Comment Cest* (*How It Is*): 'We are spectators at a ballet, formal and untroubled by any reality but its own, by any principle but that, inevitable and serene, of its growth and rapid decline.'[6]

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[5] *Text for Nothing* was originally written in French (*Textes pour rien*) during 1950 - 52 following the completion of *L'lnommable* (1949-50). Fletcher points out that these, rather aptly titled pieces, were produced at a time when Beckett could write very little following the enormous effort of *The Trilogy*. In fact, it is not until *Comment C'est* (1958 - 60) that Beckett will produce such a sustained period of creativity (*The Novels of Samuel Beckett*, p. 194).
[6] ibid. p. 216.

Such an unlikely reading as this in which the fiction (or any fiction for that matter) could be conceived of as 'untroubled by any reality but its own' is, however, undoubtedly helped by Beckett's own artistic approach (an approach which has been largely misunderstood) not only in terms of his biligualism but also in his evolving minimalistic method; a method which increasingly closes off references to an external world until we are apparently left with only the complete inner realm of the text and to which all previous examples of his work seem merely fossils on the road to simplification.

We can further add to the reasons for this failure to appreciate fully the development of Beckett's fictions when we consider the way he employs a visible intertextual weave, though not exclusively, with other elements of his own work. Connor, on considering this problem, writes:

> *Our belief in the self-containment of literary texts is liable to encounter difficulties with Beckett's work, anyway. For, in a real sense, his books are items in a series, rather than single, self-enclosed elements, so that the metonymic relationship of part to whole which is that of the title to the text is duplicated by the metonymic relationships of the novels to each other in the series which runs from More Pricks than Kicks through to the Trilogy and beyond.*[7]

For example, *Texts for Nothing* consciously refers to the two previous books of *The Trilogy* as well as to earlier works such as *Waiting for Godot*. We find that *The Trilogy* similarly sets

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[7] S. Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, Basil Blackwell 1988, pp. 39-40.

out to develop this approach, creating at times the sense if not of a single text or body of work undergoing constant transformation, than that of a single if imaginary consciousness breathing them into life. I use the word imaginary in the sense that the conscious self is located as part of the narrative structure and not vice versa.

We can see then how this on the surface might suggest the notion that language is everything and the place in which character and identity reside. Professor Ricks in his highly entertaining *Beckett's Dying Words*,[8] attempts to dispel such an idea when considering Beckett's fiction. However, Ricks' approach is not always appropriate to the general thrust of his argument which we sometimes lose sight of through his exuberant and self-conscious love for the medium, taking great delight in the art of parody and the rich employment of the literary pun (along with an attempt to show that Beckett is essentially a better writer in English than in French). Though Ricks often employs this technique in order to explore Beckett's own approach to language, it, nevertheless, tends ironically to undercut the overall thrust of his argument by continually reasserting, even if unintentionally, the primacy of language over all else.

However, there is a very serious side to Ricks' work which is worth mentioning here because of its relevance to our general argument. This comes across in his concern to point out a curious 'tropism' in Beckett's fiction, that is the positioning or 'alignment' of words towards death, moving language towards what it evokes:

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[8] C. Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words*, Claredon Press, Oxford 1990.

> *... it is not simply the 'syntax of weakness' but the incarnation of the human reality of it all, of the piteous bodily weakness, and of the strength to contemplate it and realize it, which is so moving.*[9]

Ricks touches on this incidentally, for what he is principally interested in here is the 'syntax of weakness'[10] and the way in which Beckett not only employs 'words aligned towards death' but how death itself is incorporated into the winding sheet of language.[11] Ricks goes on to describe this 'syntax of weakness' as 'pressing on, unable to relinquish its perseverance and arrive at severance',[12] paradoxically denying, even in its conscious declaration, a drive towards death. Yet this is not the key form behind Beckett's 'syntax' as I shall go on to discuss. Though it is an important aspect of his writing, it is only a partial understanding of the set of processes he attempts to accommodate.

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[9] ibid. p. 148.

[10] Ricks notes that this term was attributed to Beckett himself by Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett Poet and Critic*. p. 249 (*Beckett's Dying Words*. p. 82[ft.711) Ricks goes on to claim that "Beckett's syntax of weakness, in the vicinity of clichés and other forms of life in death, asks a larger sequence than a single sentence however singular. It is not that such syntax is weak; rather, that it is a 'syntax of weakness', pressing on, unable to relinquish its perseverance and at severance". (Ibidem, pp. 82-83).

[11] Ricks' argument bears some similarity to an earlier essay by Georges Bataille who speaks of 'language' as that which determines this regulated world, whose simplifications provide the foundations of our cultures, our activities and our relations, but it does so in so far as it is reduced to a means of these cultures, activities and relations; freed from these servitudes, it is nothing more than a deserted castle whose cracks let in the wind and rain: it is no longer the signifying word, but the defenceless expression death wears as a disguise. (G. Bataille, "Molloy's Silence", in: *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett's Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, Edited by H. Bloom 1988. p. 16).

[12] Christopher Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words*, p. 83.

A Poststructuralist Approach

Steve Connor was to take a very different approach though similarly rejecting the general premise that language is the be all and end all of textual exploration and understanding.[13] Connor's fits neatly into our second category of Beckett criticism in that he attempts to impose a number of poststructuralist readings on Beckett's work.

Connor's interest principally centres on Beckett's use of repetition and in doing so leans heavily on Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze.[14] Though Connor's application of their theories produces an effective reading of Beckett's work, nevertheless much of it has the feeling of something imposed as if the fictions were being used to support the theoretical framework and method and not as one might expect vice versa. We can see this in an earlier forerunner of this approach and one which seems to have influenced Connor's study,[15] that is Butler's *Samuel Beckett and the Meaning of Being*.[16] Only in this case Butler is concerned with a direct and crude application of Heidegger's philosophy and, as he sees it, its natural extension in the form of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Butler goes as far as to claim that: 'Beckett's work

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[13] See: S. Connor, Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text

[14] Connor in particular refers to Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, Routledge and K. Paul 1978 & G. Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, Presses Universitaires de Francz, Paris 1968

[15] Indeed Connor in his notes points to Lance St John Butler 'for a discussion of Heideggerian parallels in Beckett's works'. S. Connor, *Samuel Beckett, Repetition, Theory and Text*. p. 204

[16] L.S. Butler, *Samuel Beckett and The Meaning of Being*, Macmillan Press Landon 1984

could almost be seen as a literary exploration of Heideggerian metaphysics.'[17] Butler in the same chapter also suggests that

> *If his (Beckett's) work is taken as a whole we can see that the heavily ironic treatment of philosophy in the early novels gives way to desperation in the later work that seems rather beyond being helped by metaphysics or even logic*.[18]

Hence a need for a Heideggerian understanding of being. However, Butler misses the point; it is not 'desperation' which drives Beckett or the narrators of his work to abandon metaphysics or logical thought, but rather a sense of desperation is derived, at least partially, from being forced to think in such terms. The difference is a subtle one but crucial to an understanding of Beckett's work for even Heidegger's concept of 'Dasein' is enough to drive one of Beckett's characters to desperation. For example, Butler interprets the concept of 'Dasein' as follows:

> *So the analysis of Dasein (which I shall treat henceforth as an English word) will lead to any possible answers about the meaning of being in general and Dasein is man, but man with a special emphasis, man as the entity that is there'. Not only that, man is also the entity that 'comports itself towards the question of Being: Dasein is the questioner as well as the questioned...*

Thus in fact three categories emerge from Heidegger's opening remarks [to *Being and Time*]: Being, Being-there (Dasein) and

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[17] Ibid, p. 7.
[18] Ibid, p. 13.

the 'understanding' with which Dasein already comports itself towards Being. The 'understanding' is here apparent as an 'inquiry'.[19]

In refutation of Butler it is possible to argue in this context that Dasein as representing both 'Being-there' and the ability to 'enquire' on our individual state of Being in relation to the circumambient universe is precisely what the Beckettian hero attempts to escape from. These are all elements of the world of representation to which both subject and object can be ultimately reduced and thus discarded. We can conclude then that Butler approaches Beckett's work purely as a philosopher and cannot understand that it ultimately attempts to shed all philosophies.[20]

Connor's study, though equally linguistic as theoretical, interestingly falls into the same trap as Butler in attempting to situate Beckett securely in contemporary theory. For example, it is significant and rather predictable that Connor in his attempt to demonstrate how Beckett goes beyond the normal representational world, also marginalises Schopenhauer whose extreme and gloomy philosophy without doubt most strongly influenced Beckett's own thought and uncompromising aesthetic.[21] Connor's mentions him only

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[19] Ibid, p. 10.

[20] We can compare this apparent simplification to Ruby Cohen's location in Beckett's work of the universal 'everyman' or Dearlove's assertion that Beckett is moving towards the presentation of 'archetypes'.

[21] For example, Harold Bloom in his *Introduction to Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett's Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* writes that 'his (Beckett's) Cartesian dualism seems to me less fundamental than his profoundly Schopenhauerian vision' (*Modern Critical Interpretations*, p. I [see also pp. I – 121]).

once in the course of his entire book and that in a brief and rather incidental fashion, and like Butler directly substitutes him for Heidegger.[22]

In not considering Schopenhauer Connor fails to understand what Beckett is attempting to get across in his early essay on *Proust* (11-93). Connor asks (supposing it to be a key problem in Beckett's argument) "but how can the self be an 'essence' and the seat of 'decantation' at the same time".[23]

Bloom interestingly mentions here the clear Cartesian influence that is apparent especially in Beckett's earlier work; however, in suggesting the preeminent influence of Schopenhauer we have a hint here of Beckett's eventual abandonment of Descartes in order to shape his work on more Schopenhauerian lines. I am not saying that Beckett's fictions are an expression of Schopenhauer's philosophy, but only that it is fundamental to the development of his art.

[22] It is interesting to note in this context that Butler fails to mention Schopenhauer even once in the entire course of his study. David H. Helsa, in his major study of Beckett's fictions, also leans heavily on Heidegger for theoretical support (D. H. Helsa, *The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett*, The University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis 1971. See also: R, L. Klawitter, *Being and Time in Samuel Beckett's Novels, Dissertation Abstracts International*, Ann Arbor, MI. 1966, 26, 7320; Livio Dobrez, "Beckett and Heidegger" in the Southern Review: *Literary and Interdisciplinary Essays 7*, South Australia 1974. pp. 140-53; A. Thither, "Wittgenstein, Heidegger, the Unnameable, and Some Thoughts on the Status of Voice in Fiction in Samuel Beckett", in: *Humanistic Perspectives*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus 1983, pp. 80-90).

[23] S. Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 48. Connor is referring to the following passages from the Proust essay: "The individual is the seat of a constant decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours." (Beckett, *Proust and the Three Dialogues*, p. 15).

"But here, in that gouffe interdit a nos sondes", is stored the essence of ourselves, the best of our many selves and their concretions that the simplest call the world, the best because accumulated slyly and painfully and patiently under the nose of our vulgarity, the fine essence of a smothered divinity whose whispered 'disfazione' is drowned in the healthy bawling of

Yet Connor so conspicuously ignores Schopenhauer where the answer to this paradox so clearly lies. For this divide presented in the *Proust* essay is crucial to any attempt to understand the intentions lying within Beckett's artistry.

Beckett and Schopenhauer

On looking at Schopenhauer's seminal work, World as Will and Representation, we find he employs Kant's division of mind into known and knowing. For example, in Volume Two of his great work Schopenhauer sums up the knowing' which corresponds to the world of representation and includes both the individual subject as well as paradoxically the so-called objective world of things.

> *The fundamental mistake of all systems is the failure to recognize the truth, namely that the intellect and matter are correlatives, in other words, the one exists only for the other; both stand and fall together; the one is only the other's reflex. They are in fact one and the same thing, considered from two opposite points of view; and this one thing – here I am anticipating - is the phenomenon of the will or of the thing-in-itself. (Schopenhauer 1966 vol.ii. 15-16)*[24]

After reducing the 'knowing' or understandable universe to merely representative aspects or 'phenomenon of the will' Schopenhauer later goes on to clarify this distinction between

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an all embracing appetite, the pearl that may give the lie to our carapace of paste and pewter. (Ibid, p. 31).

[24] Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, Volume II, Translated by E.F.J. Payne, Dover Publications. New York 1966, p. 15-16.

the phenomenal world of the knowing subject and that of the 'known' (will or thing-in-itself). He further suggests how the thing-in-itself becomes the true 'known' of the individual.

> *In consequence of all this, on the path of objective knowledge, thus starting from the representation, we shall never get beyond the representation, i.e., the phenomenon. We shall therefore remain at the outside of things; we shall never be able to penetrate into their inner nature, and investigate what they are in themselves. So far I agree with Kant. But now, as the counterpoise to this truth, I have stressed the other truth that we are not merely the knowing subject, but we ourselves are also among those realities or entities we require to know, that we ourselves are the thing-in-itself. Consequently, a way from within stands open to us to that real inner nature of things to which we cannot penetrate from without. It is, so to speak, a subterranean passage, a secret alliance, which, as if by treachery, places us all at once in the fortress that could be taken by attack from without. Precisely as such, the thing-in-itself can come into consciousness only quite directly, namely by itself being conscious of itself; to try to know it objectively is to desire something contradictory. Everything objective is representation, consequently appearance is in fact mere phenomenon of the brain.*[25]

The known for Schopenhauer is the Will, which is effectively the seat of primal desire and of those elements that essentially constitute our innate characteristics, not only connecting us with our species, but also predetermining an essentially fixed individual personality. The 'intelligible

[25] Ibid, p. 195.

character' as Schopenhauer called it, which we come to understand (if ever) only over time.[26] We can justifiably then make the direct connection between what Beckett terms the 'essence' (a term Schopenhauer himself used interchangeably with the Will)[27] with this idea of a predetermined or innate character. As for 'decantation of self this can be taken synonymously with the knowing or rational parts of consciousness. This is largely created through experience and abstract understanding and therefore unlike the known or Will it is unstable in its identity, and relies in its consistency on social positioning and language, and liable to change and fragmentation depending on context and externalities. The knowing part of consciousness cannot affect the known, though the known itself certainly has a large say in how we respond and deal with the world.

[26] The character of each individual man, in so far as it is individual and not entirely included in that of the species, can be as a special idea, corresponding to a particular act of objectification of the will. This act itself would then be his intelligible character, and his empirical would be the phenomenon. 'Ihe empirical character is entirely determined by the intelligible character that is groundless, that is to say, will as thing-in-itself ... The empirical character must in the course of a lifetime furnish a copy of the intelligible character, and cannot turn out differently from what is demanded by the latter's inner nature. (Ibid, p. 158).

[27] For example, Schopenhauer considers that: 'It is only this application of reflection which no longer lets us stop at the phenomenon, but leads us onto the thing-in-itself. Phenomenon is representation and nothing more. All representation, be it of whatever kind it may, all object is phenomenon. But only the will is thing-in-itself, as such it is not representation at all, but in toto genere different therefrom. It is that of which all representation, all object is the phenomenon, the visibility, the objectivity. It is the innermost *essence* [My italics], the kemel, of every particular thing and also of the whole.' (Ibid, p. 110).

Connor's failure to see this is a serious one, for though he does not take language as the be all and end all of his analysis, he ultimately leans in that direction. In his effective discussion on repetition Connor concentrates on the double tension it creates:

> *Repetition can involve both the promotion of the materiality of a sign and the erasure of that materiality. Repetition can often be read as an attempt to close the gap between word and thing, even though it is repetition which instantly opens the gap.*[28]

What he is effectively expressing here is an awareness that repetition can act through its very consistency to stabilise the connection between word and object, while at the same time reinforces to us that the whole process is a linguistic device, and so the separation between them is made all the more clear. Yet Connor in effect gets no further than this and so does not go on to look at the accommodation of the creative process or drive itself. However, it seems to me that Beckett seeks a language subordinate to desire and not vice versa: what language contains beyond meaning and to which the repetitiveness of linguistic expression is only a shadow. For repetition is a way of both inclusion and conforming to the Will.

Conclusion

This connection with Schopenhauer is crucial to our understanding of Beckett's work and though itself is equally open to misreading, nevertheless, is too easily discarded in

[28] S. Conner, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*, p. 33.

attempts to fit Beckett securely with more contemporary textual reading and theory.[29] This has been the principle fault of the second criteria of criticism I have broadly drawn attention to here. It reads more like an imposing of theoretical perspectives than a true opening of the text. However, as I suggested we can see from this that both critical approaches, for the most part, are only concerned with the knowing, the world of experience and understanding, of representation. Ricks, despite his criticism of the formalist approach stopped at the edge of the dying word, only able to suggest what lies beyond in that vast uncontainable space, lying at the very edge of linguistic possibility; while to appreciate Beckett's work fully we must go that little bit further and attempt to understand something of his search for the known.

This distinction is critical to an understanding of Beckett's work and what we need to grasp is that here we have an art form, which ironically recognises the failure of artistic expression, and yet paradoxically fully accepts, and indeed incorporates, the definite need for such an expression.

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[29] Deidre Bair, for example, writing on Beckett's life during 1928-9, emphasises in particular the growing influence of Schopenhauer: '*Schopenhauer's ideas would become in later years the philosophical foundation of much of Beckett's thought and the system with which he felt most at ease* [My italics], but at this time, his thoughts were still far-reaching and chaotic. He worried about the impossibility of language and the repeated failure to communicate on any meaningful level. He was coming to the Schopenhauerian conclusion that, since the only function of intellect is to assist man in achieving his will, the best role for himself would be the total avoidance of any participation in a world governed by will. The doctrine suited him but at the time made him uneasy. He coped by returning to Descartes and mindlessly filling the pages of his notebooks with Descartes' thoughts and sayings.' (D. Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. Vintage. London 1990, pp. 83-4).

Commentators on Beckett's work have generally stood only on the side of the knowing in which are located problems of language, identity and tradition, but have not attempted to understand the nature of the known, the force or set of characteristics that leads the individual to make an expression of these things in the first place.

In relation to the above research, I propose that in attempting to explore the nature and terms of Beckett's developing aesthetic it is important firstly to look at the way he challenges the knowing (in Schopenhauerian terms) in order to point us beyond the limitations and falsehoods of representation. Secondly, it becomes necessary to demonstrate how Beckett, in achieving this, seeks to incorporate or find the known: that which essentially lies beyond representation.[30]

[30] Interestingly Li-Ling Tseng in an article published in 1992 suggests that a tension exists within Beckett's later prose fictions which is generated a conflict between a 'syntax of energy' and a 'syntax of weakness'. We have already touched on the characteristics of Beckett's syntax of weakness in relation to Christopher Ricks, however Tseng isolates another form of syntax within Beckett's work, one which 'still maintains a control of human will in (the) process creative (p.103). However, in spite of similarities, this division between different forms of syntax does not conform to the Schopenhauerian split we have defined here (Li-Ling Tseng, "Samuel Beckett's For to End Yet Again: A Conflict Between 'Syntax of Energy' and 'Syntax of Weakness'", in: *Twentieth Century Literature: A Scholarly and Critical Journal* 38:1, 1992 Spring. pp. 101-23.

CHAPTER TWO

Beyond the Death Principle: a Study of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*

Perhaps the most defining feature of the so-called 'Beckettian character' consists of the desire or drive to persist, to keep on going, no matter how worn the body or depleted the environment in which it inhabits. Indeed, within the confines of their stark fictional settings, Beckett's troubled creations simply do not succumb to despair or even die. The purpose of this article is to explore the reasons why this specific trait is so central to the moribund of characters which litter both Beckett's prose and drama, because in solving this enigma it becomes possible to understand Beckett's whole artistic approach and the central influence on which it was shaped. For the sake of concision, the present study will focus mainly on Book One of the *Trilogy*: *Molloy*. The reason for starting with this specific work, is simply that by the time the author begins the *Trilogy* there is a clear and marked contrast with earlier fictions, such as *Dream Of Fair to Middling Women*, *Murphy* and *Watt*, indicating that by this point he had largely formulated the aesthetic which would shape the later works, particularly the extreme representational reductionism characteristic of the late novellas *Ill Seen Ill Said*

and *Worstward Ho* and such dramatic works as *Quad* and *Rockaby*.[31]

Where death is concerned, Beckett often draws a grotesquely comic connection with birth and excrement.[32] A powerful example of this is to be found in the pages of *Molloy*, when the title character contemplates suicide in

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[31] This middle to later period, in terms of Beckett's work, marks both a conversion from the French language as the primary medium for his art and the well documented transformation of style from the arguably more Joycean novels, to a more definite affirmation of ideas concerning art and creativity already expressed to some extent in the nascent prose and critical writings.

[32] It is interesting to note, in this context, that William Hutchings in an article published in 1985 describes Beckett's *How It Is* in terms of a 'peristaltic journey'; and goes on to consider (with something of Beckett's own dark humour) that 'The central metaphor of *How It Is* - that the narrator (and by extension every human being) is a turd in the cosmic digestive process of time - is a metaphysical conceit startling as any of Donne's, embodying an excremental view of the world that surpasses even Swift's in its all inclusiveness'. (Hutchings 1985: 321-2) Hutchings ends the article considering the protagonists movement towards annihilation or re-birth: '... Despite its resemblance to the marmorean geometric solids of Beckett's later prose works - the white rotunda of *Imagination Dead Imagine*, the almost white cube of *Ping*, the yellow-lit cylinder of *The Lost Ones* - the chamber of *How It Is* is no mere reification. Instead, it is the necessary and appropriate end for the narrator's journey through the cosmic digestive tract, the opposite site for his release from the burdensome obligations of speech and movement that have characterized his subsistence for so long. Until the unknown moment of his release occurs, however, the narrator of *How It Is*, like the rest of Beckett's characters, "must go on", alternately tormenting and being tormented, never knowing whether his next collapse will be - as he hopes - the last.'(Hutchings 1985: 330-1). Andrew Christensen sees this use of the scatological as essentially part of Beckett's exploration of the human condition and this searching for a base pattern which is the veiled code of the species: 'Ultimately, scatological art makes us face excrement, and in facing excrement we face dilemma: we find it disgusting, yet produce it – we are the source of our own disgust. What are we to do? One option is to laugh. Molloy's presentation of his own toilet paper as identification and observation of human and dog excrement intermixed reminds us of our nature and condition. (Christensen 2017: 90-104).

a squalid back alley (Beckett 1979: 56-9). He imagines its use for illicit love making along with defecating dogs and humans: In drawing the two so feelingly together there is the strong sense that life is only the beginning of a long and far from gentle decay. Perhaps it is this and Molloy's own estrangement from the world, which leads him to stand uncommunicative next to a young vagrant sheltering in a doorway. The suggestion is that he sees himself in that solitary figure whom he cannot reach out to; just as he longed to embrace the two nameless figures A and C (10-13), providing them with algebraic terms so that in this equation he can readily convert them, filling each with the significance of his own desires as they pass by on the quiet road. Further prompting Molloy to imagine a possible meeting first between A and C and then they with him; and in the anxiety of rejection begins to shape the returning C into an image of himself which finally collapses into nothing. Perhaps it is all these things, in the alley alone, telling Molloy to kill himself with the old rusty blade; and yet he simply cannot do it, he has never been able to bear pain. The irony here is strong, for the greatest pain is derived from the long rigour of life.

In this failure, despite everything, to kill himself (and he informs us such attempts have been made before) we have a marked departure from Freud's idea of a powerful death as well as life drive.[33] Here there is only a strange affirmation of

[33] In Freud's essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he rather speculatively discusses the possibility of 'death drives'. Beckett, in Molloy's narrative, appears to parody part of Freud's essay as if to comically dispel this notion of competing drives that might ultimately lead to human extinction. For example, when Moran, speculating on the mode of travel he and his son might take, has a rush of pleasure at the thought of being able to use his

life even at the thought of death, strange because it is equally incomprehensible to Molloy, who recognises fully, in that moment, his greatest suffering is to exist; however, he gently resigns himself to fate.

It is important to stress at this point that a number of commentators have, quite wrongly, considered Beckett's work as manifesting the presence of the Freudian 'death drive' as one of the key forces underpinning existence. Raymond T. Riva, for example, in an article published as early as 1970 made the following connection between Beckett and Freud:

> [...] *let us look for a moment at Man's instinctual apparatus. According to Freud, there are two complexes of instincts, or drives. One is Eros, the other is the death instinct* [...]

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autocycle and laments that 'thus was inscribe the fatal pleasure principle'. (Beckett: 91) More subtly, Beckett plays on the analogy of the 'fort/da' game employed by Freud to describe the compulsion to repeat - a strategy described in Beyond the Pleasure Principle through which the child is able to assert an individual sense of control of the fact that he or she is denied complete access to the mother. Beckett consciously parodies this process through a verbal reconstruction of the fort/ da: 'At the same time I satisfied a deep and doubtless unacknowledged need, the need to have a Ma, and to proclaim it audibly. For before you say Mag, you say Ma, inevitably. And Da in my part of the world means father.' (Beckett 1979: 18). The name Malloy gives to his mother is Mag – Mag because the first syllable for the word Ma – while the final letter 'g' produces the effect of obliterating and spitting on it, each time Molloy speaks the name he spits on his own mother. However there is a curious difference in this endearing trait from that of the Freudian conception for Molloy's act of revenge seems more allied by the fact that his mother could have thought to bring him into this terrible purgatorial struggle in the first place, rather than on her in any way leaving him (remember that for Beckett, as for Schopenhauer, original sin consists in simply being born, thus there cannot be any alleviation even through a process of admitting guilt, to which there is ultimately no recourse). Also, we must consider that Molloy's image of himself is so tied up with his mother's that this act effectively must threaten to obliterate his own identity.

> *Obviously this urge to non-being is subtle and repressed from our consciousness, but manifests itself in a great many ways. And Beckett's works imply again and again the power - even the desirability - of our instinct toward social disintegration. Death, or rather an apparent death, a state in which all appears dead save the ability to speech and monologue seems highly prized. Beckett's characters would often seem to aspire to just such a state or non-state of being ... And it is quite possible that Beckett, by playing upon our totally unconscious and equally unknowable desire to return to an inorganic state (the death-wish) is striking a most sympathetic and responsive chord within us.* (Riva 1970: 163)

Similarly John Fletcher claims that the heroes of Beckett's Trilogy 'long for a state of being like death'. (Fletcher: 147) Although Fletcher is careful to underline that this is a state 'like death' rather than actual 'death', it nevertheless implies a denial of life, a definite 'longing' or desire for non-existence which drives the principle protagonists of Beckett's fictions. However, as we shall see this apparent desire is not a drive towards death but, in fact, its very opposite: the affirmation of life in a terrible purgatorial world of representation.

I would suggest that Beckett turns to Schopenhauer here rather than to Freud; as Dedrie Bair observes, Beckett as early as 1928–1929 and while still a student, became fascinated with the writings of Schopenhauer's seminal work, *World as Will and Representation*:

> *Schopenhauer's ideas would become in later years the philosophical foundation of much of Beckett's thought [...] He worried about the impossibility of language and the repeated failure to communicate on any meaningful level. He was*

> *coming to the Schopenhauerian conclusion that, since the only function of intellect is to assist man in achieving his will, the best role for himself would be the total avoidance of any participation in a world governed by will.* (Bair: 83-4)

Freud himself, ironically enough, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and when tentatively alluding to the idea of a set of death drives, suggests that in one sense the aim of life is death and considers 'We have unwittingly steered our course into the harbour of Schopenhauer's philosophy. For him 'death is the true purpose of life". (Freud 1991: 322) In the way he employs this quotation from Schopenhauer, Freud demonstrates how far he misunderstands him. Schopenhauer may be saying (and there is an enormous paradox in this) that we should 'make' death the purpose of our lives, but this for Schopenhauer is the product of a conscious letting go of the will-to-live, and not the product of a natural drive towards death. Far from it, there is always and only for Schopenhauer the will-to-live[34] in whatever form that should take. Freud

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[34] For example, Schopenhauer here emphatically defines the will purely in terms of the 'will-to-live'. The will, considered purely in itself is devoid of knowledge, and is only a blind, irresistible urge, as we see it appear in inorganic and vegetable matter and in their laws, and also in the vegetative part of our own life '[...] We therefore called the phenomenal world the mirror, the objectivity. Of the will; *and as what he wills is always life, just because this is nothing but the presentation of that willing for the representation, it is immaterial and a mere pleonasm if, instead of simply saying "the will", we say "the will-to-live* [*My* italics]. As the will is the thing-in-itself, the inner content, the essence of the world, but life, the visible world, the phenomenon, is only the mirror of the will, this world will accompany the will as inseparably as a body is accompanied by its shadow; and if will exists, then life, the world, will exist. Therefore life is certain to the will-to-live, and as long as we are filled with the will-to-live we need not be apprehensive for our existence, even at the sight of death.' (Schopenhauer

argues (suggesting a link with modern physics in the form of entropy) that living matter strives to regain its inanimate form. (Freud 1991: 306–15) Indeed, evolution itself has its retrogressive as well as its progressive sides, and we can see just as much a tendency to revert in form as to go forward, just as we can trace the evolution of humanity from its earliest origins by looking at foetal development, first exhibiting fish-like characteristics. This in itself certainly does not establish a death drive. Schopenhauer argues that all forms of matter are a manifestation of the Will, and in this he locates the emergence of every natural force from gravity to electricity (Schopenhauer 1966: vol.i.63-5); and although these forces compete with each other and there is a continual process of change and ascendancy, the ever shifting balance of creation, nevertheless in higher manifestations of the Will (living organisms), all these forces work together in a single unity or idea (Schopenhauer establishes this largely through the Platonic theory of ideas presented in The Republic[35]) which overrides any conflict of its components to assert life and life alone.

1966: vol.i.275) Following this hypothesis we can conclude that according to Schopenhauer's philosophy there can be no drive toward death, the Will is the force of life itself and has no prevailing or counter force. Conflict and destruction are merely part of the intense struggle for life and continuance.

[35] Schopenhauer connects the primary phenomena or representations of the Will with Plato's world of 'eternal ideas'. '...every universal, original force of nature is, in its inner essence, nothing but the objectification of the will, and we call every such grade an eternal *Idea* in Plato's sense. But the *law of nature* is the relation of the Idea to the form of the phenomenon.'(Schopenhauer 1966: vol.i.134) However, there is a fundamental difference between Schopenhauer and Plato's conception. For example, Plato considered these 'eternal ideas' to be the ultimate template for all the various forms to be found in the world; Schopenhauer, however, has the Will for his template from which these ideas are merely physical manifestations. It is quite possible that

It is interesting that Beckett should himself focus, even if momentarily, on suicide to demonstrate this affirmation of life in a way that we find so clearly presented in the works of Schopenhauer. For suicide is paradoxically in Schopenhauerian terms one of the ultimate affirmations of the will-to-live.

> *Far from being a denial of the will, suicide is a phenomenon of the will's strong affirmation. For denial has its essential nature in the fact that the pleasures of life, not its sorrows, are shunned. The suicide wills life and is dissatisfied merely with the conditions on which it has come to him. Therefore he gives up by no means the will-to-live, but merely life, since he destroys the, individual phenomenon.* (398)

In other words suicide is the great triumph of the ego, not over life but over the terrible conditions it may contain. In lacking the will to kill himself, despite all, Molloy is denying the ego, and is on the road, according to Schopenhauer, to a more definite salvation.[36] For Schopenhauer interestingly

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Schopenhauer also has in mind here Plato's *Timaeus* (*Timaeus and Critias* 1977: 40–2). It is in this earlier work that Plato talks of a divine creator who produces a plan or pattern on which the universe is ultimately formed.

[36] If the Will, the primary force of life, can only ever be the will-to-live then logically it is only through a process of completely letting go of the Will that one can be free of Man's otherwise eternal purgatorial existence. 'There appears to be a special kind of suicide, quite different from the ordinary, which has perhaps not yet been adequately verified. This is voluntarily chosen death by starvation at the highest degree of asceticism. Its manifestation, however, has always been accompanied, and thus rendered vague and obscure, by much religious fanaticism and even superstition. Yet it seems that the complete denial of the will can reach that degree where even the necessary will to maintain vegetative life of the body, by the assimilation of nourishment, cease to exist. This kind of suicide is so far from being the result of the will-to-live, that such a completely resigned ascetic

departs in this from one of the most important tenets of Christian belief while holding to its essential law. To deny one's life in Christian terms is a powerful sin against God's creation in seeking to forsake the struggle and be rid of it. We find for example that in Dante's *Inferno* the suicides have a particularly low status even amongst the damned and are placed in one of Hell's deepest tiers without their original bodily form (Dante 1961: canto xiii), symbolising its former abuse and denial (which after all is cast in God's image). Schopenhauer, on the other hand offers virtually the reverse of this when he claims that suicide in affirming the will-to-live effectively damns us to endless purgation, while to simply and passively let go of the will in all things is the true and only real hope in the form of complete self negation.[37] However this effectively runs against all natural drive and desire, and therefore is a difficult condition to achieve. I suggest in this we can see the strong influence of the Eastern teachings contained in the Vedas.[38]

If we look at the way death is evoked in the novel we find Molloy in his mother's *chambre* wondering whether she

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ceases to live merely because he has completely ceased to will. (Schopenhauer 1966: vo.i.400-1)

[37] '... this consideration is the only one that can permanently console us, when, on the one hand, we have recognized incurable suffering and endless misery as essential to the phenomenon of the will, to the world, and on the other see the world melt away with abolished will, and retain before us only empty nothingness.' (1966: vol.41)

[38] As Schopenhauer himself acknowledges when he considers that 'Here indeed the close relationship between life and dream is brought out for us very clearly. We will not be ashamed to confess it, after it has been recognized and expressed by many great men. The Vedas and Puranas know no better simile for the whole knowledge of the actual world, called by them the web of Maya, than the dream, and they use none more frequently.' (Schopenhauer 1966: vol.i.17).

was already dead when he arrived, dead 'enough to bury' (Beckett 1979: 9) anyway and this gives a sense that for Molloy his mother never quite leaves him. The space she has left is filled by the insubstantial presence of her ghost, or a faint but insistent voice, as in the evocation of the dead in the dramatic work, Embers (Beckett 1990: 251-264), in which the voice of the living Henry, symbolically figured on the sea's shore, is mingled not only with the sound of the ocean, but with the voices of the dead animated beyond his control, so they seem more than mere memories. Yet despite this they never stand within the terms of their own individuality, and are hardly the substantial shades of Dante's vision; we even come to wonder if Henry himself is not simply one of those voices of the unstill dead.

Another such presentiment occurs when Moran begins his journey to find Molloy; he notes the spot where he is finally to rest. A stone is already there 'a simple Latin cross'(Beckett 1979: 124), but they (village and religious authorities) have not let him put his name on it yet. He notes it is his 'plot in perpetuity', immortality in death and that he sometimes 'smiled, as if...already dead' indeed the mortal grin of a skull, and yet as he passes the grave yard he is aware that 'The land descends, the wall rises, higher and higher. Soon we were faring below the dead'. (1979: 124)

The language is clichéd and the archaic 'faring' with its poetic and heroic associations acts as a reminder of Anchises descent into Hades, (Virgil 1968: 147-74) breathing a little life into the dead language, for now it is the living who seem to pass beneath the dead. We think of the myth of the ancient Egyptian sun God who during night passed down through the

dead lands only to rise again in the morning,[39] though here there is no promise of resurrection, only the recognition that life contains death: The boundaries between life and death blur and spill and like the poetry of Rilke becomes heavy with the presence of the unresurrected dead.[40] Beckett develops this awareness very effectively in his dramatic works. Death then is an everyday part of life, not some terrible drive towards destruction but a necessary cycle of change and decay, in which the dead nevertheless still have their part to play.

Beckett's purpose in directing our gaze away from a concept of the 'death drive' in *Molloy* is to begin the process of turning us, the reader / audience, towards the idea of Will in the Schopenhauerian sense of the word. As Piotr Woycicki writes, 'In his later works the representational aspirations are reduced and this makes the structural performance more visible.' (Woyciecki 2012: 137). Although Woycicki in his article is concerned with the 'mathematical code' underlying Beckett's performance art; nevertheless, it underlines Beckett's method of removing the representational elements of his work in order to express a recurring pattern which has a definite structure, corresponding with Schopenhauer's concept of the Will; and, I would suggest, with modern mathematical

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[39] The following short extract relates to the Egyptian sun God Amon-Ra: '...Each hour centres on the sun god in his barque, and around him are the beings who inhabit that region ... As the sun god passes, he addresses the beings of each hour, who respond in welcome and are revived by the light he sheds ... Throughout the night, the sun god had to contend with his arch-enemy, the snake Apep, but in the last hours ... he himself entered a great snake from which he emerged rejuvenated, to be reborn at dawn. (Willis 1993)

[40] Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Selected Poetry,* Picador, Edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell, 1887. See especially the *Duino Elegies,* pp. 151-205.

modeling relating to so-called chaos theory. Audrey Wesser alludes to something similar when she considers that The Trilogy with its '…nightmarish recurrences of plot and character gives one the sense of Beckett's having created a kind of alternate universe, were events are generated from a combination of a fixed set of narrative elements.' In other words the whole reflects a complex pattern which emerges from a few recurring fundamentals (Wesser 2011: 248).

Schopenhauer relates the Will to Plato's concept of universal forms in that it acts as the one true reality from which all other things arise. Though there is a crucial difference between the platonic and the Schopenhauerian[41] theories, one which is equally valid when considering the nature of Beckett's fictions. For example, Plato thought that the various things and creatures which inhabit the world found their origin in some original archetype or fundamental idea. Schopenhauer on the other hand, describes the apparent visual universe, characterised by its constant state of change and decay, as emerging from a formless base pattern, which nevertheless, contains the primary characteristics or tendencies from which these ever transforming shapes and forms emerge. To take this further, Plato is clearly suggesting that the world's intelligible because it has been well designed by an intelligent creator. Schopenhauer's universe is correspondingly even bleaker, with none of the fixity or surety of Plato's vision, for here in effect we have pattern without design or purpose. Purpose and intelligibility are only created

[41] Rilke Rainer (1987), *The Selected Poetry.* See especially the *Duino Elegies,* pp. 151-205.

through those denizens of the world who have acquired consciousness and therefore, shape a world of representation according to their desires and needs. We can see this expressed by both Beckett and Schopenhauer in the following two quotations; the first extract is taken from Beckett's Proust essay written in 1931 when Beckett was only just beginning his career as a writer:

> *A book could be written on the significance of music in the work of Proust … The influence of Schopenhauer on this apsect of the Proustian demonstration is unquestionable. Schopenhauer rejects the Leibnitzian view of music as 'occult arithmetic,' and his aesthetic separates it from other arts, which can only produce the idea with its comitant phenomena, whereas music is the idea itself, unaware of the world phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe, apprehended not in space but in time only, and consequently untouched by the telelogical hypothesis. This essential quality of music is distorted by the listener who, being an impure subject, insists on giving a figure to that which is ideal and invisisble … thus, by definition, opera is a hideous corruption of this most immaterial of all the arts.* (Beckett 1965: 91–2)

The second quotation is taken from volume one of *World as Will and Representation*:

> *Now the nature of man consists in fact that his will strives, is satisfied, strives anew, and so on: in fact his happiness and well-being consists only in transition from desire to satisfaction, and from this fresh desire, such transition going forward rapidly. For the non-appearance of satisfaction is suffering; the empty longing for a new desire is languor, boredom. Thus, corresponding to this, the nature of melody*

> *is a constant digression and deviation from the keynote in a thousand ways, not only to the harmonious intervals, the third and dominant, but to every tone, to the dissonant seventh, and to the extreme intervals; yet there always follows a final key note.* (Schopenhauer 1966: 260)

We can see that in the first quotation Beckett is concerned to present Schopenhauer's ideas concerning music. That music, at least in the visual or tactile sense, is, unlike the other arts, outside of the normal world of representation;[42] for Schopenhauer the world of representation contains the whole of the phenomenal world, right down to the very rocks we stand on. However, the listener, through culture, education and imagination, gives it a shape and representational form it would not otherwise have. Music is the 'idea' itself, in other words it is like the Schopenhaurian concept of the Will which exists outside of time and consequently forms the thing-in-itself or base pattern on

[42] As Francois-Nicolas Vozel observes: 'Beckett in *Proust* (1931) follows Schopenhauer in casting music as a superior art form in relation to which literature appears impoverished and necessarily lacking' (Vozel 217: 21). However, I disagree with Vozel when he asserts that 'In Beckett's post-Schopenhauerian universe, art tends to reveal a "musical unconsciousness". Such an unconsciousness leads to a decentering of the characters; they know nothing about it even when it is obviously "ordering their actions and desires"' (217: 23). Vozel clearly underestimates the influence of Schopenhauer on Beckett's later works; yes, there is a kind of musical unconsciousness in that we have the sort of recurring patterns we might find in music, which indeed appear to be ordering the lives of the characters, but this is not some post- Schopenhauerian device, but rather an attempt to convey a sense of the Will or set of repeated characteristics which codify the species. In other words, it is an affirmation that within Beckett's developing aesthetic he includes the most fundamental concepts presented in *World as Will and Representation*.

which all else is predicated.[43] In the second quotation it is Schopenhauer who employs the music analogy to describe the nature of man: human life resembles music in that it is full of variations, 'digression' and 'deviation', stops and starts; yet it will always return to the overall melody or 'key notes': set of characteristics or repeating pattern.

This description offered by Schopenhauer strikingly fits the pattern which unfolds in Molloy's life as he moves from seeming 'satisfaction' to 'languor' and 'boredom' and back again in the course of his travels. Indeed, this sketches the life of the Beckettian character in general, because what Beckett is searching for ultimately within his own art is not the characteristics of the individual, the Will or primary characteristics on which a single person is built, but that of all humanity. In other words, he attempts to capture the indelible trace of the species which lies beyond representation.

In the course of this article we have isolated the nature of what we have termed Beckett's 'aesthetic'. The textual evidence we have uncovered so far strongly suggests two underpinning strands which clearly begin to mark the key developments in, and scope of, Beckett's fictions; two elements which correspond with Schopenhauer's division of the individual consciousness into the known[44] and the

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[43] Schopenhauer in World as will and Representation claims that music is an 'entirely universal language, whose distinctness surpasses the world of perception itself' (Schopenhauer 1966: vol.i.256). He goes on to further claim that 'music is as immediate an objectification of the will as the world is' (257); it is because of this that music has the power to convey something of the 'nature of man himself'.

[44] 'The known' corresponds to the Will, consisting of the primary characteristics on which all things are built and which, by understanding our own innate characteristics, we can come to 'know' over time.

knowing[45]. This dichotomy of intention is particularly advanced and refined within the prose and drama of Beckett's later period. Firstly, we noted that the *Molloy* text far from endorsing and incorporating the idea and sense of a death drive, as a number of critics have erroneously suggested, in fact stages an implicit denial of such a negative force, and, in its stead, strongly asserts the will-to-live (as defined by Schopenhauer). In fact the text, by deliberately setting out to discard Freud's theory, would seem to support the hypothesis that the will-to-live is the only real primary force within nature. And as a confirming proof of this we have already begun to see that it is not through a willing for death, that Molloy (or the other protagonists of *The Trilogy* and the later novellas for that matter) will seek freedom from their purgatorial existence, but rather by a process of letting go of the Will; the denial of desire itself, even if that desire is for death. Yet, even this course will be rejected in favour of simply letting go of the trappings of representation rather than seeking a way out of life itself. This brings us to the second strand of Beckett's fictions, that is to expose the illusory world we have created through our cultures and societies which obscures something of the fundamental nature and characteristics of this otherwise inexplicable force; that urge or will-to-live which will force the principle characters of Beckett's work to go on even when they are devoid of reason and purpose.

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[45] 'The knowing' relates to the phenomenal or representational world, which we experience through our senses as well as social and cultural perception etc.

CHAPTER THREE

An Imaginary Author: *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*

In the course of this article, on the final two books of The Trilogy, I will principally look at Beckett's attempt to expose and challenge the illusory or representational nature of our world. In doing this I will also demonstrate how Beckett seeks to uncover the nature of the known or will-to-live, that which Schopenhauer terms, in preference to Kant's phraseology, the thing-in-itself. It is important to recognise from the outset, however, that this force which underpins the progress of Beckett's protagonists is by nature a complex composite of various primary characteristics: a set of characteristics which make-up the Beckettian hero, though Beckett will extend this in order to suggest something of the fundamental patterns of life itself. As means of understanding how these characteristics relate to each other I will seek to make certain connections and parallels with two relatively modern scientific theories: the world of the quantum and Chaos theory. As I shall demonstrate there is some evidence that Beckett was significantly influenced by certain aspects of Quantum Mechanics; also we shall find emerging, from Beckett's heroic attempt to glimpse truth behind the chimeras of Western culture, a striking resemblance to modern ideas of

chaos. It is important to note in contrast, however, that Beckett, by the time we reach his middle period, adopts a wholly different direction to that of science and philosophy. For example, we can quite validly generalise that the philosopher or scientist seeks to turn knowledge into some form of meaning or understanding and this ideal is as much a product of culture and society as any more definite programme. Beckett, however, is aware that to glimpse the real one must step outside conventional ideas of understanding and perception, and in so doing reach beyond the representational in order to sense the blind world of pure substance or Will. As a means of understanding this further we will return briefly to the *Molloy* text.

The Dance of the Bees

Toward the end of *Molloy* we find that the struggling Moran is, in part, sustained on his long homeward journey by the thought of bees (Beckett 1979: 155-6). To such a keen keeper they are like the strange object Molloy cannot fathom and so consequently does not have the fear of being able to reduce to a single definite meaning[46]. For Moran the precise dance of the

[46] Molloy describes in detail the affect this mysterious *object* still has upon him: This strange instrument I think I still have somewhere, for I could never bring myself to sell it, even in my worst need, for I could never understand what possible purpose it could serve, nor even contrive the faintest hypothesis on the subject. And from time to time I took it from my pocket and would have gazed upon it, with an astonished and affectionate gaze, ifl had not been capable of affection. But for a certain time I think it inspired me with a kind of veneration, for there was no doubt in my mind that it was not an object of virtue, but that it had a most specific function always to be hidden from me. I could therefore puzzle over it endlessly without the least

bees seems so unlike the 'frivolous' dance of human existence, and yet it too is filled with an excess of possibility. Though able to trace meaning within the complex symmetry of movement, it would take forever to understand fully, yet unlike human life Moran seems to sense it is understandable. Perhaps this is simply because Moran himself is in the position of imposing, as an outsider, a sense of meaning and purpose on the hive.

> *And I said with rapture, here is something I can study all my life, and never understand. And all during this long journey home, when I racked my mind for a little joy in store, the thought of my bees and their dance was the nearest thing to comfort. For I was still eager for my little joy, from time to time! And I admitted with good grace the possibility that this dance was after all no better than the dances of the people of the west, frivolous and meaningless. But for me sitting near my sun drenched hives, it would almost be a noble thing to contemplate, too noble to be sullied by the cogitations of a man like me, exiled in his manhood. And I would never do my bees the wrong I had done my God, to whom I had been taught to ascribe my angers, fears, desires, and even my body.* (Beckett 1979: 156)

Yet Moran, towards the end of his contemplations, is almost forced to admit that he is wrong. Perhaps the bees hold no more meaning than the life of Man. However, by giving them less they seem to offer more, they become something

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risk. For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be 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. But I would rather not affirm anything upon this subject. (59-60)

'almost' noble, while God is sadly reduced by attributing to him all human weakness and failure. The exile looks up to God and is able to make little sense of the world; as in Tennyson's *In Memoriam* he can only trace the patterns of 'a human face'.[47] On looking down at another world, at the hive, he can keep it free from such human association and trace there some kind of definable pattern he is unable to find within his own existence.

Obviously Moran can only form his interpretations from outside the hive and, as he recognises, so much lies beyond his comprehension. In this sense, despite Moran's considerations, we can see that much of the meaning ascribed to that tiny social order is an imposition from another and greater structure lying outside of it, the world of Moran and of Man. We might, if we take a wider perspective, see our own world likewise. It is doubtful, for example, that the bees recognise the beauty and complexity of their own dance, only registering a set of signals or codes to which essential information is imparted

It is clearly no accident then that Moran is given to contemplating the bees and we, the readers, are expected to make such associations, like modem day Mandevilles,[48] with

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[47] What find I in the highest place, / But mine own phantom chanting hymns? / And on the depths of death there swims / The reflex of a human face. (Tennyson 1935: 278)

[48] Bernard de Mandeville 1679 - 1733. In 1714 and 1723 Mandeville published a satirical work, based on one of his earlier pieces *(The Crumbling Hive, Or Knaves Turned Honest,* 1705), composed of doggerel verse and prose commentaries which he entitled *The Fable of the Bees.* Mandeville intended the work to be a critical reflection of contemporary life and values. James Knowlson also notices this covert connection with Mandeville, claiming that "Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* is evoked only so that, after seeking all the

our own travels. It is through representation: art and communication, that we attempt to make sense of the world and although it is impossible fully to understand our relationship to it, it is nevertheless possible to trace a pattern there, a kind of syntax of life, as in the figures formed by the dancing of bees.

It is suggested, through such an awareness, that if we were to step outside of whichever hive we belong to, there would indeed be no given meaning. Though we might go on to consider that what we found there reflects some kind of order or pattern which is general of the external world or belongs to the internal structures of the brain, or even to our sense organs. Clearly, however, the mystery of meaning, place and identity reach beyond the representational in which we locate them, and cannot be completely accommodated in any form of discourse.

To take this a stage further we can imagine observing a city from an aeroplane: from such a position we would have a sense of pattern and even some notion of purpose, after all many of us would have experience or knowledge of city life. However, in a broader sense we might feel this to be superseded through an awareness of the almost inexplicable randomness of design, an accident of social evolution. It is only when living within a city, we attain a greater sense of function, though this will only be at a finite level and strongly

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possible explanations for the bees' dance, the narrator can say, 'Here is something I can study all my life, and never understand (Beckett 1979: 156)" (Knowlson:1996: 375). Knowlson, however, in making this statement fails to appreciate the wider social critique Beckett himself is making in this rather subtle passage.

suggestive of the limited and localised nature of meaning and understanding. Unfortunately for the individual inhabitant in the maelstrom of the social world it is difficult to gain an overall perspective, a single coherent and rational view, indeed this could only be imposed by some idealised observer.

In both suggesting and exploring these limitations which bound human perception and the acute anxiety that arises from such awareness, Beckett often draws attention to Man's frail need for just such an ideal observer. In *Endgame* (Beckett 1990: 89-134), for example, we have an interesting 'play' on this idea when Hamm, in one of his frequent moments of anxiety, longs for a 'rational being to return to the world'.[49] Both through Hamm's statement of desire and his indicated change of register in which he assumes the imagined voice of such a 'rational being', there is the strong indication that he places both himself and Clov outside of the 'rational'. They are effectively trapped in a minute irrational world, and only through the continual process of story-telling can Hamm retrieve some sense of order and meaning. From within this world we can gain no sense of overall perspective or purpose, only the competing sets of discourse which Hamm vainly attempts to draw together into his own grand narrative. Here

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[49] By way of illustration it is worth giving this quotation in full: **Hamm:** We're not beginning to...to...mean something? **Clov:** Mean something! You and I, mean something! *[Brief laugh.]* Ah that's a good one! **Hamm:** I wonder. *[Pause.]* Imagine if a rational being came back to earth, wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough. *[Voice of rational being.]* Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at! *[Clov starts, drops the telescope and begins to scratch his belly with both hands. Normal voice.]* And without going so far as that, we ourselves... [with *emotion] ...we* ourselves...at certain *moments... [Vehemently.]* to think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing!

there is no coherent view of the universe such as we find in Beckett's beloved Dante, only the chaos of linguistic possibility. In effect Hamm hopes that such an imaginary 'being' could make sense of the lives he finds and observes, locating some purpose or logic to seemingly futile existence. The device is a clever one, a kind of autocriticism[50] which consciously plays (by this time) on the audience's increasingly uncomfortable expectations and awareness: given to see themselves as the rational observer attempting to make sense of what they are watching, while at the same time being forced to recognise the similarity between themselves, their own position and circumstance, and those of the characters in the play. In this way the drama not only draws attention to itself as 'play' i.e., a representational device, but effectively encloses the audience too within its tiny fictional space: A world in the

[50] Beckett would appear to have drawn and re-adapted this autocritical method from Joyce's own prose style. Declan Kiberd, for example, in his excellent introduction to the Penguin edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses,* disrusses Joyce's employment of the 'autocritical' technique in order to expose the fictive process. Kiberd begins by considering Frank Kermode's assertion that this technique has important political implications: "Moreover, the autocritical structure maybe seen as congruent with the book's *(Ulysses)* anti-authoritarian politics. The critic Frank Kermode has contended that it is the self-criticism and self-deflation of modern art which saves it from the excesses of romanticism and fascism. In The Sense of an Ending, he proposes a distinction between 'myth' and 'fiction', explaining that 'fictions can degenerate into myths, whenever they are 'autocritical' technique in order to expose the fictive process. Kiberd begins by considering Frank Kermode's assertion that this technique has important political implications: Moreover, the autocritical structure maybe seen as congruent with the book's *(Ulysses)* anti-authoritarian politics. The critic Frank Kermode has contended that it is the self-aiticism and self-deflation of modern art which saves it from the excesses of existence, in•that its entire world is built on representation. It is only through an awareness of this fictional context are we to arrive at a notion of the real".

margins which constitutes the peripheral position of modem Man as opposed to the ancient and medieval religious perception of centrality (see previous article).

Similarly in *The Trilogy* we have a continual exploration and questioning of the imposition of 'rational' narratives which help determine the individual's relation to language and society. We shift perspective from idealised observer, or Bee Keeper, to move suddenly to those margins where we find the inner and complex world of the individual, inundated within the competing discourses of the human world. Indeed, for the narrators of the last two books of The Trilogy this will become like the incomprehensible humming of insects.[51]

Aporia and the Science of Uncertainty

We have dealt already with the opening text of The Trilogy in relation to the implicit denial of a 'death drive' in the previous article and we will see in this chapter, concerned with the final two books, how this connects with the need to express, to create fictions and representational forms. If we move out of chronology for a moment and look at the opening of *The Unnamable* to illustrate what I have been attempting to outline above, we find the narrator questioning whether he will proceed by 'aporia' or 'by affirmations and negations

[51] For example, in *The Trilogy* Molloy claims that 'the words [heard ... were heard a first time, then a second, and often even a third, as pure sounds, free of all meaning ... And the words [uttered myself; and which must nearly always have gone with an effort of intelligence, were often to me as the buzzing of an insect' (1979: 47); and later Malone will explain, in reference to his own condition, that now 'the noises of the world 'sound to him like 'one vast continuous buzzing' (190).

invalidated as uttered'(1979: 267). This is rather ironic since both mean essentially the same; for example if we consider the etymology of the word aporia we find that it is derived from the Greek word *anopia* signifying doubt and ambiguity.[52] Indeed the narrator could hardly illustrate doubt and ambiguity better than by presenting an explanation of aporia but failing to connect it to the word. This is carried further when the narrator confirms that he uses the word 'aporia' without really understanding what it means. In the complex comic play of the text we might doubt the truth of this statement, but this only adds to the overall uncertainty as to the direction of the narrator's argument.[53] For example, *The Unnamable* immediately gives us the whole process of the previous texts in miniature, the opening lines presenting the reader with a series of questions and contradictory statements: 'Where now? Who now? Unquestioning I say I unbelieving' (267). The constant affirmation and denial gives the sense of the previous 'I' being obliterated by the one which follows, or perhaps, in a broader sense, it presents the curious impression

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[52] For a complete definition see OED. Vol. I. p. 555.

[53] John Pilling, in his fine critical study simply entitled *Samuel Beckett,* considers Beckett's use of 'aporia' ... is Beckett's disarming doubleness at its best. It involves no more fence-sitting than Johnson's deep moral explorations in Rasselas; it is the balance of tragi-comedy, the largeness of vision that takes in both real and ideally, the philosophically serious and the ludicrously absurd. "Such doubleness does, however, naturally give rise to uncertainty, and uncertainty gives rise to crippling doubt. Beckett himself has itemized 'perhaps' as the key word in his work and occasionally (as in *The Unnamable*'s 'Dim intermittent lights' suggests a kind of distance) doubt is so thorough going as to almost annul the words that are said. (John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1976, p. 27).

of a dialogue taking place between invisible beings posing as a single entity.

Yet this whole process of reasoning or unreasoning, as we might call it since the narrator's discourse continually threatens to question and undermine its own validity, is essential to an understanding of *The Trilogy* and indeed of Beckett's later works, for it moves considerably from the earlier Cartesian position adopted in *Murphy*.[54] The celebrated 'cogito ergo sum' can no longer apply. For example, we can clearly see how the Cartesian position is eroded in these opening sections of *The Unnamable*. We see this especially through the narrator's attempt to describe both himself and his environment. The descriptive process is an obvious parody of Descartes' *Meditations* in which the philosopher attempts to describe himself as a physical and spiritual entity in relation to world and thing. For example, Descartes, in the second of his Meditations, is able to make the following formulation:

> *I could not exist without them? I have just convinced myself that nothing whatsoever existed in the world, that there was no sky, no earth, no minds, and no bodies; Have I thereby convinced myself that I did not exist? Not at all; without*

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[54] Many commentators have noted the influence of Decartes' ideas on Beckett's earlier works, in particular the poem *Whorescope (*1930) and the novel *Murphy (*1934-7). For example, Deidre Bair notes that during Beckett's graduate studies in 1926, just before his fateful period at the Ecole Normale Superieure, 'filled three large loose-leaf notebooks with his own thoughts and impressions'(Deidre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. p. 54) on the philosophical works of Descartes. Later on, in the biography, Bair suggests that 'Beckett meant Murphy (heir to the line of antiheroes began with Belaqua) to demonstrate the possibility of successfully living the Cartesian duality of mind and body without the necessity of integration.' (ibid. p. 233)

> *doubt I existed if I was convinced [or even if I thought anything]. Even though there may be a deceiver of some sort, very powerful and very tricky, who bends all his efforts to keep me perpetually deceived, there can be not the slightest doubt that I exist, since he deceives me; and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never make me be nothing as long as I think I am something. Thus, after having thought well on this matter, and after examining all things with care, I must finally conclude and maintain that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true every time that I pronounce it or conceive it in my mind.* (Descartes 82)

And a little later he goes on to consider that

> *Is there anything in all that which is not just as true as it is certain that I am and that I exist, even though I were always asleep and though the one who created me directed his efforts to deluding me?* (86)

We can clearly see from the above extracts that Descartes also 'proceeds by aporia'; and yet from this position of doubt and complex self-questioning he is able to arrive at absolute certainty, providing us with the proposition 'I am, I exist'. However, as we shall see, the narrative of *The Unnamable*, though following an almost identical process of rigorous self-interrogation, will be unable to arrive at such a position of certainty. In fact the narrator will be lead to ever greater degrees of doubt and uncertainty. The narrator of *The Unnamable*, for example, quickly builds up a picture of himself as a great lidless eye, fixed in one particular position with his former creations circling him like planets round the sun (Beckett 1979:267-82). However, the narrator is unable to hold

to this perception and soon comes to imagine himself as a mobile globe without feature, passing through a grey void. Yet even this image, already having lost its supposed centrality, though still cast in the divine form of the sphere, gives way to the habitual story-telling and the lowly form of Man.[55] Thus the narrator can find no stable world or identity from which he can ultimately locate the truth of his condition, or even final conformation of his existence. Instead of moving from a position of doubt to one of understanding, we only move to doubt still further, producing an ever greater need to define both self and world. The difference then is that unlike in Descartes' reasoning no stable ego, the I of the self, can be located, which would be the one constant from which the truth of the world and Man's relation to it can ultimately be worked out.

So applying the correct use of 'aporia', but nevertheless failing to understand what it means, leads us to suggest that the tools we use for such an exploration (the search for truth and meaning), namely language and other forms of representation, cannot be relied on, for so much lies beyond their reach: this includes understanding of the self. For example, arbitrary linguistic structures and psychological models are not only unable to accommodate what they attempt to explain, but also serve to obscure and misdirect (i.e., language conceals much even as it both supplies and shapes our understanding). Of course language is always unstable, pointing to more and to other than that to which it

[55] The narrator begins to dwell on Mahood, formally Basil, and goes on to claim 'it was he who told me stories about me [...]' (1979: 183).

is applied. Perhaps then we could describe aporia as the inexplicable desire simply to 'be' which indeed lies outside of representation.

Turning once more to the significance of aporia we can draw a further valid connection with Schopenhauer whom I have already drawn attention to as a major influence on Beckett's thought and work. Although Schopenhauer is ultimately deterministic in that he considers all things to be derived from the Will, nevertheless he also recognised that the greater part of this Will or general Will always remains a mystery, a point of dark uncertainty shrouded by the veil of Maya.[56] As individuals we can only ever hope to have definite knowledge of the aspect or part of the Will from which we are derived. In this respect the world will always remain uncertain and ambiguous, and full of potential anxiety. This is perhaps why Schopenhauer suggests that the closest we can get to truth is not through science, but through art and literature as these more fully reflect the breadth of life and its many experiences and inconsistencies. Again we are confronted with a sense of pattern, one which indeed has its antecedent in Platonic theory[57] and perhaps more unusually it also connects with the modern idea of chaos.

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[56] But of course the world does not exhibit itself to knowledge which has sprung from the will to serve it, and which comes to the individual as such in the same way as it finally discloses itself to the inquirer, namely as the objectivity of the one and only will-to-live, which he himself is. On the contrary, the eyes of the uncultured individual are *clouded, as the Indians say, by the veil of Maya. to him is revealed not the thing-in- itself, but only the phenomenon in time and space.* ([*My* italics] Schopenhauer 1966: v.i.352).

[57] I am again referring here particularly to Plato's *Timaeus* and its attempt to portray the universe as being founded upon a fundamental pattern. 'Let us return to our question, and ask to which pattern did its constructor work,

This may seem on the surface an oxymoron but if we investigate it further we will find that a philosopher such as Schopenhauer, along with certain writers, has much in common with modem theories of chaos. This is perhaps more to do with their chosen subject matter rather than their method of interpretation. It is also interesting to note here that despite Schopenhauer being essentially part of German Romanticism his ideas were acceptable to the modernists, especially Beckett. This is not so surprising when we consider not only the quality and clarity of Schopenhauer's prose but also its gloomy pessimism: a pessimism which seems to have underscored Beckett's own attempts to escape the imposed validity of representational form and its endorsement of rational and progressive models of human endeavour.

Nevertheless, in placing art above science Schopenhauer clearly presents a critical view which locates him within the school of Romanticism. It recognises the limitations of natural science and acts as an implicit counter attack on

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that which remains the same and unchanging or that which has come to be ... the world is the fairest of all things that has come into being and he (the creator) is the best of causes. That being so it must have been constructed on what is apprehensible by reason and understanding and eternally unchanging; from which again the world is likeness of something else.' (Plato, *Timaeus & Critias*. p. 41). We can see here the similarity with Schopenhauer's theory of the Will, for the perceptible world Plato presents here is merely an illusion grounded upon a fundamental pattern or true reality. However, the difference between Schopenhauer's and Plato's conception is considerable; e.g. While Schopenhauer's idea of the Will is also that of a fundamental pattern or set of characteristics which is essentially an unchanging and absolute reality from which the phenomenal world manifests itself it, nevertheless, has no divine origin (being the first cause in its own right) and no ultimate purpose other than its blind desire for continuance.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth century belief that science, particularly in the form of Newtonian physics, could provide us with a complete model and understanding of the universe. Of course during the twentieth century faith in such neoclassical idealism was, if not shattered, then greatly undermined. In fact it is possible to draw some interesting parallels between early nineteenth century Romanticism, in the way that it challenges the simplicity and linearity of more traditional concepts, and that of a similar twentieth and, indeed, twenty-first century desire to find a theory through which everything can be explained, and that of the new sciences under the aegis of Quantum Mechanics and Chaos, which do not allow for simple linearity or finite answers within the complex changes or patterns they predict. For example, James Gleick, in his excellent introductory work to the new science[58], considers the essential subject matter and nature of Chaos theory when he makes the old assertion 'Now that science is looking, chaos seems to be everywhere'.[16] And goes on to point out the enormous scope offered through this approach:

> *A rising column of cigarette smoke breaks into wild swirls. A flag snaps back and forth in the wind. A dripping faucet goes from a steady pattern to a random one. Chaos appears in the behaviour of the weather, the behaviour of an airplane in flight, the behaviour of cars clustering on an expressway, the behaviour of oil flowing in underground pipes. No matter what.the medium, the behaviour obeys the same newly discovered laws. That realization has begun to change the*

[58] See also Murphy, Robert. *Chaos Theory*. Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2018.

> *way business executives make decisions about insurance, the way astronomers look at the solar system, the way political theorists talk about stress leading to armed conflict Gleick* (1993: 5).

I suggest that we can see the parallels between this description and Schopenhauer's own theoretical staging of the Will:

> *The ice on the window-pain is formed into crystals according to the laws of crystallization, which reveals the essence of the natural force here appearing, which exhibit the idea ... What appears in clouds, brook, and crystal is the feeblest echo of that will which appears more completely in the plant, still more completely in the animal, and most completely in man* [...] (Schopenhauer 1966: vol.i.182)

As we have already discussed, Schopenhauer considers the Will to be the ubiquitous pattern, essence, or substance from which all the various aspects and structures of the natural world are ultimately manifested, and this of course includes aspects of both broad based social and individual behavioural characteristics. For example, it is clear, from what has already been said, that both theories would be concerned with the primary characteristics or essentially repetitive patterns which lead humanity 'toward armed conflict'.[59]

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[59] It is important to note, however, that I am not trying to equate completely the two theories but, nevertheless, it is clear that in many of their essential aspects and concerns there are strong similarities. These similarities, I suggest, are drawn even closer through the way Beckett idiosyncratically incorporates Schopenhauer's ideas into the enfolding structure of his own fictions.

It is important to note here, in attempting to draw such parallels, that the modern concept of chaos is not, as it is classically presented, a region where complete anarchy, random disorder or lawlessness prevail; but is rather more specifically defined through its goal to locate, in the apparent irregularity of natural phenomenon, an underlying pattern: A pattern which is conveyed through a form of geometry, that of the 'fractal'. As James Gleick points out:

> *The first chaos theorists, the scientists who set the discipline in motion, shared certain sensibilities. They had an eye for pattern, especially pattern that appeared on different scales at the same time.* (1993:5)

It is through this concern to uncover 'pattern' that Chaos Theory is to be defined. In particular we need to pay attention to Gleick's phrase 'especially pattern that (appears) on different scales at the same time'. This discovery of different scales of pattern occurring in the phenomenal world is termed 'self-similarity'.[60] It is this process of 'self-similarity',

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[60] Coveney and Roger Highfield, in the highly acclaimed work *Frontiers of Complexity,* attribute the term 'fractal' or 'fractal geometry' (which essentially encompasses the theory of 'self-similarity') to Beno'it Mandelbrot: The word "fractal" has been in existence since 1975. It was coined by Benoit Mandelbrot ... to describe the peculiar geometry of irregular shapes that look the same on all scales of length. In the same way, regardless of how much a fractal object is magnified, it contains essentially the entire structure of an object. This property of endlessly manifesting a motif within a motif is known as *self-similarity.* The motif is mirrored at every scale of length: the edges of a clover leaf will be bristling with smaller clover shapes that will bristle with still smaller clover shapes, and so indefinitely. Johnathan Swift's fleas fall into this category: So, naturalists observe, a flea / Hath smaller fleas that on him prey / And these have smaller

the continuous repetition of complex patterns that we have already noted in *Molloy*. For example, we found this particularly in reference to the set of uncanny similarities which arise between the two halves of the text (she previous article); and, as I will seek to demonstrate, this will be advanced still further in *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. Not only this, but I hope to show in the remainder of this article that the repetitive patterns which emerge within and between the longer prose works also presents us with 'different scales at the same time'. That is that the texts not only become shorter in length but in their reduction starkly distil out the fundamental patterns which have essentially underpinned all of Beckett's work. It is my contention then, that on looking carefully at the development of both plays and prose works, we shall find that rather than simply noting a sequence of interrelated texts it will be more like focusing down with a microscope on to a single object at a particular point in time; going down ever further to uncover the nature of its geometry, its architecture, and by so doing uncover something of the essential pattern from which will be reflected or exhibited aspects of the whole.

We may go further not only in considering parallels with the scientific paradigm of Chaos, but also that of Quantum mechanics and in particular the contribution made

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fleas to bite'em / And so *ad infinitum*. A fractal's form is the same no matter what length scale we use to view it. (Peter Coveney & Roger Highfield, *Frontiers of Complexity- The Search for Order in a Chaotic World,* Faber & Faber 1995. p. 172. See also for further definition *Chaos - The Making of a New Science* 115-16).

by the German physicist Werner Heisenberg.[61] Heisenberg formulated the now famous Uncertainty Principle in 1927.[62] Such a theory counters the classical absolutism that we find in Newtonian and earlier schools of scientific understanding. Even Einstein had problems with such a concept, once famously claiming against the modern quantum school of indeterminacy that 'God doesn't play dice'.[63] Indeed it is perhaps easier for a critic or writer to allow for various degrees of ambiguity and uncertainty within their interpretation of the world, or even to be aware that they are working within an interpretive model, than a mathematician with his equations.

If we consider the quantum world more closely we find curiously that it seems to counter all our normal preconceptions of cause and effect. On the level of the sub-atomic particle we are presented (in terms of movement and position) with a number of possible outcomes, and not one

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[61] Ruben J. Ellis in his brief exploration of Beckett's reference to a 'Matrix of Surds' in the novel *Murphy,* states: When William York Tindall asked Beckett in 1963 if he had read Heisenberg's *Uncertainty Principle,* Beckett wrote back that if he had, he had "succeeded in repressing it". Although Beckett teasingly left Tindall's question open in 1963, he may have already come some distance in closing it in 1938. If Tindall had asked Beckett whether he was familiar with any of Heisenberg's *other* theoretical work, specifically, his application of matrix algebra to quantum mechanics in a series of articles in 1925 and 1926 and in his 1930 *Principles of the Quantum Theory,* Beckett might have offered the text of *Murphy* as an equally cryptic response. (Ellis 1993: 362)

[62] Oxford Reference, *A Concise Dictionary of Physics, Oxford* University Press, second edition 1990. p. 294: Uncertainty Principle; Principle of Indeterminism. The principle that it is not possible to know with unlimited accuracy both the position and momentum of a particle.

[63] 'This, probably the most popular quote attributed to Einstein, is noted by Stephen Hawking in his discussion on the Uncertainty Principle. (Hawking 1988: 56)

clear direction. A particle may appear at any one of several different points, indeed it may paradoxically appear at them all simultaneously.[64] On the surface this does not seem plausible and would appear to contradict our own life's experience. We can see again in this the relation to aporia, in that in the physical world, much less general life and circumstance, no true determination can be made through abstract measurement and the scientific reductiveness of mathematical interpretation.

It would be hard to prove to what extent such a theory might have influenced Beckett's writings,[65] though it is clear

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[64] Quantum theory provides a dazzlingly successful description of the subatomic world ... Indeed, quantum theory was invented to overcome the failure of classical physics to describe the world of the atom.
...quantum mechanics seems to admit intrinsically unpredictable hops- "quantum leaps" -between electronic, atomic, and molecular states. There seems to be no limits to how accurately we can measure the properties of an object like an apple, such as its weight and dimensions. Not so in quantum theory. The uncertainty principle, enunciated by Werner Heisenberg in 1927, states that the measurement of certain pairs of quantities, such as position and momentum, can be only made to a certain degree of precision and no further.
... According to this unsettling and strongly counterintuitive theory, all physical objects are intrinsically ghostly. *They exist in a twilight state-a "superposition"- of all possibilities of position and velocity* ... Stranger still, *a particle moving between two points in space simultaneously travels along all possible paths between them* [My italics]. Indeed, the behavior of particles that are at opposite ends of the universe cannot be described separately by quantum lore. (Coveney & Highfield 1995: 125)

[65] Reuben J. Ellis discusses this very problem, and considers that:
The extent and nature of Beckett's understanding of twentieth century physics remains inadequately defined. At any number of places in his work, Beckett elaborates the tropal function of quantum mechanics in displaying an ongoing problematization of mind and matter. But the texts for all their poignant hinting, leave no clear, comprehensive, determinate map to his reading and knowledge, and Beckett himself can be coy on this subject. Specifically readers have sometimes speculated about whether Beckett was

that such theories in science widely crossed over with the philosophies of the early part of the century and would have been broadly discussed in the French cafes that Beckett frequented. Certainly these ideas had a wide spread impact on society and culture, the arts as much as the sciences. We might go further in making some connection, specifically with the scientific theories of Relativism and Quantum Uncertainty, and that of Existentialism. Existentialism in the Sartrian sense propounds existence before essence,[66] that is we do not have as individuals a predetermined spirit which guides our actions, but are free to make relative decisions in the light of experience. The sense that we collectively share of not being free, that much lies beyond our power or is predetermined, is perhaps more like Faustus' retreat into the old proverb 'che sera sera' (Marlowe 1988: l. 48). That is the responsibility and

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familiar with the work of Werner Heisenburg, the physicist and philosopher so closely linked with our modem investigations of the atom.
However, this does not stop Ellis from boldly stating that "Beckett takes as an element of his project in *Murphy,* as well as in other works, the destabilization of the various permutations of a materialist ontology, and he frequently associates materialism with a "Newtonian" world view.'This destabilizing process that Beckett dramatizes fictionally has a historical analogue in twentieth-century physics, in particular, the research of Werner Heisenberg, Max Born, and Pascual Jordan, whose investigations of subatomic energy states led to the development of the field of quantum mechanics as it exists today." (Ellis 1993: 362-3)

[66] For example, in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre states:
...if we no longer believe in the being-behind-the-appearance, than the appearance becomes full positivity; its essence is an "appearancy" which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it... The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it is the essence. The essence of an existent is no longer sunk in the cavity of this existent; it is the manifest now which presides over the succession of appearances; it is the principle of the series.(Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness.* p. xx.ii).

fear such freedom brings ironically generates the need for a kind of prison or cage, the narrow strictures of which provide individuals with a sense of security. In accepting this perception of limitation as a falsehood it seems to capture the relativism predicted by the new sciences. However, distinct differences lie between them, differences which indeed mark the fundamental shift from existential thought to that of Beckett's own thinking. After all one cannot choose to be an existentialist, one either is or is not.

For example, Lance St John Butler in his well known study, Samuel Beckett and The Meaning of Being; attempts·to define·Beckett's work partly in relation to Sartre's existentialist philosophy. However, Butler's attempt to read Beckett's work as a dramatisation of existentialist thought is questionable and seems contradictory to Beckett's whole artistic approach. In two letters, for example, published in The New Yorker, Beckett hints at a concern which takes his work beyond human subjectivity and its inherent problematic encompassing the question of human choice, anxiety and freedom.

Extract 1:

> *All that I have managed to be aware of, I have shown. It is not much. But it is enough for me, quite enough. I can even say that I would have fared better with less.*
> *As for wanting to find in all this a broader and loftier meaning to take home after the performance, together with the program and the ice-cream stick, I cannot see the point in doing so. Yet it might be achieved.*
> *I am no longer involved, and will never be again. Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo, and Lucky, their time and their space: if I did*

> *manage to get slightly acquainted with them it was only by keeping very far away from the need to understand ... (from a letter to Michel Polac, Paris 1952, translated from the French by Edith Fournier.*[67]

Extract 2:

> *I am afraid I am quite incapable of sitting down and writing out an "explanation" of the play. I think the simplest thing would be for you to send me a list of queries. My answers to these might cover a lot of ground. The trouble with most commentators is their failure to see the wood from the trees. Do try to see the thing primarily in its simplicity, the waiting, the not knowing why, or where or when. If there are obscurities of detail their elucidation will never be in terms of a system of symbols. It is not in any sense a symbolic work. The point about Pozzo, for example is not who he is, or what he is, or what he represents, but the fact that this is not known, so that for a moment he can even be confused with Godot. It is essential he should not be specified. It might even be said that he does not know himself who or what he is, and it seems to me that it is only of great inner dereliction that the part can be played satisfactorily.* (from a letter to Desmond Smith, who wanted to produce "Godot" in Canada, April I, 1956)[68]

The second of the two extracts is the most revealing in that Beckett lays stress on the importance of the character not being 'specified' and that 'he does not know himself, or the part played best with 'great inner dereliction'. Beckett does not seem to be concerned so much with Man's subjective identity

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[67] *The New Yorker* (Special Fiction Issue), June 24 & July I, 1996. p. 136
[68] ibidem. p. 137.

or the sense of meaning he can distil from his world; rather he suggests a turning toward the primal conditions and characteristics of life itself which repetitively undercut purpose and meaning - in fact the brutal underscoring 'simplicity' of the 'waiting, the not knowing why, or where, or when, or what'.

One further point will, I suggest, bring us to Beckett's own position: the Nietzschean revolution in philosophy, for example, stages the well-known beginnings of an anti-metaphysics[69] which becomes ironically transformed through the natural sciences (incorporating uncertainty and randomness) into a new metaphysics in order to explain the universe.[70] This effectively replaces choice in existentialist thinking with probability. This suggests that choice is only

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[69] As emphasised in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy:* Nietzsche had a 'deep concern with issues relating to the quality of life in the culture and society of his time, his conviction that the interpretive and evaluative underpinnings of Western civilization are fundamentally flawed, and his determination to come to grips with the profound crisis he believed to be impending as this comes to be recognized ... He deemed traditional forms of religious and philosophical thought to be inadequate to the task, and indeed to be part of the problem; and so he attempted to develop a radical alternative to them that might point the way to a solution' (619).

[70] The most modem and popular example of this is to be found in Hawking's *Brief History of Time* which concludes: Philosophers reduced the scope of their enquiries so much that Wittgenstein, the most famous philosopher of this century, said, "The sole remaining task for philosophy is the analysis of language." What a comedown from the great tradition of philosophy from Aristotle to Kant!

However, if we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason - for then we would know the mind of God." (Stephen W. Hawking 1988: 174-5)

apparent and that individual activity, at its base, follows the primary characteristics on which all matter is predicated. At one level this connects us with the inexplicable world of the quantum: that is that the human condition and its activities are governed by the principle of uncertainty; and, consequently it is not that we choose freely and independently to act in a particular way, but rather that our thoughts and circumstances are derived at through a number of possible outcomes each of which are themselves a product of a number of variables or uncertainties and so on ad infinitum. You may note that this also allies itself to Chaos theory in that although we cannot determine the outcome at each point or event we can, nevertheless, begin to see an overall pattern or set of patterns emerging. Indeed it may be possible for us to locate within these 'patterns' something of the fundamental nature of humanity itself.[71]

This particular 'quantum' way of looking at the world was already being developed in Beckett's earliest writings.[72] For example, in his first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (*Dream*), Beckett weaves into the narrative an interesting and equally autocritical attack on Balzac's us of characterisation and plot, referring to them as wholly deterministic and running like 'clockwork cabbages' (Beckett 1992: 119), an approach which has already been rejected by the

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[71] *As* we shall see in a moment this essentially anti-existentialist (though equally non-deterministic) outlook is adopted by Beckett in his fictions.

[72] *See for further reference: Brother I. Duggan, *Relativity, Quantum Theory, and the Novels of Samuel Beckett,* DAI, Ann Arbor, Ml\971, 32, 2637A (Loyola) & Angela Montgomery, "Beckett and Science: Watt and the Quantum Universe" in *Comparative Criticism 13:* A Yearbook, Cambridge 1991. pp. 171-81.

narrator earlier in the same novel through his discussion on the mysterious Nemo:

> [...] *we could write a little book that would be purely melodic; think how nice that would be, linear, a lovely pythagorean chain-chant solo of 'cause and effect', a one figured telephony that would be a pleasure to hear* [...] *But what can you do with a person like Nemo who will not for any consideration be condensed into a liu, who is not a note at all but a regrettable simultaneity of notes.* (10-11)

Besides the music analogy which Beckett borrows from Schopenhauer we find the use, if somewhat ironically, of the scientific language of 'cause and effect', pure form and neoclassical harmony. However, this is ultimately denied through the presence of the inexplicable Nemo who cannot be simply measured out. Indeed, the sense is that the narrator/author himself does not have complete control over his creation, this is later affirmed through the criticism placed on Balzac's work. The sense is that, with at least some of the characters, the author does not have complete control or autonomy over their thoughts and actions, in other words he is aware that he cannot make them walk through situations and circumstances with the precision of simple machines, or reduce them to mere shadows in a puppet show. However, this does not necessarily suggest a degree of choice on the part of the author, much less the creation (if indeed a character from a work of fiction could ever be said to exist in autonomy of its creator), but rather a degree of potentiality, of different possible outcomes over which choice does not preside only possibility.

Our argument so far as to the importance of Uncertainty and Probability leads us to suggest that rather than taking Beckett's characters and plot development as a set of existential problems we need to see them more as functioning like random sub-atomic particles as characterised by the new sciences, especially that of Quantum Mechanics. Interestingly Ruby Cohn in her well-known *The Comic Gamut*, both suggests and anticipates just such a reading of Beckett's fictions when she claims that 'From *Watt* on, however, Beckett's plots are so unpredictable that they cannot be twisted, since there is no norm from which to twist. *One seemingly senseless incident follows another without sequence or motivation*.' [My Italics] (Cohn 1962: 88) For example, this is graphically portrayed by the narrator of *The Unnamable*, when, as I have described, he pictures himself fixed within a void containing only the orbiting figures of his past creations. At first it seems as if he is some central, controlling being (the Sun God of myth); an overarching creator or dominant identity (ego) from which the other subsidiary fictions ultimately emerge. The narrator, however, is unable to maintain this centrality, and will quickly come to portray himself as a great moving sphere, reduced to the level of the other creations, though not perceiving himself to be in a particular orbit. We have the sense that there is indeed a lack of control in which the narrator is in truth unable to determine the orbits and progress of his creations, and can only note their passage such as when he sees the collision and supposed demise of the 'pseudo couple' Mercier and Camier. If we go back to our earlier discussion on quantum uncertainty we see that the narrator / author is correspondingly unable to predict

the outcome of his own fictions. As with putting pen to paper there is a considerable amount of seeming choice, but that choice is ultimately reduced to sets of probable outcomes. This suggests, as far as the characters are concerned, that there is an element of freedom, or at least points where the creator does not control them. However, it is random conditions which will outline the pattern of their actions rather than being predetermined or dependant on self-determination.

It is as if in denying the linearity of one ideal of science he finds the answer in the inherent uncertainty of another.[73]

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[73] Reuben J. Ellis touches on Beckett's attempt to discard classical and Newtonian models in favour of the new scientific paradigm of Uncertainty encapsulated in the Quantum World in his consideration "that the narrator of Murphy offers a far more distinct corroborative gesture to the mention of 'non-Newtonian motion'. In moving back through the text to the description of the dark zone of the mind, the most readily available point of interest, both visually and conceptually, is the three-word paragraph "matrix of surds." this phrase stands in syntactical apposition to the narrator's description of the dark mind and expands the recovery of Murphy's intentionality. The reference to numerically irrational, infinitely repeating *surds* suggests again that materialist, rationalist, and "Newtonian" notions do not coherently operate in the dark zone of the mind. To the narrator's way of thinking, the roots of materialist ontology extended back to the Pythagoreans and their notion of mathematics as the repository of truth. Significantly, surds represented the central chink in the armour of the Pythagorean understanding of the universe as a rational numerical structure, an understanding that from the novels opening pages the narrator seems determined to dismantle as part of a consistently anti- materialist project. The narrator seemingly aligns himself with those fifth century B.C. philosophers who regarded the existence of irrational surds as a powerful refutation of Pythagorean order. He lodges surds as the definitive centre of his description of mind, not simply as "problems" or "gaps" in a rational system of thought, but further as the mathematical / linguistic terms necessary to describe the radically new understanding of reality with which twentieth century physics attempts to supplant earlier ontological systems." (Reuben J. Ellis, *"Matrix of Surds": Heisenberg's Algerbra in Beckett's Murphy.* pp. 363-4)

A representational definition of the universe that Beckett strips away in his fictions ironically only to remove somewhat the grand illusion of power and autonomy to be found in existential choice, rejecting the linearity of cause and effect for the polyphony of probability, even if it lies only at the level of possibility. We can see then how this relates to the earlier discussion on Molloy and the life drive (see previous chapter) which contains no counter force or death drive, so that choice becomes an illusion, even to commit suicide is to affirm and not deny life. So rather than trying to give absolute definition to the universe and Man's place within it, we must instead take a 'journee dans le sacre-coeur'.[74]

Truth and the Failure of Artistic Expression

Before we go on to look further at Beckett's attempt to stage the world of the known or Will, a world which Beckett clearly associates with the blind quantum universe, and which we have sought also to connect with the equally uncompromising patterns suggested by Chaos theory, we need to consider carefully the way Beckett both formulates and stages an art form which is essentially predicated on failure. It is, as we shall see, within the terms of a so called art of 'failure' that Beckett will come closest to victory; conveying something of the fundamental reality he seeks beyond the limits of representation. In terms of his critical work Beckett comes closest to formulating just such an anti-aesthetic (an approach

[74] This phrase is taken from Beckett's essay *Peintre de l'Empechement*. See Samuel Beckett, *Dis*. p. 125.

which so strongly dictates the middle to late works) through his reflections on the artistic endeavours of the Van Velde brothers, particularly Bram.

In the Three Dialogues (1965: 138-45), for example, we have a written recording of a rather staged discussion between Beckett and George Duthuit centring on a number of relatively modem artists. However, it is clear that Beckett is much more concerned with presenting his own ideal aesthetic, which Duthuit is quick to recognise. Beckett interestingly comments on the efforts of such influential artists as Tai Coat, Masson and Matisse. For Beckett these artists have never truly broken with tradition, attempting something which could be considered wholly new, instead their work belongs to the 'domain of the feasible'[75]. Beckett ·locates this as the central aim of art since its earliest developments, and in attempting to describe this he draws on a similar expression to that which we have already noted in Dream, that is 'reaching for the Pythagorean light'. Beckett clearly refers to Pythagoras as representative of western culture's assumption that one can achieve absolute truth through various forms of representation (see the following article and its discussion on Beckett and Dante). However, Beckett acknowledges that this is an impossibility for, like Plato, he accepts that art is merely a representation or model of reality; and this is the case

[75] For example, Beckett argues 'The History of painting, here we go again, is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure ... in a kind of tropism towards the light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature.' (1965: 145)

whether it seeks to hold up an idealised mirror to nature, or attempts to reproduce the world through the intellectual and emotional response of the artist: the mind's landscape of the Romantics or the heroic creator God of the Modernistic Wallace Stevens. It is only when considering the work of his contemporary Bram van Velde and to a lesser extent his brother Geer, that Beckett is able to claim that something fundamentally different has been achieved. A change has been made in the conception of art in its broadest sense from that of the ancients, which Beckett attempts to relate, though somewhat comically, to an ever sceptical Duthuit.

In relation to Bram Van Velde Beckett talks of the artist's 'occasion'(144), which essentially forms the classic dualism between the artist and his subject, indeed the occasion informs all. Beckett fully realises that this relation far from being able to express absolute or general truths is always an unstable one. We can again relate this to the Uncertainty Principle or Beckett's awareness of 'aporia' in terms of the inconsistency and uncontrollability of externalities, and the circumstance and conditioning of the artist's subjectivity. Beckett in another essay on Bram and Geer van Velde, Peintres de l'Empechement, both interestingly and originally suggests that they have shifted the focus of art, creating a completely new relation, they in effect, 'refusent d'accepter comme donne le vieux rapport sujet-objet' Beckett goes on to claim that

> *A partir de ce moment il reste trois chemins que la peinture peut prendre. Le chemin du retour à vieille naïveté, à travers l'hiver de son abandon, le chemin des repentis. Puis le chemin qui n'en est plus un, mais une dernière tentative de vivre sur le*

> *pays conquis. Et enfm le chemin en avant d'une peinture qui se soucie aussi peu d'une convention périmée que des hiératismes et préciosités des enquête superflues, peinture d'acceptation, entre-voyant dans l'absence de rapport et dans l'absence d'objet le nouveau rapport et le nouvel objet, chemin qui bifurque deja, dans les travaux de Bram et de Geer van Velde.* (137)[76]

This third path or 'nouveau rapport' as Beckett defines it in relation to the Veldes' work, should stop seeking to escape from a sense of failure in attempting to find truth through artistic expression. In fact during the *Three Dialogues Beckett* goes as far as to consider that art need not be expressive (1142-3), which extends the ideas in l'Empoche, for in attempting to reach the truth expression will always lead us to failure. For example, in Beckett's summing up of Bram Velde's work he considers that '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, its impossibility, of its obligation.' (145)

From this we can see that Beckett finds, particularly in Bram van Velde's work, a shift which places the focus on the very futility of the artistic act or expression itself, and yet at the same time on the seeming 'obligation' to act despite the perceived futility of such an attempt at expression in the first place.[43]

This is clearly an aesthetic already grounded in 'aporia', in the very principle of uncertainty: the inexplicable

[76] See also Samuel Beckett, 'la peinture des van Velde ou le Monde et le Pantalon'. (1983: 118-32)

desire to create cannot be explained fully on rational grounds, for as Beckett himself admits on a representational level he can make little sense of Bram Velde's work (145). Yet this is surely the point, for beyond the arbitrary social conventions, like the formal and extravagant dance of the bees, that surround and inform artistic achievement Beckett is unable to understand why he or any other artist should make this attempt at expression in the first place. This seems to dismiss the notion that art has a rational bias, for the emphasis here points principally towards the need or desire to act, despite the unattainableness, at least in Beckett's terms, of true expression (the representation of truth and reality). Clearly then the focus is turned on the act itself, the very ambiguity of the creative process which I have already termed the signature of life, rather than on the final artistic form or Impression.

Real Illusion

In relation to *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* we are clearly presented with the development of such an aesthetic in that we have an awareness of failure which is grounded in representation. We have seen already how the *Molloy* text effectively opens and closes with an evocation of the act of writing (see previous article), clearly directing our attention to the fact that this is an attempt at expression, a process which at one level is doomed to failure through the constant slippage of meaning and identity which will conceal more than it reveals. For example, we find this consciously portrayed in *Molloy* through the narrator's contemplation of the figures A and C. (Beckett 1979: 15-16) In trying to describe them and the

circumstances in which they are to be found there is a free admittance on the part of the narrator, that he might be 'confusing several different occasions, and different times'. (15) This is affirmed when the narrator apologises for not employing the past tense as he feels he perhaps should, thus effectively presenting a kind of paradoxical defence against the deceit that this is not real after all, but created - the conscious and imaginative construction of a particular scene, which nevertheless also indicates that this process is not entirely under the narrator's control.

In Malone Dies our attention is again drawn towards an awareness of the work as an attempt to express, to create certain events and ideas all of which are ultimately doomed to failure, but even more than in the Molloy text we find this is connected with the natural process of life itself. The nameless narrator begins by saying 'I shall soon be quite dead' (165), immediately opening the discourse with the expectation of closure, a silence that was not completed through the transformation of Moran and the final stopping of the impotent Molloy. The less definite 'shall' rather than 'will' suggests the possibility that this too might not signal a complete closure, only the slowing pulse of entropy leading to a state which is neither life nor death, but a grey timeless limbo.

The narrator, with seeming uncertainty of when his death might occur, comically mentions particular dates that he might reach. These form two basic categories: political, such as the Fourteenth of July, or Biblical, such as the Transfiguration or the Assumption (ibid.). A further touch of irony is added when it is suggested that the whole process of dying begins in April or May, a time associated with new life

(ibid.), just as the named political and religious calendar events are associated with hope and spiritual renewal. Here the narrator is reminiscent of The Waste Land's opening line 'April is the cruellest month', itself a reversal of Chaucer's introduction of the Canterbury Tales. In the case of Malone Dies, though chronologically moving forward, the sense is of a slow reverse, a steady dwindling towards complete negation, a little like the unfortunate Nikolai in Tolstoy's masterpiece. However, this is too reductive a reading for what we end up with is a kind of mythic year having taken place in which we end up finally where we started only with a little less than what we were. The sense is of a continual and ever thinning round rather than a total stoppage. The cyclical landmarks of time are exposed as mythic and symbolic, not real but imaginary. Landmarks in the written structure of life which, through their very lack of linearity, question and threaten our collective notions of tradition and society.[77]

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[77] John Pilling writes, in relation to Beckett's employment of repetitive cyclical time as opposed to linear, that [...] (in Beckett's work) seasons are vague indicators, and feasts are movable. It is hardly surprising therefore that Beckett's narrators adopt the 'One day ' form of narration popular among story tellers from the earliest times; it is, for the most part, all they have to go on. When, after a while, time ceases to be linear and end- stopped and is seen to be circular and eternal, the merely individual occurrence is swamped. It is unpleasantly like Fortune's Wheel in fact though without the prospect of death as a way out. For the unpalatable truth that circular time forces on Malone and the Unnamable (since Molloy and Moran remain almost unscathed) is that death will never come, any more than Godot will ever arrive or (to use an example Beckett is fond of) Zeno will ever halve his heaps. And if the only paradise is the paradise which has been lost (as Beckett says in *Proust),* so that it is only time and not paradise which can be regained (Proust's vision rather than Milton's), then the triadic vision of Dante that so appealed to Beckett (hell, purgatory, paradise) has to be replaced with a kind of monadic condition which, for Beckett, is purgatorial. And purgatory is a concept that

It is here that I must take issue with Christopher Ricks' emphasis on a 'syntax of weakness',[78] this is surely misleading in the sense that this replication of entropy is only on the surface, it represents the breakdown and letting go of a world of representative form which like the philosopher in Chapter Nine of The Republic must come to see as illusory, the shadow play of the political animal. Beneath, as we have discussed with regard to Molloy, the steady quick of life's pulse remains. This is supported by the emphasis on the mythic structure and pattern of time in the opening section of the novel, and is furthered when the narrator draws the interesting connection between May and the Roman Goddess of nature and fertility from which the month derives its name:[79] this particular point in the year personified in the form of a beautiful young woman whose ripe body clearly symbolises the potentially rich

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can apply to Beckett's work from his first published essay to his last published work. (John Pilling, *Samuel Beckett.* p. 30). Pilling makes an interesting, though obvious distinction between Dante's medieval world view and that of Beckett's narrow but nevertheless eternal purgatory (again this concept seems to have less to do with Dante than with Schopenhauer's idea of the Will).

[78] Ricks notes that this term was attributed to Beckett himself by Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett Poet and Critic.* p. 249. Ricks goes on to claim that 'Beckett's syntax of weakness, in the vicinity of cliches and other forms of life in death, asks a larger sequence than a single sentence however singular. It is not that such syntax is weak; rather, that it is a 'syntax of weakness', pressing on, unable to relinquish its perseverance and arrive at severance.' Christopher Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words.* pp. 82-83.)

[79] For example, Malone, at one point during his relentless discourse, returns to his ironic opening claim that he is now nearing or at the richly promising month of May:

'For I believe I have now reached what is called the month of May, I don't know why, I mean why I believe that, for May comes from Maia, hell, remember that too, goddess of increase and plenty, yes, I believe I have entered on the season of increase and plenty, of increase at last, for plenty comes later, with the harvest.' (Beckett 1979: 215)

fecundity of nature. Here we might think of Botticelli's Primavera with its sensual portrayal of the woodland nymphs, however to one side of the painting we notice emerging from the shades a sinister figure threatening the rape of Flora, just as in the novel all these significant representations and embodiments of personified time are continually undercut. In this case it is achieved through the subtle pun being played on Maia as the similar sounding eastern Maya which Schopenhauer so often refers to in his writings.[80]

For example, the pun is affected partly through Malone's unusual description of his own bodily form:

> *...Maia, hell, remember that too, goddess of increase and plenty ... I'll be still here at All Saints, in the middle of chrysanthemums, o, this year I shall not hear them howling over their charnels. But this sensation of dilation is hard to resist. All strains towards the nearest deeps, and notably my feet, which even in the ordinary way are so much further from me than all the rest, from my head I mean, for that is where I am fled, my feet are leagues away. And to call them in, to be cleaned for example, would I think take me over a month ... Strange, I don't feel my feet any more, my feet feel nothing any more, and a mercy it is. And yet I feel they are beyond the range of the most powerful telescope. Is that what is known as having a foot in the grave? And similarly for the rest. For a mere local phenomenon is something I would not have noticed, having been nothing but series or rather succession of local phenomena all my life. without result.* (Beckett 1979: 215)

[80] See Schopenhuer 1966: vol.i. pp. I, 8, 17, 253, 274, 284, 330, 352, 365, 370, 373, 378, 397, 399, 419, 420, 495 & vol.ii. pp. 321, 601 for references to Maya

The comic passage subtly links the goddess Maia, representing 'increase and plenty' with Malone's hypothesised 'month' long search for his 'feet'. Malone's sense of 'dilation' is indeed 'hard to resist' for it conveys the disconcerting 'sensation' that his body is beginning to dissolve; it is as if the human form, devoid of the will to drive it, simply ceases to exist. The significance of Man's form along with May month and All Saints is shown to be illusory, part of the veil of Maya rather than something real in themselves. This explains why Malone then considers himself to be little more than a 'succession of local phenomena'; after all, this is how others have perceived him throughout his life: i.e., life defined and placed within a representational context just as the month of May is re-represented as Maia the goddess of plenty. Malone's present plight and, indeed, the nature of his entire life ironically further undercuts the significance of May and shows us that it is indeed the false promise of Maya and not Maia to which we are forced to respond.

The veil of Maya, for the writers of the Vedas, far from representing earthly life filled with richness and hope, rather expresses it as a great illusion which the individual cannot simply escape by death, but is continually returned to through the process of reincarnation until the final attainment of Nirvana. This, to some extent, resembles the continual transformation of character and narrator in Beckett's works, though Nirvana can never be obtained since this exists by definition outside of representative form.

This mythic form and representation is part of a process of story-telling clearly replicated within the text, forming the complex pattern and structure of time, linking

back to my earlier point concerning Beckett's formulation that culturally the tendency of art has been to reach toward the 'Pythagorean light', i.e. to find truth through representational form. Yet it extends further than this for in drawing us, if somewhat obliquely, to recognise the veil of Maya, it also questions the broader narratives of life into which we are indeed continually reborn and redefined both in terms of ourselves individually and in the context of wider society. We can see then how this process is carried out and replicated to the very end of the text through both Malone's representation of himself and his unfortunate creation, Macmann.

Macmann, for example, in the story Malone weaves during his more lucid moments of consciousness, begins his life with the unlikely name of Saposcat (Beckett 1979: 171) which suggests an at least partial play on the word scapegoat[81] Though the anagram is incomplete just as Saposcat cannot fully come to represent a new beginning and complete escape for Malone. This accounts for Saposcat's transformation later into Macmann with the obligatory consonant 'M' beginning

[81] Hugh Kenner places the etymology of Saposcat on the Greek word *skatos,* of or concerning dung (Hugh Kenner, *The Trilogy: Modern Critical Interpretations,* Edited by Harold Bloom, p. 39). Indeed (fitting in with the satire ridiculing the Saposcat's aspirations) this seems the likely origin of the name, especially when we consider the way that Beckett relates the Saposcat's dreams to the fulfillment of all their requirements for 'manure':
'[…] He (Mr Saposcat) would be pensioned off; she (Mrs Saposcat) at her last gasp. They would take a cottage in the country where, having no further need for manure, they could afford to buy it in cartloads. And their children, grateful for the sacrifices made on their behalf; would come to their assistance. It was in this atmosphere of unbridled dream that these conferences usually ended. It was as though the Saposcats drew the strength to live from their impotence.' (Beckett 1979: 173)

the names of most of Beckett's principal characters in the novels up to this point. Not only does this return us to the inescapable image of Man with its further celtic associations (Mac),[82] but also suggests a kind of chain, a single blurred half-forgotten name. We can link this back to Molloy's difficulty in remembering his own name, and even Maron's uncertainty of it given Gaber's report. It hints that all the narrators and characters are connected to the same patchy consciousness, to part of the many narratives in a larger story.

A further play is made on the name as well as the partial suggestion of the Latin verb Sapio[83] or wisdom (in this case wisdom in simplicity) in that he is generally referred to with the shortened Sapo which strongly resembles the name of the Greek lyric poet of the C.6th BC, Sappho. Though in Beckett's work Sapo is a young boy he still in many ways resembles the image we have of the poetess. Again it is useful to draw the connection with the evocation of the Roman Maia whom in one sense is encapsulated in the promise of physical and sensual pleasure evoked in much of Sappho's poetry.

The narrator considers Sapo to be 'precocious'(172), though for most of the time his mind is clearly blank and devoid of ambition, much to the exasperation of his parents who, as lowly members of the petit bourgeois, have high hopes for their son. The simple and materialistic outlook of the parents is heavily and comically satirised in the best traditions

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[82] We can also, in support of this, take the shortened Sapo as a derivation of *homo sapiens*.

[83] *Sapia* forms the first person singular (I am wise) which would seem to reinforce the suggestion that the narrator is attempting to present this as a self image.

of Swift, (see 172-8). Yet there is also an almost gentle tenderness in laying bare the simple pattern which these folk envision to be their lives. Not seeking or able to imagine anything else and too apathetic to do anything about it if they could. Sapo's parents needs must live out a narrative or story readymade for them both literally and imaginatively. However, Sapo cannot fulfill their dreams, rather than studying he prefers to bunk off and take long walks amidst the wonders of nature, and here the narrator paints rather a pseudo-romantic world reminiscent of a stereotypical Victorian outlook in that we have the added portrayal of young Sapo making frequent visits to the lower working-class Lamberts. However the romantic idyll is continually undercut by the harsh satirical portrayal of both Sapo's parents and the Lamberts themselves.

The narrator affirms that this 'history' (Sapo's) is his own and then paradoxically claims 'shall I be incapable in the end of lying about anything else'(174). This comic note suggests something of the truth behind the narrator's attempt to tell the story of Sapo, which serves to support our suppositions concerning his name. That this lie, in a sense, is himself or rather a representation of himself as perhaps he would have liked to have been: carefree without taking on the awareness and education to absorb the different narratives and positions offered and expected within the structures of our social existence. An ignorance again constantly undermined through the narrator's only too clear perception of the lives of Sapo's parents and the Lamberts. Hence the narrator's inability to hold to the validity of Sapo's young and

hopeful form which undergoes the sudden transformation into Macmann (210).[84]

We indeed are never truly convinced that the events described by Malone in reference to either his past life or present circumstances, contradictory as they are, have ever taken place other than in the narrator's mind. We are also unsure of the narrator's own tenuous existence, its pale flickering in and out of consciousness. Neither can we be certain that the events represented have elapsed over a relatively short or long period. Here we are given a strong sense of subjective time and the limitations of human awareness. It would seem to support the assertion Schopenhauer makes following his understanding of the Vedas, that life is merely a dream - Plato's play of shadows. (Schopenhauer 1966: vol.i.16) Such an awareness is crucial if we are to understand the way Beckett plays with and undermines representation, always threatening to expose the truth of its own fiction.

In the case of the Malone text we are given the impression of the narrator passing in and out of consciousness so that we are aware that ellipses have taken place, and the narrator's attempt to fill them with fictions only serves to highlight the apparent disjuncture. Of course these spaces are

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[84] For Sapo – no, I can't call him that any more, and I even wonder how I was able to stomach such a name till now. So then for, let me see, for Macmann, that's not much better but there is no time to lose, for Macmann might be stark staring naked under his surtout for all anyone would be the wiser. (210) Hugh Kenner connects this transition to the *Molloy* text when he claims that 'The story, moreover, is itself twofold, the hero having apparently changed names part way, from Sapo *(homo sapiens)* to Macmann (son of man), as it were by analogy with Molloy and Malone. (Hugh Kenner, The Trilogy *in Modern Critical Interpretations,* p. 39)

themselves a fiction which do not exist within the text - yet likewise they do not provide us with a sense of passing beyond text or representing a point of complete stillness where consciousness is altogether silenced. What is suggested is something rather different, that these fictional lacunae, which either act to change the content or direction of the narrative, are in fact fed through from another story written between the lines of this one;[85] I have already, for example, pointed out the way in which the act of writing is evoked by the various narrators - in *Malone Dies* we find the narrator now claims that he is writing in the dark, and only by the careful positioning of his little finger does he stop the hand from falling off the page edge, just as the walls of the little room, real or imaginary, stop him from falling into the abyss. The narrator's hand, however, is not guided lengthways across which would stop it from writing one line over another (Beckett 1979: 190). Although we do not get a literal representation of this and we are continually given to doubt the validity of what the narrator is saying, nevertheless, it does symbolically serve to represent the structure of The Trilogy itself. The continual process of one discourse, one story being

[85] This is explored in many of Beckett's texts. For example, in the short story Ping (1984: 149-51) the repetition of 'ping' seems to represent the sound of a Hospital scanner, just as in *How It Is* the narrator fulls momentarily onto the image of a hospital bed. These act to threaten and destabilise the imaginary world - is it merely the product of some injured person on the very edge of consciousness, moments before extinction? Though, in a sense, even if we are given a gleam of something beyond - something that seems to filter in from outside the text through its very insistence - we are also given to doubt this process aware of its tenuous fragility, passing with consciousness and easily obscured. These strange fragments forcing their way in could be just part of another story.

written over another and, indeed, incorporated into each other.[86] For example, we have the narrator's disturbing sensation that he can 'feel, behind closed eyes, other eyes close' (180), almost as if he was not under the scrutiny of, but actually in the mind of another, being written out just as he is writing out the text before us interwoven as it is with the stories of Sapo and Macmann. (We might possibly connect this also with the reader of the text being brought into the fiction, as if the character could be aware that another was reading him, or in the sense of Barthes, recreating him as the text is being read.)[87] This extends our argument as to the cyclical nature of time, here it is clearly more than that, time is compressed in layers, again rather than in some progressive linearity. We can see how this sense of a brutally repetitive, cyclical and layered reality is played upon in the crucial episode where Malone finds himself describing his room in more or less the exact details of the hospital or asylum in which Macmann is placed, almost as if we could reverse the whole thing and have Macmann telling the story of Malone.[88]

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[86] We again have a curiously similar rendering in *Texts for* Nothing 71-115), parts of which were interestingly written between *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable.* In this case the narrator presents himself as a kind of puppet whose eyes are covered by another's hands, the fingers of which are further engaged in manipulating his tongue. We cannot tell whose voice is being presented. We shall come back a little later to this important image of the narrator as a kind of puppet in a puppet show, for as I discussed earlier, it is an attempt to escape from a style of writing and character development that Beckett associated with the mechanistic Balzac.

[87] *Barthes, Selected Writings,* Intro. by Susan Sontag, Fontana/Collins 1983. pp. 185-93.

[88] Before we discuss this process further it is important to note that the only thing we can feel certain about is that a particular, though not unified consciousness, has created the inner space of the text. If it points to anything

beyond its series of intertwined and partial narratives, it is to this fundamental: a pattern of memories and related incidents forming a kind of constant amidst ever shifting circumstance and environment. This does not suggest some ultimate fixed identity, but it does draw us to the idea of an individual voice as opposed to merely a set of confused discourses. That is that the texts indicate that they are composed from the composite nature of a particular individual, dependant on experience and character. This in part relates to Schopenhauer's theory of the *Will* which represents the individual's natural potential and tendencies, their nature as opposed to their circumstance; indeed, this exists beyond experience.

This process is continually represented not only by references to the Molloy/ Moran episodes, but to previous works as well. For example, at the point I discussed above when Malone looks out of the window after a period of unconsciousness he remembers inexplicably the stars over London (Beckett 1979: 169-70). This is clearly Murphy's memory, not Malone's. In *The Unnamable* we find this being produced in a much more explicit way when the narrator suddenly apologises for employing 'one of Malone's anecdotes' (286) - as if he had suddenly slipped into Malone's form of thought; it further acts to force the text into revealing its fictional status, itself partly a series of 'anecdotes'. In telling the story of Sapo, Malone betrays, in an act of reasoning over a hen (86-87), a set of thought processes which resemble the kind of tenacious logical questioning and permutations employed by Molloy over the sucking stones (64-9) and by Moran in relation to his son (119); it is also characteristic of Watt's form of reasoning in the last of Beckett's English novels. Sapo's grey hen is clearly connected with the one discussed by Moran, in the previous text, with Father Ambrose (93). We also have Malone's claim that he only has to imagine something and there it is - evoking a Hunch back- suggesting the figure of Mr Hackett created in *Watt.* The stranger who enters Malone's room and knocks him on the head with an umbrella (248) strongly mirrors Molloy's attempts to communicate with his mother. We also, very interestingly, have Malone's desire to make an inventory of his possessions (167), an inventory which the narrator at the beginning of the *Molloy* text also wanted to create when the time was right (15). These objects are equally unstable for both characters: Molloy, when the mood takes him, casts away one thing only to replace it with another, while for the impotent Malone, who can only reach his possessions with the aide of a stick, there is the inexplicable disappearance, re-appearance and transformation of his things. However, the relation between subject and thing seems even more tenuous with Malone.

As with Winnie in *Happy Days* there is an attempt to measure or locate identity in relation to certain objects which litter life like memories, and a refusal, which is also developed in *The Unnamable,* to accept, despite

We can see how the author further extends this intertextual weave and powerful sense that life itself is represented through just such a layered tapestry of fiction-making when he consciously steps beyond the fictional text to touch the babble of the external world. For example, in a famous letter in which Beckett talks of his play *Endgame*, he writes 'My feeling, strong at the moment, is to leave it in French for a year at least. I'm in a ditch somewhere near the last stretch and would like to crawl upon it.' (Beckett 1983: 107)[89]

This description of Beckett's own condition strongly resembles that of Molloy's at the end of the first part of The Trilogy's opening text

> *And true enough the day came when the forest ended and I saw light ... I opened my eyes and saw I had arrived. And the reason for that was probably this that for some time past I had not opened my eyes, or seldom. And even my little changes of course were made blindly in the dark. The forest ended in a ditch that opened my eyes, for why would they have opened otherwise?* (Beckett 1979: 83)

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evidence to the contrary, that change has taken place. In relation to this another interesting device is employed in *Maione Dies* were we are presented with a particularly unusual image, an image which does not obviously relate to anything else in the text: 'my sons and moons that I Hang aloft and my pockets full of pebbles stand for men and things' (217). However, this serves as a conscious connecting image between the three texts. It suggests or anticipates the transformation of Molloy's sucking stones into the sun-like narrator of *The Unnamable* who is orbited by his planetary creations. It is also suggestive of the present narrator's obsession with certain objects and that of the narrator at the beginning of *Molloy* with his possessions.

[89] Extract from Correspondence with Director Alan Schneider, June 21, 1956

Beckett, like his character Molloy on the last stretch, is held up and must wait for help or inspiration to crawl the final stretch. In the case of the author it is the need to recreate *Fin de Partie* into the English version of the play and of Molloy to crawl on towards his mother. Yet the two images are so strikingly similar, the long process of struggling towards a particular goal which is suddenly punctuated by a seemingly impassable obstacle and for now the quest is denied attainment. It obviously serves to connect author and character, relating both to the described process of Molloy's blind urge - the impulse to go on in spite of all and without obvious reason, and we must also think of the little he will find at the end of his journey. Again we have the sense of failure, but necessary failure, the inexorable process of life, like Clov's assertion in the face of Hamm's anxious fears, that 'something is taking its course'(Beckett 1990: 107). The letter effectively transforms that part of the Molloy episode into an act of autocriticism, turning on itself to describe the artistic process taking place, and indeed in a broader sense the relentless pull of life. The movement, for Molloy, stops before a tremendous vision of unattainable spires, the town which might harbour the long decaying form of his mother (Beckett 1979: 83). Perhaps it is the desire alone that turns it into a fairy tale city, projecting a richness and hope it does not contain. The inner imaginary text and the so called real world are drawn together in a way which exposes their connecting similarity.[90]

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[90] This indeed fits very well with *Endgame,* itself playing greatly on Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* An island of illusions, though the difference is crucial in that Shakespeare never doubts the importance of the outer world stage of social events - the world of men - rejecting the isolationism of

When we turn, however, to look closely at Malone's stark world portrayed between the weaving of his stories we find that his disaffection is such that he even conceives of his room as the interior of a skull (205). The reductive and subjective retreat however is not quite complete for the window through which the narrator can see the stars also evokes the passing of seasons and the brief lives of others. Malone is able to watch the shadow form of the couple across the street making love, and even considers how others might view him now. The image he has of himself is curiously alien and detached from the human world, it is as if the narrator's awareness of himself is as fictional as his presentation of Macmann. This self image indeed clearly resembles the character of Macmann which the narrator develops in the second of his stories and in the growing alienation of Sapo, so that we are hardly surprised at Sapo's transformation.

The world faintly drawn through that solitary window represents the socio-cultural world of human endeavour, a world to which the narrator, Malone, clearly does not belong. Indeed Malone's perspective threatens to dissolve all. This

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a Caliban. Shakespeare exposes the inner illusion of the stage in order to point to the real external world, which the stage world reflects and enlarges on, even if it is only a dream it is a dream nevertheless worth attaining - hence Prospero's desire to leave the enchanted isle and take up his rightful place as Duke of Milan. Beckett's work likewise exposes the illusion of the stage but at the same time breaks the boundary between real and imaginary, external world and the imaginative inner space of the stage so that, in an odd way and despite the lack of realism, the two are made indistinguishable - portraying life's illusion which for Beckett, as for Shakespeare, becomes a kind of stage. In Beckett's case, however, this lacks centrality, causing Hamm to reflect like the narrator in *Texts for Nothing* 'was I ever really there or did it all happen without me?

contraction into such a tiny space leaves the narrator stranded with the window acting as a kind of umbilical cord connecting to a possible and indeed insistent other world which at this point is not denied.[91] This creates the sense of a womb and with it ironically the possibility of birth rather than death. Indeed such a process constitutes a threat to Malone who would, if not quite so poetically, long for his quiet breath to cease upon the midnight with no pain, rather than be born into that 'other' world, to start again, to, in a sense, become part of another incarnation, already growing in embryo, as we have seen, between the lines. We can see how this is developed in the later dramatic works. For example, in *A Piece of Monologue* such a process is strongly suggested through the complex syntax and imagery.

> *Birth was the death of him. Again. Words are few. Dying too. Birth was the death of him. Ghostly grinning ever since. Up at the lid to come. In cradle and crib. At suck first fiasco. With the first totters. From Mummy and Nanny and back. All the way. Bandied back and forth. So ghostly grinning on. From funeral to funeral. To now. This night. Two and a half Billion seconds. Hard to believe so few. From funeral to mineral. Funeral as of … he all but said loved ones.* (1990: 424)

Here the short clichéd phrases form separate units of meaning, the coming and passing away of both life and death. The use

[91] 'Does this mean there is more light here now, now that I know what is going on? No, I fear not, it is the same grey as hithertofore, literally sparkling at times, then growing murky and dim. thickening is perhaps the work until all things are blotted out except the window which seems in a manner of speaking my umbilicus, so that 1 say to myself, When it too goes out I shall know' more or less where I am. (Beckett 1979: 205)

of rhyme and half-rhyme in these opening lines provides both a paradoxical sense of definition between phrases and also a ringing connectiveness; these are the inescapable accumulating moments of time caught in the steady but relentless rhythm of their passage. It is as if the narrator, shaped within his own discourse, is dragged from one day to the next and from one moment to another. By the end of the piece this build up of memories and images, the rags of time, threaten to cave in under their own weight and the narrator's desperation to be free of them. Under such pressure the rapid repetition of phrases falls towards seeming confusion and randomness. On top of this, during the Monologue, we have the autocratical

> *Waits for first word always the same. It gathers in the mouth. Parts lips and theists tongue forward. Birth. Parts the dark. Slowly the window. That first night. The room. The spills. The hands. The lamp. the gleam of brass. Fade. Gone. Again. Again and again gone.* (428)

We have now the strong Biblical resonance of 'parts the dark' like God dividing night and day, only here it is the tongue splitting silence. The narrator is born again through the word, like the word of old which brought forth man and beast. With the short monosyllabic repetition of the room and the few objects it contains, we have a sense of starting once again, one narrative merging into another. In effect, as with *The Trilogy*, the narrator and his world are continually redefined within the

series of intertwining narratives, forced on without reprieve amidst its purgatorial windings.[92]

In a similar way to that which we have just noted With *A Piece of Monologue*, Malone, toward the end of the text, seems unable to separate himself from his own stories. However, this process has been continual throughout as I have suggested in connection with the portrayal of Sapo and Macmann (e.g. see Beckett 1979: 74-5). Malone interestingly claims that he is trying to end with his creations. Is it that

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[92] What we have with changing narrator and narrative is a change of form but not necessarily of consciousness. Certain experiences, certain sets of conditions link between the texts in a way which resembles the process outlined by Watt in reference to the blind piano tuner and his son, an incident which is reduced only to its 'elastic content'.

lt resembled them in the sense that it was not ended, when it was past, but continued to unfold in Watt's head, from beginning to end, over and over again, the complex connexions of its lights and shadows, the passing from silence to sound and from sound to silence, the stillness before the movement and the stillness after, the quickenings and the retardings, the approaches and separations, all the shifting detail of its march and ordinance, according to the irrevocable caprice of its taking place. It resembled them in the vigour with which it developed a purely plastic content, and gradually lost, in the nice processes of its lights, its sounds, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal. (Beckett 1981: 69)

We can see here how the very process is developed through the syntax: the ever expanding sentence in which the repetition of light and shadow, sound and silence and the sense of movement which accompanies them, leads to a world without meaning and beyond understanding, the pure uncoloured substance of experience. One can see it as a kind of template on which other things can be produced that resemble the original in terms of the response that they illicit. Schopenhauer relates this to *Will* by drawing a comparison with Plato's world of universal forms (though now, in one sense, we might consider the contrary, view that only the sign remains constant not the thing it is connected to). That is that the Will acts as the template for the many variations of similar forms which exist in the world of substance. This in the texts provides us with the impression of an overarching consciousness, which all the constantly sliding disparate forms and characters are a part of.

Malone confuses himself with his own story or does he recognise that he is only himself part of it, not its originator but a strand in someone else's narrative? Can we ever say of a fictional character that it recognises itself as part of a narrative fiction? In any case Malone must be taken as part of a textual creation or series of meta-narratives which make up *The Trilogy*. We could easily extend this to the whole of Beckett's work," however, we will come to this in a moment. The desire of Malone to cease with his creations suggests more than a simple ending of the text. Macmann at this point, for example, is presented with the problematic figure of Lemeul[93]

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[93] We have already seen examples of this lack of control and uncertainty presented in *Malone Dies* through certain curious character developments. For example, on Macrnann's entry to the asylum the blaspheming young man in charge is ironically given the image of Christ (1979: 235) - clearly a figure whom in this form Macmann is unable to relate. It is later thai we come to a further reversal of the Christ-like figure through the symbolic removal of Moll - the character Lemuel, who efiectively takes her plaoe, is transformed from a sadomasochistic Jew hater into Macmann's friend and is the agent employed by Malone to end the story. These changes are clearly sign-posted and run counter to what we have already learned about the characters. Moll cannot fulfil such a role - her sterile body, after the pathetic and comic attempts at a sexual relationship, undergoes a phantom pregnancy which marks the final stages of her decay. Before her death she symbolically loses her one remaining tooth carved into a crucifix (244) - she clearly cannot perform the role of saviour - just as the self-centred young man running the asylum could not. Ironically it is the anti-semite Lemuel who must fulfill that role. The change is an obvious one requiring the form of a man not a women, the fictional love affair having run its course between Macmann and Moll. Such a love story cannot provide the narrator with ultimate satisfaction, this can only be brought about through ending both the story-telling and story-teller in the process (we might see a cross connection with Moll and Molloy - as if it represents the failure and rejection of the Molloy episode which so transformed Moran). Here we have a kind of control driven by need on the narrator's part, but one which runs counter to the consistency of the story and raises many internal contradictions which the narrator actively denies or attempts to cover up.

and five other characters who are fellow inmates of the asylum (258-60). The image is a powerful one: we are presented with the stark lyrical passage of the fatal boat journey and its strange occupants (262-4). The gentle rocking of the boat beneath the evening stars is captured through the bare and simple language. Symbolically it is 'Easter Sunday' a date which is analogous with Dante's sojourn into the underworld, his passing out of Hell and from before the face of Lucifer;[94] to see again the stars, which represent so graphically God's divine and universal order. Malone even draws upon the image of the moon which he had denied earlier.[95]The suggestion is that this is indeed a mythic moon like Dante's 'prison home of Cain.

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[94] E se'or sotto l'emisperio giunto / ch'è opposito a quel che la gran secca / coverchia, e sottol cui colmo consunto / fu l'uom che nacque e visse sanm pecm [...] (Dante.in.cxxxiv.11.113-16)

As compared with 'The sun was dragging itself up, dispatching on its way what perhaps would be, thanks to it, a glorious May or April day, April more likely, it is doubtless the Easter week-end, spent by Jesus in Hell.' (Beckett 1979: 25)

[95] In other words the moon here is clearly only a trope and therefore, is exposed as mere symbolism - a device being employed purely for effect. The passage, as we have seen. strongly plays on the final moment of the *Inferno* and it is with this in mind that I refer to the moon as the 'prison house of Cain', for it harks back to Belaqua's attempt to grapple with Dante's symbolism in the opening story of *More Pricks than Kicks (Dante and the Lobster).* For example:

> For the tiller of the field the thing was simple, he had it horn his mother. The spots were Cain with his truss of thorns, cursed from the earth fugitive and vagabond. The moon was that countenance fallen and branded, seared with the first stigma of God's pity, that an outcast might not die quickly. (Samuel Beckett, *More Pricks than Kicks,* Calder Publications 1993. pp. l 1-12)

In suggesting that Malone evokes Dante's moon makes the scene all the more poignant since it conveys the awful nature of Man's lot. Macmann and the others are indeed little more than *vagabond out casts* forced to endure a terrible existence.

It is interesting to consider here that Dante places himself within his own fiction and in a very real sense does not separate fact from the imaginary since he is able to take the fictional world, created in the Divina Commedia, as being completely representative of his personal spiritual journey in search of God and salvation. In contrast Malone seems to recognise himself as only part of a fiction, a representational world, and wishes to leave such a world of illusion, or rather cease with it like a lull in the boats movement mid-way on the waves, never to resume.

The five characters that are with Macrmann and Lemeul represent at least some of the other creations. Indeed they resemble types of characters that Beckett has employed in his earlier works, or at least composite elements of them. In some ways, as we come across them in their separate cells at the asylum, we can see a similarity between them and the dead whom Dante encounters in the underworld; and through them we have something of the personal Hell exhibited amidst the general horror surrounding them. Though unlike Dante's damned, the characters Malone portrays are uncommunicative and comic rather than truly tragic. Macmann himself is very much reduced to their condition, and he too is led in chains. This would indeed seem to be Schopenhauer's rather than Dante's ideal tragedy: the comedy of individual life and circumstance which forms the general tragedy of human existence.[96]

[96] 'Schopenhauer considers that the life of Man forms the well run pattern of a Tragi-comedy; this is indeed the very art form which Beckett creates *par excellence.*

The contrast, which I shall explore in the following chapter, lies between Dante's representation of his own spiritual quest within his narrative; a quest which leads him to truth and reality, a journey which in a very real sense Dante controls, and Malone's growing awareness or sense that he himself is only part of a fiction and by ending his creations might put a stop to the long narrative of his own existence.[97] Of course this is beyond Malone's control as indicated in the confused blend formed between the narrator and the story he is attempting to tell, which is ever increasingly blurred and distorted as we move towards the closing sections of the text. It is here that we also paradoxically find the one point of clarity, and the slight gleam of the narrator's fictional status -

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The life of every individual. viewed as a whole and in general. and when only its significant features are emphasized, is really a tragedy; but gone through in detail it has the character of a comedy. For the doings and worries of the day, the restless mockeries of the moment, the desires and fears of the week, the mishaps of every hour, are all brought about by chance that is always bent on some mischievous trick; they are nothing but scenes from a comedy. the never-fulfilled wishes, the frustrated efforts, the hopes mercilessly blighted by fate, the unfortunate mistakes of the whole life, with increase suffering and death at the end, always give us a tragedy. thus, as if fate must contain all the woes of tragedy, and yet we cannot even assert the dignity to tragic characters, but, in the broad detail of life, are inevitably the foolish characters of comedy.' (vol.i.322). It is this double perspective which is so conspicuous within Beckett's fictions: in that the whole snuggle for life produces a bitter tragedy while its many parts contain numerous comic scenes.

[97] At the beginning of the previous chapter I suggested the way that the *Molloy* text seemed to be playing with the form of Dante's *La Divina Comedia* - a kind of reversal of its thematic structure - in the light of the above discussion we can broaden this to all three parts of *The Trilogy*. Instead of leading upward toward light and God's truth, we have a movement that takes us from Molloy and Moran to the less definite and turbulent world of Malone (though still with the window looking out on an active world), on *to* the vain attempt, in *The Unnamable,* at complete enclosure from all painful externalities.

an imaginary author indeed. However, despite Malone's desire to take 'as many of his creations'(1979: 252) with him as possible, he recognises that he cannot take them all, suggesting not only his own limitations and subordinate nature, but that this will not serve as final closure to the text, though Beckett, their real author, as yet had no thought of writing a sequel.

The Puppet's Side-Show

In the oblique passages of *The Unnamable* this sense of continual rebirth amidst the eternal round of existence is further explored, though now we are made even more aware that this process emerges from the world as representation Returning, for example, to my earlier discussion we find that identity and the creation or birth of identity precariously resides on the quick sands of aporia. The narrator, for example, goes as far as to deny that the personal pronoun 'I' is, in fact, a reference to himself, claiming rather problematically that it is of another who has usurped (his) name' and from which 'I is far' and 'I is near'. The narrator's seeming sense of confusion as to whom or what is really speaking is from the very first equally shared by the reader. This is compounded by the constant slippage between first, second and third person: the I, you and he of the text. This sense of uncertainty is heightened when at one particular point the narrator follows a statement with 'Oh the swine!' (349) as if what he had just said had been put into his mouth by someone else. However, such condemnation does not confirm that this itself is the genuine 1' or authentic voice of the narrator.

It is no wonder then that the nameless narrator in the face of such uncertainty will begin to question if his eyes are not in fact turned in on themselves and that he is only looking into his own retina (276), and so forming a kind of closed self-referential circuit. Nevertheless this sense of solipsism in which the narrator effectively denies the existence of a world outside his own mind forms a kind of awful comfort. A sense of comfort or security from which he can attempt to establish his own centrality and that all else is subordinate and ultimately of his own invention. Yet such an awareness does not live up to scrutiny, for the narrator's world is continually disrupted by the various things which force their way in upon him. He cannot close parenthesis, keep out the images being fed to him.[98] In attempting to stave off these images and forms the narrator actively denies that he will fall back into the 'old style' of storytelling. Presumably he means by this the habitual round, shared by all the narrators of *The Trilogy*, of creating a particular human character and describing something of its life - a life in which the narrator will inevitably come to recognise that he too has a share. In this we also perceive something of the narrator's dilemma, in that through his creations lies the crucible of his own rebirth, while paradoxically he is increasingly forced to recognise his own equal status to theirs in that he is as much created as creator.

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[98] The nameless narrator, for example, graphically draws attention to his plight when he claims that 'It's this hunt that is tiring, this unending being at bay. images, they imagine that by piling on the images they'll entice me in the end. Like the mother who whistles to prevent baby's bladder from bursting, there's another.' (1979: 318)

This reading is advanced when we consider the narrator's reference to 'they' whom he has never seen and goes on to describe Basil with 'eyes like cinders' (273) who seems to act as their go between. It is 'they' who have fed him (the narrator) bits of information about 'nature and man' in a kind of reversal of the opening Molloy text in which the mysterious 'they' send out an agent to take away bits of the narrator's diary which clearly relate to the scraps of his unfortunate life that we go on to read. However, it is natural that we should, at this point, find at least a partial reversal of *The Trilogy*'s beginning for it is now that we come nearest to the origin of the narrator's plight and just as Molloy is unable to free himself totally from his mother's influence, so the narrator of *The Unnamable* is unable to free himself from the trappings of selfhood, the puppet being shaped and named by Man. For this indeed is Man, creator of himself along with his own world through the many varied acts of expression, communication and representation in general.

We can clearly see how this is developed through Basil's rapid transformation into Mahood, 'cast', as the narrator claims, in the 'image' of himself (286). This is interesting since he has denied ever having seen Man or nature - once again reminding us of blind Hamm wondering if he were ever really a part of the world. Perhaps in the denial we obtain a sense of the character or narrator being part of a represented world, the narratives of others (they) rather than autonomous. In this way he is indeed more like an actor whose stage existence consists of reading the lines of script that others have written. Thus we are forced to reverse the

narrator's statement in that it is he who is cast in the image of Mahood and not vice versa.

For example, this connects strongly with the anti-character Worm. The narrator claims that Worm is different. 'Worm only exists for others' (318) like a fish on a hook. Nameless figures ('They') are described as rotating about him (327) returning us only partially to our initial image of the sun-like narrator orbited by his almost mechanical creations. However, Worm, we are told, is free of narrative, the almost opposite of the narrator and yet from whom we glean something of the narrator's origins. Worm is observed through a 'keyhole', by those who pass about him and 'while one speaks the other peeps' (ibid.). It is interesting to remind ourselves here that most of the key characters begin with the letter M - Worm is inverted - as if he alone is unformed and lacks a definite image. However, by simply naming him and actively desiring to be like him the hapless narrator has effectively begun the process of drawing Worm into the representational world, even though the humble, lowly and despised creature is furthest of all things from the glorious and upright image of Man. Yet the narrator in describing Worm's plight is in effect reflecting his own having himself been drawn from birth into a false world of representative truth.

We can see how this connection is developed through the transformation of Basil into Mahood. We have already noted, in Malone Dies, the change undergone by Sapo through which he is replaced by Macmann (the unfortunate image of the narrator himself). Here the metamorphoses is just as sudden, in which the name is again substituted for one beginning with the usual M, though in this case unlike Sapo's

transformation we are almost certain this has not been brought about by the seemingly impotent narrator but crucially it is the narrator who is forced to don the image of Basil or rather Mahood. Mahood is clearly a play on motherhood and we can further relate this to the Ma at the beginning of the *Molloy* text (see Chap.2 p.27). The mother (who Molloy so despises) acting to feed the child in terms of bodily nourishment, but also in the sense of narrative, of building up a picture of the world and the child's place within it, of self and identity. The narrator, for example, claims that he will use one of 'Mahood's stories'(284), he then goes on to describe the image of a man with one leg swinging along between two crutches in away reminiscent of Molloy, spiraling around the world so that he is returning to his point of origin. The sense is that identity, place and purposes are built on language and images like the information presented by Basil and his crew who seem to have taught the nameless narrator everything he knows of the world and of himself; in fact who are in many ways his creator or are at least the creators of his conscious self and its representational context. From this evidence we can conclude that the reference to 'they' is a wide general reference to human society and culture as the shaping force of Man's perception of both himself and the circumambient universe.

The narrator, as an interesting addition to this, describes himself, not only as a mouth (An image which often occurs in Beckett's work and is most significantly developed in *Not I*), but as a great 'tympanum' (352) with no thickness between outer and inner world, vibrating to what it hears but not without obvious distortion. This seems to represent the

zero point of writing, the representational narrative of existence. Life as transcribed by all the anomalies of the world. Yet in claiming this and in drawing such an image it demonstrates an awareness which stretches beyond such a narrow perception of existence (i.e. as seeing everything as merely existing in the world of representation).

However, at least on the surface this seems to be suggested in the constant creational shifts which occur through such statements as 'me, mutter me'(275) pointing us primarily to the language itself rather than the 'me' or 'I' as some external force or objective being existing outside the text. In Malone Dies, for example, we already have Malone's description of himself (like Alice after taking a swig from the bottle marked 'Drink Me') as having limbs 'loose and vast' (215). This is very much like Schopenhauer's understanding of the death process, the sense that the individual is given form through the drive or will-to-live, without such an act of will the body begins to dissolve; further echoing Malone's impression of hands reaching into the body to scatter it, even as it turns to dust. The narrator in *The Unnamable* extends this by picturing himself as a whirlwind of dust, of words, beneath which lie all the joys and pains of life (355-6). We find a further connection when we consider the pile of lentils Malone describes in his story of Sapo (196) with a later image, in the same text, of two piles of dust (204). These are clearly related to his own bodily form; the dust piles are not of the same size but reduce uniformly and are perhaps a symbolic representation of Malone obliterating himself and his fictions simultaneously through the very process of creation. Again when we couple this to Malone's perception of hands passing

through him we are brought once more to the image of a puppet, a marionette worked by 'they' those mysterious puppeteers. A similar sense is conveyed by the narrator of how It Is who effectively claims that he has been formed and shaped by the line of multiple authors who have contributed to the three books (presumably referring to the three texts which make-up the work). I suggest in this way on can draw a parallel with Rilke's Fourth Elegy in which the poet writes: 'I won't endure those half-filled human masks,/ better the puppet it at least is full./ I'll put up with the stuffed skin, / the wire that is nothing but appearance.' (Rilke 1982: 169) As we can see Rilke in his assessment of human life also uses the puppet analogy. Life is simply appearance, going as far as to prefer the puppet for its skin 'is full' rather than the empty soullessness he sees around him. Beckett, however, is very different, though equally non- materialistic. The puppet is the soul, the reflection or representation of man rather than the real substance, cast in the upright image of humanity.

We can locate then a crucial similarity between Schopenhauer's idea of Will as the force or life drive which underscore all forms and definitions to be located in the representational world and Beckett's awareness of the inexplicable force which holds the individual in the purgatorial confines of a representational reality. This is indeed supported in *The Unnamable* when the narrator refers back to *Murphy* through asking the question

> *Did they ever get Mahood to speak? It seems to me not. I think Murphy spoke now and then, the others too perhaps, I don't remember, but it was clumsily done, you could see the*

> *vetriloquist. And now I feel it's about to begin. They muse consider me sufficiently stupified, wàh all their balls about being and existing.* (320)[99]

The reference to Murphy who may have 'spoke now and then' rather than simply mouthing the words of others presents us with an important clue. Murphy, for example, clearly sought a way out of the purgatorial torture of conscious existence by seeking complete negation, that is in the strict Schopenhauerian terms the only true freedom from representation lies in letting go of the Will to be (live or exist). However, in *The Trilogy* I suggest we have begun to see both a further subtle acceptance and departure from this gloomy conclusion to Schopenhauer's philosophy, through a kind of acknowledgement of the inescapability of the will-to-live. That is that one of the principal concerns of The Trilogy is not to seek a negation of the Will but rather to begin a process continued throughout the longer prose works of stripping away and exposing the representational in order to reach the Will (true substance) or underlying authenticity of the world. To this end we find Beckett's emphasis and approach in this

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[99] A little earlier in the text the narrator interestingly claims that
But now I shall say my old lesson, if l can remember it. Under the skies, on the roads, in the toivns, in the woods, in the hills, in the plains, by the shores, on the seas, behind my manikins, I was not always sal I wasted my time, **abjured my rights,** suffered for nothing, forgot my lessom Then a little hell after my own heart not too cruel, with a few nice damned to foist my groans on, something sighing off and on and the distant gleams of pity's fires biding their hour to promote us to ashes.(Tr.280) Here the narrator both acknowledges that he has been forced live behind a mask of Representation and, in part, through his failings own Mailings. has found himself unable to acœpt such a position; because of this the world for the narrator is continually transformed into a hellish purgatory'.

search to understand and ultimately escape the strictures of representational form, are somewhat different from Schopenhauer's. For example, in *The Trilogy* we have an exploration of the process of learning from a childhood experience; the illusion of identity being part of a discourse which contains all our various social ends: Trapped in a verbal and written cage, a pattern of words posing as meaning. If we consider Beckett's familiar image of a disembodied mouth we can also, I suggest, equally see in The Trilogy how words are disconnected from meaning.

Each attempt to escape from defining the self only leads to further definition - there is no escape - on one hand we have the recognition of the narrator as a fictional character, part of a written text, and on the other an attempt to escape from the process of representation, of constructing narrative, to find some real trace of existence behind the fictional facade.

> [...] *like a caged beast born of caged beasts born in a cage and dead in a cage, born and then dead, born in a cage then dead in a cage, in a word like a beast, in one of their words, like such a beast, and that I seek, like such a beast, with my little strength, such a beast, with nothing of its species left* [...] (356)

The act of narration which constitutes *The Trilogy* represents a continual set of stories, a process which has parallels with a Celtic or mythic tradition of defining the position and nature of Man in relation to the rest of creation. The stories distort meaning and a sense of final definition, outlining the dilemma of Man. The 'I' unlike Descartes' position is not a definite fixed point, but a fictional creation that is in a continual state of

defining itself. We might in this locate a reversal of Eliot's attempt to build a mythic structure in order to locate a universal goal or truth to existence.' For Beckett, however, the artist cannot reach the 'light' even through the most profound of human experiences (for 'ultimately Beckett's work is a turning away from experience). This brings us back to our initial observations, on which we began this chapter, concerning the 'bees': for by stripping away the representational world built on experience we are no longer left with the deafening hum of Mandeville's human hive, but only with unadorned beauty of the drones' dance of life. In this way we must find truth elsewhere and not in the social world of Man or, in a religious sense, through his imaginative creation of a soul reaching toward God.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Soul of Representation: A Study of Samuel Beckett's *Text for Nothing*

In an attempt to understand Beckett's exploration and challenge to the perceived notions of representation, this article explores a wider historical critique implied through the Dante connection, which will also serve to bring us closer to understanding Beckett's ultimate goal in reaching beyond the merely representational within his art. I shall, therefore, primarily consider the prose work *Text For Nothing* for two reasons: firstly it presents one of Beckett's most powerful portrayals of at least part of Dante's vision; and secondly because this particular work forms a natural progression from earlier writings: not only chronologically but also in terms of style.[100] I shall also, by way of illustration, make reference

[100] Although How It Is is often taken as a kind of addendum to The Trilogy, it is important to note that Beckett started on the French original of this text (*Comment C'est*) some nine years later, near the beginning of 1959 and then only with great effort. This marks a considerable hiatus in Beckett's writing career following exhausting but highly fertile period in which he produced *The Trilogy*(May 1947 - Jan 1950). For example, as Knowlson records: 'It was desperately hard going. *Comment C'est* proved to be one of the most difficult texts that he had ever written. He found that he could face working on it for only two or three hours a day at the most; a dozen lines a day were an

to *The Trilogy* and *How It Is*. For I suggest that these two texts, as examples of Beckett's middle and later period, particularly establish a powerful critique not only of the Dantesque model but of Western forms of representation and the religious idealism on which Beckett, by implication, suggests they were founded.

A Medieval Point-Of-View

Even a cursory look at Beckett's previous works, especially *The Trilogy*, strongly indicates that his search for truth must lead him away from an impression of the human soul.[101] The reason for this is that the idea or image of soul, so embedded within Judaeo-Christian tradition, has, through its desired representation, became a fundamental part of the artist's, and indeed humanity's, aspiration to progress and so rise ever 'toward the light'.[102] Beckett is highly critical of the general tendency of Western art to formulate such aesthetic idealism

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achievement; half a page a triumph.' (Knowlson 1996: 461 [see also pp. 418-74 for a full account of this period])

[101] For Beckett the image or soul of Man is merely just its representational form, the body or socially defined puppet-self.

102 For example, when the bed-ridden Malone loses the stick he needs for reaching with he reflects that 'I suppose the wisest thing now is to live it over again, meditate upon it and be edified. It is thus that man distinguishes himself from the ape and rises from, discovery to discovery, ever higher toward the light'(Beckett 1979: 233). We note immediately here the powerful comic irony: the image of man rising up from the ape toward the light of 'discovery' is itself brutally undercut by Malone's own physical condition; for despite his ability to reason Malone is forced, in his impotence, to lie flat and cower amidst the sheets. He seems less than the wild beast he claims supremacy over. The 'light' here is only represented truth and the real discovery will stem from Malone's awareness of the stark conditions which underpin his futile existence.

and to believe that through such means it can find genuine truth and understanding.

It is perhaps within the work of the medieval poet Dante, as Beckett recognises, that we find such a view-point most highly developed and reflected; and it is because of this Beckett clearly parallels much of his own work against Dante's all embracing vision. For example, in an early article, Christopher Ricks was to go as far as to consider 'that throughout his work he (Beckett) has wrestled with the attempt to rewrite Dante so that literalism is expunged and so that we may see the truths about man, not about God' (Ricks 1964: 254-5) To conclude that Beckett's work is essentially an 'attempt to rewrite Dante' is a considerable claim indeed and one which perhaps both misunderstands what Beckett is attempting to achieve through his art and overstates Dante's influence. Nevertheless, it does emphasise the important effect Dante's work had on Beckett's fiction making; and we will return, at the end of this article, to re-evaluate Ricks' rather provocative statement in the light of our own argument.

It is obvious that Beckett's reading and understanding of Dante is essential to his work, his very first novel (*Dream*), and the subsequent series of short stories largely drawn from it, take as their central character the slothful Balaqua from the *Purgatorio* [103] However the Dante connection is both complex and problematic and we need to take a wider as well as longer perspective, if we are fully to grasp this relation, for it is, as I have suggested, essential to Beckett's entire artistic

[103] Dante and Virgil first come across Balaqua on Mount Purgatory in canto IV of the *Purgatorio.*

development and the fundamental critique that his work forms of Western ideas and definitions of representation.

It is through this implied criticism of these differing strands of perception relating to Man and his Universe that we can begin to understand why Beckett draws so often on Dante's all embracing vision. For it is in the pages of the *La Divina Commedia* that we find a sense of Man's image or soul in relation to the wider universe or macrocosm. I suggest that such a desire for absolute meaning and definition lies in both the realm of myth and science, and represents the human need to find both significance and context, so marking itself off from the rest of creation: A noble aspiration indeed and one which achieves its fullest expression through Dante's idea of the soul. Dante represents the soul as essentially the preservation of the intellect after death (i.e. the shade resembles the living person because it represents their individuality, and this is conveyed through a representation of their physical features). For example when Dante enters Hell it is with an awareness that the shades he will encounter do not represent the death of the intellect, they have only lost the 'il ben dell'intelleto' (Dante vol I: Canto iii. l. 8) the ability or intelligence to reach God and to Dante this is a kind of death indeed. We have in connection with this the problematic figure of Virgil whom Dante regarded in a very real sense as his true 'maestro',[104] the opening sections of the Inferno being

[104] Dante, throughout the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio,* refers to the figure of Virgil as *maestra* (master). This is both meant literally in the context of the narrative were Virgil is Dante's guide and companion and figuratively through the acknowledgement of the influence of his works, particularly *The Aeneid.*

based largely on book vi of the Aeneid and Anchises own descent into Hell, (Virgil 1968: 147 – 174) from which Dante borrows much of the imagery for canto iii. Virgil is of course one of the dead confined to limbo or the outer regions of Hell where unbaptised children and those pagans who have led a virtuous life but have not received Christ's message reside.[105] Dante clearly does the best he can for Virgil in giving him an honoured status amongst the damned, but damned nevertheless he is. Despite this Virgil is clearly portrayed with a very strong individual character, guiding and instructing the at times faint hearted Dante.

Purgatory and Heaven are treated in a similar light. Though it is true in the celestial regions, Dante this time guided by Beatrice (who in work and mind seems synonymous with Christ or God in terms of divinity), cannot, for the most part, see the glorious dead because of their brightness.[106] However, it is clear on questioning them that they present Dante with the intact memories of their former lives, and seem to retain much of their original characteristics. In these regions that make up the divine universal order Dante is particularly effective in that he mainly employs personal portraits of people he once knew. This idea of the soul can be seen for example in Marlowe's Faustus who in his final soliloquy, caught in the fast and relentless rhythms of time, which he cannot stop; in a wonderful reversal from the demi-

[105] See Canto iv of the *Inferno*

[106] Quali per vetri trasparenti e tersi, / over per acque nitide e tranquille, / non si profonde the i fondi sien persi,/ toman di nostri visi le postille / debilie si, the perla in bianca fronte / non vien men tosto alle nostre pupille; / tali vid'io pin facce a palar pronte; ...(Dante vol 3: Canto iii.ll.10-16).

god image he presents at the beginning of the play, wishes that he would become like the brutish 'beasts' (Sc. 13. l. 101), happy in that 'their souls are soon dissolved in elements' (Ibid. l. 103). Yet this negation never comes and Faustus, the true Faustus that is his living personality, is carried off to Hell.

This view of the soul is clearly something that Beckett sets out in his work literally to cast to the elements, the use of Biblical allusion, that 'mythology with which I am perfectly familiar' (Duckworth 1972: 18) as Beckett calls it, is important in the sense of the image, idea or definition of soul, Creator, or Saviour. For example, at one significant point in the text the narrator creates the sense that he is part of Lent eternal[107] an everlasting sacrifice associated with the beast-like act of getting down on all fours before rising on knees to pray. In *Texts for Nothing* (Beckett 1984: 71-116) the narrator claims that he is 'out of species', and at the beginning of *The Unnamable* the 'voice' attempts to give itself a form, a shape, though not at first human (Beckett 1979: 267-88). In *Texts for Nothing* we are presented with the evolution of Man developing from all fours to its upright position, the image of God reminiscent of Pozzo's mockery towards Vladimir and Estragon.[108] This progression is placed against the narrator's

[107]'my sack sole variable my days my nights my seasons and my feasts it says lent everlasting then of a sudden Hallowmass no summer that year if it is the same not much real spring my sack thanks to my sack that I keep dying in a dying age.'(Beckett 1984: 18)

[108] Estragon: [Hastily.] Were not from these parts, Sir.
Pozzo: [Halting.] You are human beings none the less. [He puts on his glasses.] As far as one can see. [He takes off his glasses.] Of the same species as myself. [He bursts into an enormous laugh.] Of the same species as Pozzo! Made in God's Image! (Beckett 1990: 24)

consideration of a 'contemporary skull',[109] in some ways it bares similarities to the grave-digger scene in Hamlet (vi.ii.ll.1-211), were the humour and irreverence of the sexton to the bones he unearths mocks human achievement and highlights its ultimate limitation. However Beckett is much more interested in the representation of the human form in God's image, rejecting the double sense of the Elizabethan playwright of man both animal and divine. This quintessence of dust is perhaps only dust after all, and yet it is caught and moved in a terrible storm. Beckett creates the powerful image of a wheel revolving in the head: circumscribing mind and life.

> *What thronging memories, that's to make me think I'm dead, I've said it a million times. But the same return, like the spokes of a turning wheel, always the same, and all alike, like spokes. And yet I wonder, whenever the hour returns when I have to wonder that, if the wheel in my head turns, I wonder, so given am I to thinking with my blood, or if it merely swings, like a balance wheel in its case, a minute to and fro, seeing the immensity to measure and that heads are only wound up once, so given am I to do my thinking with my breath* (Beckett 1984: 94).

This is the prison of Ixion, reduced to 'thinking' in 'blood', with 'breath' (ibid.), the desire and struggle for life, for form, which also imposes our limits through the need to measure

[109] '[...] It's not me in any case, I'm not talking of me, I've said it a million times, no point in apologizing again, for talking of me, when there's X, that paradigm of human kind, moving at will, complete with joys and sorrows, perhaps even a wife and brats, forbears most certainly, a carcass in God's image and a contemporary skull, but above all endowed with movement, that's what strikes you above all, with his likeness so easy to take and his so instructive soul [...]'(Beckett 1984: 93-4)

everything, to give everything a place including and especially ourselves.

In direct relation to this it is interesting how many of Beckett's characters end up losing the use of their legs ultimately forced to crawl on all fours or even on the belly, or roll in the form of a great cylinder like Macmann. Of course this is the worst form one could take in Christian terms, we think of the usurped shapes of the thieves in canto xxv of the *Inferno*, and in *Milton's Paradise Lost* Satan and his crew are ultimately transformed forever from their former god-like splendour into such a lowly body as the serpent. We find the most extreme embodiment in Becket's work through the naming of the lowly Worm who has yet to take any true form (see Beckett's *Trilogy* p. 318). Yet in Beckett it is not a reduction of form in the sense of good becoming evil, but rather acts to challenge the very assumption that humanity is cast in a divine shape.[110] In other words perception of ourselves is representational: giving our form and place in the scale of things greater significance than it really has, lifting it, all be it on two legs, above the rest of creation: a form in the sense of the intelligible self which will remain and continue to exist even after death. In attacking this living perception Beckett undermines the soul itself, taking from it representational form; and goes even further when he claims in the 'Proust essay' death will cure many of the desire for immortality' (Beckett 1965: 26). In essence it is not necessarily

[110] 'We might suppose that during the Second World War Beckett's experiences taught him that humanity was far from what could be considered divine or naturally more important than other forms of life.' (*See for analysis of Beckett's war-time life and circumstances: Bair. D., *Samuel Beckett a Biography,* 1978 pp. 320-66 & (Knowlson: 1996: 297-339)

the denial of life after death, there is, and modern physics agrees with it, a continual recycling of energy and matter, but a denial that the intellect, the individual personality, continues beyond death and so on to the last unspoken syllable of God's recorded time.

This process of exploration into notions of identity and the soul is developed at some detail in section v and vi of *Texts for Nothing* (Beckett 1984: 85-92). The narrator locates himself in an 'obscure assize where to be is to be guilty' (ibid.85), it is the awareness that existence itself is painful, the sin of simply having been born, which for Beckett is the real original sin. For example, Mr Endon refuses to make the first move in the bizarre chess game he plays or rather fails to play with Murphy as it would symbolise this enactment of birth.[111] However in this strange court, which echoes Lewis Caroll, the narrator represents himself as both 'clerk' and 'scribe'(ibid.) in the seemingly impossible position of both witnessing and noting himself. Indeed we find that in the later work, *How It Is*, the word 'witness' has all the force of a law court, of being judged by one's peers.[112] In the case of section v of *Texts for Nothing*,

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[111] See Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (1993), New York: Riverrun Press (First pub. 1938 by Picador)

[112] Note, for example, how this is conveyed in the following extract from *How It Is:* 'all alone and the witness bending over me name Kram bending over us father to son to grandson yes or no and the scribe name Krim generations of scribes keeping the record a little aloof sitting standing it's not said yes or no samples extracts' (Beckett 1985: 88). We can see here that Beckett cannot resist suggesting that we are being continually judged, re-defined and positioned within life's various narratives. Interestingly, in evoking the broader historical perspective that this process has taken place through all the endless generations of Man ('father to son to grandson'), Beckett also presents us with a sense or need for the ideal observer, God, in the form of the 'father'. In his role as father of all God represents the ultimate authority

as I have begun to outline, the fictional space is transformed into a court setting to great effect. The narrator, for example, talks of the eyes of the others which, during a terrible silence, 'fix' upon him (86). perhaps he is witnessing himself through them, constituted by the crowd (we could extend this to society in general - through and a part of, however reluctantly, the wider social conscience); again this in effect is providing him with a sense of shape or form, though at the same time the narrator denies that he is there or God for that matter, 'but both will be represented talking of his (the narrator's) soul'(87). There is clearly a play on the word 'represented' here, both his 'soul' and 'God' seem to be reduced to just that, mere representation. The narrator sees a hand out of the corner of his eye, but too close to make out the detail, it is in the act of writing, almost as if he, too, is being written, created with the text.

> *Yes, I see the scene, I see the hand, it comes creeping out of shadow, the shadow of my head, then scurries back, no connexion with me. Like a little creepy crawly it ventures out an instant, then goes back again, the things one has to listen to, I say it as I hear it. It's the clerk's hand, is he entitled to the wig, I don't know, formally perhaps. What do I do when silence falls, with rhetorical intent, or denoting lassitude, perplexity, consternation, I rub to and fro against my lips, where they meet, the first knuckle of my forefinger, but it's the head that moves, the hand rests, it's to such details the liar pins his hopes.* (86-7)[113]

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figure by whom all are judged. This desire for a divine, omniscient, judge or 'witness'(here the two terms are cleverly elided) further represents the need for security, giving both meaning and validity to human thought and action.

[113] Note especially here the sense of the narrator's own impotence. At first claiming that the 'hand'(presumably in the act of constructing the narrative)

Hand and soul ultimately figured arising 'from an imaginary head'(ibid.), but they too are somehow an imaginary part of this process of witnessing and being witnessed. The narrator is forced to evoke the multitude of nameless others 'It's they mummer my name speak to me of me' (87). It is as if the soul is reduced to a figure of language: a construction that exists outside the individual. Prayers are offered to his soul 'as if dead or that of an infant in its dead mother, that it may not go to limbo sweet thing' (ibid.) the suggestion is that the soul cannot be sustained as an independent life, and here we have the old theological argument that we touched on in relation to Dante, that an unbaptised child will end up in Limbo. Here it is the baptised soul of Man that is now consigned to that null place screaming with impotent rage and with the unformed mind of a new born babe.

The narrator goes on to suggest that words invent thought (see quote below), at least certain kinds of abstract thinking. Significantly it is at this point that we have a further clear link with the representation of both God and soul, the connection is with Christ receiving God's counsel at the foot of an adulteress (the Biblical image already effectively in its pictorial positioning subordinating the Divine to human sin).

> *Blot, words can be blotted and the mad thoughts they invent, the nostalgia for that slime where the eternal breathed and his son wrote, long after with divine idiotic finger, at the feet*

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emerges from his own head; yet suddenly and implausibly insisting that it has no connexion with him. He then equally suddenly and paradoxically claims that it is in fact the 'clerk's hand' after all. Finally, the head itself will be taken as nothing more than 'imaginary'.

> *of an adulteress, wipe it out, all you have to do is to say you have said nothing, and so say nothing again.* (ibid. 90)

The 'slime' through which we suffer such a sense of loss is the dust from which God created Man, giving him his own image and the breath of eternal life, and yet are not these just words. God's son, now blindly writing in that same dust, resembles the narrator writing with an 'imaginary' hand, noting himself under the guidance of others. The process is one of both concealing and exposing the self. Concealing in the sense of the perceived elevation in terms of individual significance above the rest of creation and in the honoured status it implies; exposure through the pressure of individual and collective awareness and the responsibility this places on the individual under scrutiny. The words are the terms of the narrator's imprisonment which in effect constitutes the life long trial of being witnessed by others. Yet this masks the reality, the fiction, like the act of writing or speaking, itself confirms identity and belonging while paradoxically also confirming the narrator's alienation. The promise of eternal salvation is built on a language he can no longer respond to. The whole system of beliefs is cast to the dust and the narrator clearly and ironically relates himself to the figure of Christ through the very act of writing, his hand is represented as being detached from the body, acting it would seem at the behest of others as it traces the pattern of a social identity which is as illusory as the world created within the text.

We can see from this that Beckett's fictions are not increasingly moving towards the representation of

archetypes[114], human or otherwise, as a number of critics have suggested, but rather to their very opposite. Beckett is clearly attempting to question and draw our attention to Man's perception of himself and the world and to expose those images for what they are, illusions which make up a world of representation. It is not therefore the definite form of Man that Beckett seeks but rather a process which strips away at the social and cultural representations of humanity so that the real or true substance of life can be laid bare.

We can, from this, locate the importance that Dante has on this enterprise, for his work, however, influential, belongs to another age entirely. As Eliot recognised however much one wanted to believe in it such a universal view as Dante's lies beyond modern Western culture. Indeed, Eliot seems to have a point when he claims that a 'dissociation of sensibility' (Eliot 1932: 281 – 291) has taken place since the Medieval period (where intellect, the way we act and genuine emotion have to some extent become disconnected, so that he could even say of the metaphysical poet John Donne, 'expert beyond experience' (Eliot 1961: 42). In following the historical perspective implied in Beckett's fiction we can perhaps see a slightly different perspective from that of Eliot's. Indeed one which I suggest seems to offer a more accurate general assessment of what took place during the Renaissance which created a shift in the set of relations between artistic sensibility and understanding. At its simplest level we can see that the

[114] See, for example, Hale. J. (1988) Perspectives in Rockaby in *'Make Sense Who May': Essays on Samuel Beckett's Later Works,* Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe Ltd. pp 66-76 and Dearlove, J.E. (1985) 'Allusion to Achetype'. *The Journal of Beckett studies, vol* 10, pp. 121-2.

kind of fixed structure of universal order so strongly represented in the *Divina Commedia* tends to give way during the onset of the Renaissance, transforming it into a much more fluid structure, where, for example, Pico in his 'Oration' accords Man no fixed place in the hierarchical great chain of being.[115] Perhaps it would be closer to say that the Greek idea of the Logos, that we discussed at the beginning of the article, has given way to the Mythos[116] – that is that the word of truth has given way to the fable – it effectively became increasingly

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[115] Note the following passage from Pico's *Oration (1486):* 'God the Father, the supreme Architect ... therefore took man as a creature of indeterminate nature and, assigning him a place in the middle the world, addressed him thus: 'Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is yours alone nor any function peculiar to yourself have I given you, Adam, to the end that according to yourself and judgement you may have and possess whatever abode, form and functions you yourself shall desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by me. You, constrained by no limits. in accordance with your own free will, in whose hand I have placed you, shall ordain for yourself the limits of your nature. I have set you at the world's centre so you may more easily observe the world from there. I have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honour, as though the maker and moulder of yourself, you may fashion yourself in whatever shape you prefer. You shall have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. You shall have the power, out of your souls judgement, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.' (Trans Forbes, L.E. 1948: 224 – 7). Alison Brown, in her work on the Renaissance, points out that 'What is new is not so much Pico's account of Man's central position in a hierarchical universe as his emphasis on man's freedom to move up or down as he pleases. (Brown 1988: 66)

[116] The Greek word *mythos* from which the English term myth is derived originally meant simply "word", "saying" or "story". It is only after the work of the Greek writer Herodotus in the 4th century BC, particularly his history of the war between the Greeks and the Persians, that the concept of historical fact became established in ancient Greek thought. In contrast, *mythos* then came to mean "fiction" and even "falsehood", as distinct from *logos,* "the word of truth".(*World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide.* p. 10.)

difficult to see art, or representational forms in general, as reaching or aspiring towards a divine truth via whatever method of expression.[117]

Conclusion

The connection with Dante then becomes all the more important – the quest for truth not in Dante's allegorical or symbolic fashion, not via the Logos, the Mythos being all we can know – the story telling that covers the real conditions of existence such as we find being developed in *The Trilogy* – but the definite attempt to go beyond language, and linguistically incorporate the very things over which language is built and which language itself is never fully able to accommodate. We must look at the syntax of life which Beckett so brilliantly develops in his work to escape such representational reductiveness, and the ultimate impossibility of true expression.

In his own way Beckett is searching for a pattern, a set of absolutes to counter the relative universe (and in this sense alone can he be related to the great Modernists), and in doing so a whole different aesthetic emerges that runs counter to Dante and to the Judaeo-Christian tradition itself in its denial of Western ideas of representation that are so bound with the idea of an intelligent soul (general primacy of intellect over desire), and in part supplanting it with Shopenhauer's concept

[117] A further connection is to be made with the sixteenth century philosopher Descartes whose 'cogito ergo sum' points to an awareness of individual subjectivity which would be developed by such empirical philosophers as Berkeley, Locke and Hume. An empirical phenomenology is apparent in Beckett's early novels as many commentators have noted.

of Will. In this way we come to understand the nature of Beckett's anti-aesthetic: that is that Beckett's work, in a very broad sense, moves directly against or attempts to undermine the traditions formally encapsulated within Western artistic theory and practise[118] This recalls Christopher Ricks' comment, which we quoted at the beginning of this article, that 'literalism is expunged...so that we may see the truths about man, not about God'. However, Ricks over steps the mark when he claims that Beckett 'simply throughout his work...has wrestled with an attempt to rewrite Dante'. Put simply, it misunderstands the relationship between Beckett's work and Dante's. For example, Beckett's continual reference to and play on elements of Dante's medieval epic is not so much an attempt to rewrite the Divine Comedy, but rather, through the very act of parody, he stages the double bluff between similarity and difference, and so is able fundamentally to challenge the Dantesque perception and representational model of the universe. For Beckett it is of crucial importance he pose this critique for it encompasses a perception which, to some extent, remains today that through representation we can find not only beauty but also the essential truth about Man and his universe.

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[118] This movement away from Western traditions is influenced by Eastern philosophy, though second hand via Schopenhauer. For example, in his article *The Nightmare Life in Death,* Northrop Frye not only points out the Eastern connection but hints at its origins in the gloomy pages of Schopenhauer's seminal work when he claims, in reference to Beckett's 1931 essay on *Proust,* that 'This essay puts Proust in a context which is curiously Oriental in its view of personality. "Normal" people, we learn, are driven along through time on a current of habit-energy, an energy which, because habitual, is mostly automatic. This energy relates itself to the present by will...' (Northrop, F. (1960) 'The Nightmare Life in Death' the *Hudson Review*. pp. 442-9)

CHAPTER FIVE

Samuel Beckett and the Death of Representation: *Rockaby*, *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho*

Entwined within both Samuel Beckett's prose and drama is a developing, though somewhat problematic, critique of representation. This in part springs from an early acceptance that art in aspiring toward truth must always be expressive of an act of failure; i.e. either it must locate itself in the prison of representational form or seek to turn away altogether from representation, that illusory world of Man. For Beckett both paths must lead to defeat – though it is toward the latter he will steer, seeking in vain for release. It is thus that the reader's focus is ever turned to those sets of underlying conditions and responses, lying 'least most' within the world of representation, which form a specific pattern or syntax. Indeed, in these final prose pieces he seems not only to be continuing the intertextual process he began with *The Trilogy*, but also the heroic task of trying to reduce all his former works to one final text. The aim of this article then, is to show how Beckett's later prose and dramatic works attempt to locate, beyond representation, the trace or pattern of human existence (the 'character of the species') which underpins reality.

Eric P. Levy, for example, draws attention to a specific direction to which Beckett's entire oeuvre would seem to tend:

> [...] *we can see very clearly how the notion of living ('lives') presupposes a connection between a definite subject (in this example referred to in three ways as 'writer', 'he', and 'person') and his world. Beckett, in contrast, begins with the dissolution or departure of these poles, and undertakes the enormous task of exploring human experience struggling to reconstitute them. To this end he develops his remarkable narrator who becomes a universal human voice, the voice of species, seeking in the void the certainties of subject and object that made human experience intelligible.* (Levy 1980: 125)

However, what Levy terms the voice of species is similar to Cohen's assertion that Beckett's work is tending towards the expression of a universal 'everyman' (Cohen 1962: 288). However, this is not the direction Beckett's work ultimately takes in that it will increasingly attempt to question and undermine the pre-eminence and centrality of Man and of the human form. Indeed, in the search for pattern, on which life is ultimately predicated, any desire to reach the ideal position, where 'the certainties of subject and object' are to be located, becomes irrelevant. In Beckett's world both subject and object are component parts of the world of representation; it is the primary characteristic and nature of these components which for Beckett constitute a world beyond representation. As Culik observes: "In Samuel Beckett's work, this widespread cultural anxiety about the limits of representation appears through a notion of language

as a progressively approximate measurement of an unnamable reality" (Culik 2008: 128).

Charles Krance, in his fascinating article on *Worstward Ho*, suggests the ultimate direction and point to which Beckett's reductionist method is leading in describing his 'entire oeuvre' as an "ongoing desoeuvrement of the 'death sentence', or 'Arret de Mort' (Krance 1990: 134). While I disagree with Krance's statement that Beckett's work is suggestive of an eternally arrested 'death sentence' I do, nevertheless, accept his general use of the term desoeuvrement. Krance in his notes is careful to provide a full definition of what he understands by the term desoeuvrement: This term, which translates as 'idleness', and which in the phrase 'par desoeuvrement' means 'for want of something to do', is one of the key concepts the Blanchotian lexicon; for it literally designates the 'unworking' process which is always at work in the literary act of creating a oeuvre. Its kinship with the worstwardness of *Worstward Ho* should not go unnoticed. (140)

Krance, in using this term, which he attributes to Blanchot, is suggesting that Beckett, through his fictions (in particular *Worstword Ho*), is engaged deliberately in a 'process' of 'unworking' the entire body of his writings.

Andrew Renton in his own fine essay on *Worstward Ho* significantly refers to this act of reductionism, whereby both the characters and their location are minimised to the 'least most' point leaving only the suggestion of form and space. Renton claims that through this process the novella's "discourse turns upon itself, providing what could be read as a structural analysis of itself as archetypal novel or even drama" (Renton 1992: 113). This concept of an archetypal novel

does not quite go as far as our claim that *Worstward Ho* is key to Beckett's attempt to re-write all his previous fictions and so reduce them to a single work; however, it does lend weight to this supposition since 'archetype' suggests an original from which all others are in some way derived or copied.

In respect to this we can clearly locate interesting similarities, as one might expect, between *Ill Seen Ill said*, *Worstward Ho* and the late experimental drama. For example, the central female figure of *Ill Seen Ill Said* reminds us of *Winnie in Happy Days*, but even more so of *Footfalls* and *Rockaby*. To this extent, *Ill Seen Ill Said* forms a natural extension of Beckett's previous work, particularly the drama which adopts the woman as its central figure in place of the former male character. Why such a change should have taken place in Beckett's work is clearly suggested in the later *Worstward Ho*: here the narrator claims that the solitary human figure he dwells upon, though the description fits more easily earlier male figures, is in fact a woman. Since the narrator's primary object in this unique work is to reduce or 'worsen' the figures which plague his imagination, we can assume that Beckett is attempting to 'play on' the false perception, still propagated in our patriarchal societies, that the female form and condition must somehow be less or worse than that of the male. In a sense this reading fits in very well with Beckett's overall critique of representation, especially when we consider the kind of male character(s) Beckett has developed in his work, most prominent being that of tramp or wandering vagrant, e.g. Watt, Molloy, Macmann amongst others. These clearly represent highly marginalised individuals who exist only on the very fringes of society.

In consequence, we can see that such characters or individuals challenge, simply by their very presence, accepted social and behavioural norms. This form of alienation further acts to undermine the representational position and image of Man so embedded in the mythic, historic and even scientific structures of human life and society.

The whole process, then, of exposing and stripping away the representational elements of conscious existence is enhanced through the substitution of Man for Woman. The principal reason Beckett is able to employ this so effectively is the almost ubiquitous dominance of patriarchy; though radically challenged in Western society it still plays a major part in determining cultural and individual perception of gender roles. In the case of *Ill Seen Ill Said* and much of the later drama this is enhanced in that the woman is always 'old' – a lonely spinster who, because of her life, is largely excluded from mainstream society and, therefore, looked on with suspicion. The old spinster, often the butt of cruel jokes born of fear, for in being old the woman is infertile and perceived of denying or having been denied sexual expression and the fulfillment of a 'normal' relationship. It is as if in this act of denial she has somehow challenged the whole of future society. In this way the old spinster seems to question the expected norms and structure of family life or even to pose a threat to male sexuality and power. This lack of perceived sexuality coupled with isolation may mean that the woman is scorned as nothing more than a lonely, frustrated neurotic. Such an image is powerfully distilled and questioned in *Rockaby*. Here the solitary figure of a nameless, old woman sits in her rocking chair while a voice chants in time to her

motions; this is the voice of the woman attempting to conceal that the narrative she spins is really about herself by claiming that she is simply speaking of 'another creature' who is only 'like herself' (Beckett 1990: 435). It is here that we are also able to catch a glimpse of the woman's own awareness of how others have come to see her.[119] Though the woman hides from this self-perception by placing it onto a fictional other, nevertheless, our attention is drawn to the fact that in having been brought up in the world she is all too well aware of the stereotype she has come to fill – and in this I suggest we can gauge something of the irony of her position:

> *all the years / all in black / best black / sat and rocked / rocked / till her end came / in the end came / off her head they said / gone off her head / but harmless* (440)

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[119]This complex play of human perception is emphasised by Jane Alison Hale when she writes: "*Rockaby* is one of Beckett's latest attempts to define a new dramatic perspective that takes into account the fluctuating, unstable, boundless, impossible nature of vision in a world were human beings no longer occupy a privileged, exterior, and omniscient point of view of the classical artist" (Hale 1988: 67). She also considers that: "We must remember that the woman we see listening to her own voice, which is coming to her from the outside, as is Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape* and the old face of *That Time*. This now-familiar Beckettian technique serves both to indicate to the spectators that we are penetrating the consciousness of the mute character on stage and to dramatise the dual nature of human perception – the division of every consciousness into a perceiving subject and a perceived object that can never coincide with each other, in spite of all one's desires to join them into a perfect perception of the self" (Ibid. 68–69). Hale is right to stress Beckett's brilliant portrayal of the schizophrenic nature of human perception; however, Beckett's characters do not so much seek to reach a 'perfect perception of self' for they seem bent on ridding themselves of conscious perception altogether in order to escape the existence foisted upon them while they remain captives within the purgatorial confines of their representational worlds. They are actors indeed, forced to perform their partially scripted parts in the human world.

On looking at the above quotation we find the harsh 'off her head' falls, like the other phrases, easily into the insistent rhythm of the rocking chair and its stark abruptness conveys something of the vicious and spiteful attitude in which she is generally viewed. This is made even more effective by the contrastingly gentle 'but harmless' which rather than taking the sting out of the former phrase only serves to patronise and reduce her further, creating a sense of distance between herself and her labelers. What is also interesting here is that in speaking of herself in the third person she stages an important split. In one sense she refuses to accept what she has become or rather is forced into a position of self-alienation in having to view herself through the conventions and norms of society which so condition and shape the representational world.

By taking the example of *Rockaby* and other later plays we can make a further useful connection with *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho*, one which entails another important transition. In this case we now see a change of narrative perspective from first to third person. In the drama *Not I*, for example, a bodiless mouth constructs the fragmented image of a life which it refuses to acknowledge as its own. In this case the horror of the individual's existence is distanced or hidden by concealing it as a fiction just as we have noted with the later *Rockaby*. Not only that, but in the short play *That Time* Beckett presents us with the wonderfully autocritical 'could you ever say I to yourself in your life ... that was a great word with you before they dried up' (390). This clearly provides us with an important clue as to the reasons for such a change to have been deemed necessary by Beckett. The line from *That Time* both suggests continuity with previous texts while

allowing for the crucial transition to take place; crucial in the sense that instead of presenting the 'I' which is unable to confirm its validity—its consistency—we have a process of story-telling unlike that found in earlier works, such as The Trilogy or How It Is, for now the narrative 'I' is actively concealed. Nevertheless, in both *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* we are pointed covertly towards the narrator or author, though the ever thinning and disjointed mask is never allowed to finally slip. In effect the very process of story-telling fills the entire imaginary space of the texts leaving room for nothing else. However, this is curiously more suggestive than at any other point of something beyond the text in that we are consciously made aware that this is indeed an act of concealment. Similarly, as I have suggested, in *No I*, the confused narrative spewing out from the bodiless mouth gives it a form and a history it otherwise would not possess. However, the distance between speaker and discourse, staged both semantically and visually, is maintained to the end of the drama but not without hinting at collapse during the long tortuous struggle to be free of the represented self – the image of Man cast by society.

J. Gaillard, in her article on Footfalls, reaches similar conclusions when exploring the way Beckett employs specific devices to destabilise both the subjective voice and the 'real' world it names, especially in reference to the human body:

> *Because it presents a context of enunciation where the audience can confront the name and the body, theatre should be the form of bodily stability par excellence. In Footfalls, Beckett attacks the evident stability through a series of shifts*

> *and glitches in the pragmatics of enunciation that call into question the identity of the enunciating 'I' as well as the reality of its link to the body that it refers to.* (Gaillard 2018: 41–42)

However, the process Gaillard describes is overlaid in *Rockaby* in order to provide its audience with something altogether more tangible. Here repetition is used to generate an underlying physicality within the prose and drama, as A. Dennis, observes "Beckett's work [...] demonstrates how the compulsive repetition of bodily movement, despite its uncomfortable closeness to addiction, may harness a loss of individual control that demands a more capacious understanding of human action" (2018: 6). In *Rockaby*, for example, though the voice speaks only in the third person both in its description and rhythm, which matches the chair's rocking motion, we have a sense that what is being conveyed are the figure's innermost thoughts. However, though the distance between voice and figure is still further staged by the narrative being constructed in the past tense, the gap is curiously obliterated as the rhythmic discourse catches the kinetic energy of the rocking chair's movements drawing it into the present. Here indeed is the physical enactment of that vital and inexplicable force of life that drives the individual on, even in its self professed futility.

What we are presented with is the terrible tension between the individual who refuses to accept the awful narrative or representation of her life, a life built on the powerful repetitive echoes of frustration and loneliness, and the force or Will which will not allow her to be free of the illusion. Here the split between self and voice serves only to

reinforce the connection between them, a kind of double in which each forms the mirror image of the other. The impression is of seeing oneself as if indeed one were an actor on the stage being forced to play a particular part. Again it is the idea of the world, its visual reality which is challenged – we see the lights the stage, the props – the codes and narratives into which we come not only to see and recognise others, but also to measure ourselves in relation to them. In this way the stage figure ceases to be important, she is built up slowly through the repetitive phrases yet the disparate images are just as easily broken down.[120] The body and life become an empty chain of association, a hollow reverberation – what becomes real is the insistent rhythm of voice and rocking chair which hold and support the otherwise empty images.

In the late novella, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the description of the woman, as in *Rockaby*, is cumulative; we catch only glimpses of a figure 'all in black' suggestive more of absence than presence. What picture we do form emerges mainly from the clothing 'dress' and 'stockings' and the 'boots' which 'have time to be ill buttoned' (Beckett 1982: 18). Here we can draw a further interesting comparison with *Rockaby*: in the play's stage directions we have the clear instruction that the woman is to be dressed in 'black high-necker evening gown' with 'sequins' and 'headdress' (Beckett 1990: 433) both of which are purposely designed to 'glitter' as the rocking chair moves back and forth in and out of the concentrated spot-light; the shiny

[120] Another very good example of this is to be found in the development of Beckett's short play *Catastrophe* (Beckett 1990: 455–461).

wood of the chair is also similarly designed to catch the light. In this way, like the impression of the 'glimmering buttonhook' in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, we have the staged visual presentation of a tenuous, insubstantial ghost-figure, a figure which seems to be not quite really there; and for a moment we might think that it is indeed spun out of the either and into our imaginations by the solitary but insistent voice being played out over the set.

In *Worstward Ho* we find a similarity of intent in seeking not only to expose the representational world but also the very mechanics behind its construction. Although *Worstward Ho* is markedly different in style from *Ill Seen Ill Said*, it similarly avoids the use of commas in favour of the full stop so that the whole is broken into complete short phrases. However, the syntax has an even more awkward feel about it and there is a wider use of cliché and oxymoron in order once again to force the reader into a constant awareness of the impossibility of what is being presented. However, the essential difference is that *Worstward Ho* strips away the kinds of symbolism noted not only in *Ill Seen Ill Said* but which has been also characteristic of most of Beckett's earlier work. Such a departure is significant, not least because it clearly forms part of a process in which even as the reader is drawn into the world of the imagination, that same world is brutally laid bare. The figures are termed 'shades', indicating they are without colour[121]

[121] Hale, in the essay I already noted on *Rockaby,* observers that "black and white, the predominant colours of Beckett's latest works, evoke for him the undifferentiation of the void, towards which tends human life and all the perceptual efforts of which it consists from the very moment of birth" (Hale 69). In fact this reading by Hale is bleaker than Beckett intends. For

and only have the suggestion of definite form. These 'shades' are themselves set in a void and by the end of the text will be reduced to merely: "Three pins. One pinhole. In dimmost dim" (Beckett 1883: 46). Their presence, paradoxically, is more evocative of space and absence.

The narrator begins by presenting a slowly emerging figure (later confirmed as a woman) who will painfully stand upright before being brought to her knees (7-10), like the figure in *Ill Seen Ill Said*. The language here suggests a struggle is taking place, a struggle driven by the inexplicable force of life itself, the same force which drives Molloy on toward the mother he hates and Malone to his next breath, here will force the narrator to give form and semblance to the 'shade' he dwells upon.

> *First the body. No. First the place. No. First both. Now either. Now the other. Sick of the either try the other. Sick of it back sick of either. So on. Somehow on. Till sick of both. Throw up and go. Where neither. Till sick of there. Throw up and back. The body again. Where none. Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again. Till sick for good. Throw up for good. Go for good. Where neither for good. Good and all.* (Beckett 1983: 8)

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example, as we have already seen, Beckett was attempting to get beyond colour in his composition of *The Trilogy* (see in particular chapter 5 pp. 132–133). This need to be rid of colour is not a recognition of our diminishment to the point whereby we merely fade into the void, but rather of a desire to reach beyond the representational to the colourless patterns and shapes on which life is formed.

Here we find not just the phrase containing the oxymoron "Fail again. Better again. Or Better worse", but also what appears at first to be an oxymoron of overall design. The object of the narrator is to 'worsen' the images and figures he creates or finds already posited within his consciousness. However, the oxymoron lies in the fact that the unfortunate narrator is forced, in order to achieve this process of worsening, to build-up the still complex imagery and detail within the text.

> *No choice but stand. Somehow up and stand. Somehow stand. That or groan. The groan so long on its way. No. No groan. Simply pain. Simply up. A time when try how. Try see. Try say. How first it lay. Then somehow knelt. Bit by bit. Then on from there. Bit by bit. Till up at last. Not now. Fail better worse now.* (10)

As we can see from the above quotation, the narrator not only builds up a picture of the figure he must present, but that it must also assume a certain form, that of a human being – the form ultimately forced upon the reluctant narrator's of Beckett's previous works. However, in departure from these texts the narrator is no longer obliged to fill in the sort of detail he had before of "How somehow lay. Then somehow knelt" – in other words to outline its progress up from the 'slime' and on towards the 'light'. The process attacked by Beckett so early on in his writing career[122] and so instrumental in the

[122]For example, Beckett considers in relation to art that: "The history of painting, here we go again, is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure ... in a kind of tropism towards the light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean

formulation of his own aesthetic, now, in terms of Beckett's artistry, begins to reach the final stages of its development.

Here, in a sense, we have the process of fiction-making in reverse. For though we find in this text a gradual build-up of certain detail in order ironically to reduce the very forms being presented, we need also to look at this in relation to Beckett's work as a whole and align it to the overall development we have sought to outline in this study. In doing so I suggest we can make the bold claim that all the different texts seem part of the same work, the same text in the act of being constantly re-written. From this we can see that *Worstward Ho* forms a kind of final apotheosis – in effect the last stage of that work's development. In this way we can look at *Worstward Ho* as representing all the other previous texts only now with most of the fundamental detail removed. The characters or figures, as I have already indicated, are acknowledged as 'shades without colour', and the setting in which they are found is reduced almost to nothing – a bare ever dimming void.[123] However, in this we can see how all the characters of the previous texts are here stripped away until the only figures which remain are of a woman, an old man and child along with a bare human skull. This is now all that is needed and we can see that these three simple forms match

terror, as though irrationality of pi were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature (Beckett 1983: 145)

[123]Renton comments on this particular phenomenon when he suggests that everything is stripped of its veneer or covering; constructions of the previous discourse (Renton 1992: 125). Renton, however, only extends this act of 'revision' as far as the 'previous discourse' or fragment of the text.

those characters and combination of characters we have met before, though now utterly without feature.

For example, it is fitting that the narrator first dwells on the woman, for she has become the principal character of Beckett's later prose and drama and therefore in the natural sequence of things the first to arise stubbornly in the narrator's imagination. However, it is interesting that in appearance and dress, wearing a large 'black greatcoat' and 'hat' (15), clearly resembles the comic grotesques of Beckett's earlier works. The old and sexless woman not only reminds us of those former androgynous creatures which litter Beckett's work but also of such characters as we find in *Not I*, *Footfalls*, *Rockaby* and of course *Ill Seen Ill Said*. It is here also that we find the final extremes of an ongoing process, for as with Footfalls and *Rockaby* we are presented with an ever diminishing form which almost immediately as it stands is brought to its knees, the very same symbolic position the old woman in *Ill Seen Ill Said* will find herself inexplicably forced to assume. However, as we can see from the previous quotation, all such acts in *Worstward Ho* are stripped of much of their symbolic content, the archaic 'knelt' has merely the soft ring of weary compliance rather than active prayer.

The appearance of the 'old man and child' shows only a partial reprieve of the act of stripping the narrative to its bare minimum: "So little worse the old man and child. Gone held holding hands they plod apart. Left right barefoot unreceding on. Not worsen yet the rift. Save for some after nohow somehow worser on." The quotation clearly shows that the act of 'worsening' is part of a progressive process; however, the narrator is reluctant to go too far too quickly. The narrator's

caution is in part due to the fear of running out of words, of taking things to the point where he can no longer continue. This is a fear which, to some extent, is mirrored by Winnie in Happy Days; in Winnie's case it is the horror of having nothing left to give colour to her sterile existence, while in *Worstward Ho* I suggest we are more aware of the tension between needing to go on and, in contrast to Winnie who fills her life with fictions to conceal herself from her true condition, attempting to be free of the world of representation and one's own place and image within it. In this way we can perhaps locate a further essential and paradoxical strand in *Ill Seen Ill Said* and especially *Worstward Ho*; paradoxical because we can see that this reduction which takes place in both texts on one hand leads us into a world of pure imagination, while on the other points more than in any previous example of Beckett's work towards a notion of the 'real'.

For example in the search for the 'real' beyond representation Krance comments that:

> [...] *unlike countless other attempts before it to get it all said so as to have unsaid it all, Worstward Ho commits the initial error of predicating (i.e. grounding) its entire strategy of undoing itself on the projection into beinglessness of nothing less than being itself. Thus from its very inception, the opening vocable, on, or being in Greek, engages the ensuing enterprise upon an endlessly predatory 'gnawing' away at the meaning of being* [...] (Krance 1990: 31)

Krance in making this observation leans too heavily on Heidegger and as a consequence construes a fundamental

'error' in the seeming paradox of Beckett's approach. For example, as Butler points out Dasein ('being-there') offers an essentially existential view of the self: "The self just is not any 'given' thing, like another arm or leg say, there is no 'nature' for the self to possess, no 'essence' except, of course, Dasein's special kind of essence which is 'existence'. So the self is existential" (Butler 1984: 31). Therefore, quotes Butler from Being and Time, "Dasein is itself only in existing" (Heidegger: 1962). Following this we must consider that if Beckett was attempting to be rid of 'being' in the sense of 'Dasein,' he would indeed be on the false road of also trying to be rid of "its special kind of essence which is existence".

As we have demonstrated, Beckett does not present us with an existential view-point, his characters clearly do not occupy an existential void (a void which also is part of the world of representation), their actions are largely conditioned by their nature rather than experience, and they must rather follow the dictates of an inexplicable force. Beckett's characters form part of a pattern, a pattern of existence from which their own individual nature will emerge. In this way we can see that there is no contradiction in Beckett's approach, for by stripping away at the mind's conscious operations, one is effectively thinning the veil of representation which cuts the individual from an immediate knowledge of his own nature and thereby exposing something of the fundamental reality or pattern of his existence.

CONCLUSION

Beckett's writings themselves mark a career which spans from the early 1930s to the mid 80s and in an innovative way covers almost every modern form of media from stage to television. If we attempt to place this great achievement briefly within its historical context we might particularly take into account the impact of the early twentieth century; recognising it to be a period of deep uncertainty in which key social, cultural and religious institutions, already challenged by the great upheavals and discoveries of the 1800s, seem to crumble into the terror and chaos of two World Wars. We can, as a consequence, understand the growing predominance, in that post-war world, of existential thought and its nihilistic tendency to accept that the universe, beyond this little world of man, consists of little more than a dark and bitterly meaningless void.

However (as I have attempted to demonstrate here in these five chapters), Beckett, who had himself experienced directly some of the brutal horror of World War II, refused to accept such dark and brooding pessimism. For example, though Beckett early on in his life was to pick up and enlarge on Schopenhauer's gloomy philosophy, he nevertheless did so by ultimately purging it of its nihilistic bent. Schopenhauer had proposed that the individual's goal should be to seek a way out of life's dread purgatorial toils. Beckett not only found

himself unable to follow this dictum but instead offers a final heroic testament to life itself by acknowledging the will to live in spite of all the odds. In *The Trilogy*, for example, Malone conjures up the impossible image of his own death; once the illusion is passed so too, however, is the dreaded *memento mori*, that ever mocking death's head. In response, the bold conclusion of this present study is the recognition that Beckett's work – far from representing a denial of life and what life might contain, as most commentators have thought – does in fact represent an affirmation of life; life that must be struggled for, that must continue no matter how hard the conditions or pointless the direction. In the final analysis we come closest to the truth when we recognise there is still a simple beauty within the shape and pattern of things. From this comes an understanding of the world, which, as I have claimed, is shared by the modern science of chaos. After all, chaos theory attempts to understand the nature of life and matter in all its varied forms and finds it to contain a repetition of pattern – "the deep symmetry" of life itself, which so profoundly haunts the pages of Beckett's work.

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