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SAMUEL BECKETT'S

LATE AESTHETICS OF SUBJECTIVATION

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PHD

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

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by

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ABSTRACT

Samuel Beckett's

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Doctor of Philosophy

No other writer has explored so metaphysically the problem of human existence as Samuel Beckett, the Irish writer who first gained world renown in 1953 with the formal radicalism and existential angst of *Waiting for Godot*. In the bleakest forms, Beckett has denied human experience the most fundamental of all certainties – subjectivity and self-consciousness – and exposed conventional realism's inability to convey the ungovernable flux of the world and the individual's unfixed, subjective response.

Taking Beckett's manipulation of pronominal, spatial and temporal deixis as an entry point, this thesis captures the late works in its central dilemma of Beckettian poetics: the inability to end. For Beckett, ending, or silence, is at the same time the premise and also the vanishing point. In the literary arts the withdrawal into an inner space beyond speech, where the subject is absent, can never be completely successful: silence, ending in the absolute sense, remains an imaginary limit. Beckett strikes his vital poetic sparks off this aporia, in as much as his method of writing is characterized by attempts towards a self-conscious paradox. Consequently he aims to turn the impossibility (after a critical creative *impasse* after the *Trilogy* of novels) – and the inevitability – of a linguistic constitution of meaning back into linguistic form. A 'solution' to the problem is, of course, unthinkable. The literary object/subject is thus condemned to a permanent oscillation between the rooted-ness of the art form in language, and the disavowal of that rooted-ness.

Instead of viewing his work as motivated by ambitions in the philosophy of language, the present thesis approaches it as an attempt to shore up a language whose progressive extinction had been the constant companion of Beckett's life as a writer. Relating his late work to his early aesthetic views, the thesis seeks to show, on the one hand, that Beckett's late work does not constitute a break from his early writings as they seem at first sight. Instead, they as whole witness the maturation of the writer's aesthetics. On the other hand, drawing on a variety of performance, language and psychoanalytic theories, the thesis argues that subjectivity in late Beckett exists only as the experience of language, as the marks that the movement of language has left on the text or on us, in us, the reader, as we turn our attention towards the indecisive stirrings of language.

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

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LIE JIANXI

Date: 11 May 2006

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL OF THESIS

SAMUEL BECKETT′S
LATE AESTHETICS OF SUBJECTIVATION

by
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REFERENCE CODES

Wherever a reference consists of an abbreviation followed by Arabic numerals it indicates a text and the corresponding page number(s). These are:

PTD	*Proust and Three Dialogues* (London: Calder, 1999)
DFMW	*Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (Dublin: Black Cat, 1992)
D	*Disjecta* (London: John Calder, 1983)
PK	*More Pricks Than Kicks* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970)
M	*Murphy* (London: John Calder, 1963)
W	*Watt* (repr. London: John Calder, 1963)
MC	*Mercier and Camier* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1974).
T	*The Trilogy* (London: John Calder, 1975)
HII	*How It Is* (London: John Calder, 1964)
NO	*Nohow On* (New York: Grove Press, 1983)
CP	*Collected Poems, 1930-1978* (London: John Calder, 1984)
CSP	*The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989* (New York: Grove, 1995)
CDW	*The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995)

What best befits an author is to preface a work with its *apology*, ornamenting it with the gilt of necessity. After all, one should not beg attention without excuse. That a writer provide some rudimentary justification for something he has written seems a modest enough expectation, but such a demand obliterates me, since this is a text which has been reared in perfect superfluity, clutching feebly at zero. There is not a single sentence which is other than a gratuitousness and a confusion; a cry at least half lamed and smothered in irony. Each appeal that is made to the name 'Beckett' shudders between a pretension and a joke. *Beckett*. I know nothing about him. His obsessions disturb me, his ignorances numb me, I find his work incomprehensible, the abrasion of his writing shears uselessly across my inarticulacy. In response I mumble, as a resistance to anxiety, maddening myself with words. Locked in a cell with my own hollow murmuring … but at least it is not *that* … (and even now I lie) …

To succeed in writing anything of any kind about Beckett is already something wretched, because it is only in the twisted interstitial spaces of failure that contact and infection can take place – everything written about him, it would seem, is written *contra* him. Therefore this work does not make any special pleading for itself, it has only scratched about for needles in the most destitute gutters of 'Beckett criticism'. Who cares what 'anyone' thinks, knows, or theorises about Beckett? The only thing

to try and touch is the intense shock-wave that still reaches us along with the textual embers … for as long, that is, as anything can still reach us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finally, I wish to express my indebtedness and gratitude to my parents for having always supported me and for encouraging me to choose for myself which path to follow. They have given me the possibility to get where I am today through providing me with a foundation upon which it was possible to build my academic work.

Of the themes that Samuel Beckett has explored over the years, the most important and recurrent is undoubtedly that of subjective representation. In the bleakest forms, Beckett has denied human experience the most fundamental of all certainties – subjectivity and self-consciousness – and exposed conventional realism's inability to convey the ungovernable flux of the world and the individual's unfixed, subjective response.

This thesis aims to explore Beckett's late aesthetics of subjectivation in the light of the following four configurations.

Beckett's Histrionics of Pronouns

My study of Beckett's histrionics of pronouns chooses as its entry point a specific feature of dramatic and theatrical discourse that involves us immediately in the relationship of discourse to the performance field in which it is performed. This feature is *deixis*, defined by linguists to include those markers in discourse that refer to the situation of utterance. John Lyons defines deixis (which derives from a Greek

word meaning 'positioning' or 'indicating') as 'the location and indication of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatio-temporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee.' The deictic function in discourse is assumed primarily by personal and demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative adjectives and adverbs (such words as *here*, *there*, *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*) and secondarily by such lexical features as person and tense. As Alessandro Serpieri and colleagues note, deictic expressions function in theatrical language to a degree beyond other literary genres. Noting that 'drama consists first and foremost precisely in this, an I addressing a you here and now,' Keir Elam suggests that deixis is the means by which the 'dramatic world' is removed from its status as 'possible world' and actualized as the hypothetical world we view on stage. In tandem with deictic gesture (physical references to the field of performance), verbal deixis completes a bridge between the material and verbal spheres. Because of its dual inscriptive function, then -- situating the stage within language, and language within the stage -- deixis offers a useful tool for exploring the play of person and actuality in dramatic discourse and between discourse and the embodied stage itself.

If much of our contemporary critique of logocentric pretensions of the narrative voice has dismissed or eschewed the first-person discourse in general, Beckett's critique of them has evolved around a *working through* rather than an abandonment of first-person utterances. And this endeavour is inextricably linked with the deictic referential capabilities of pronouns and the first-person in particular. Distinguishing for the first time the deictic functions of common nouns and pronouns, Emile Benveniste notes that while a common noun refers to a fixed or objective notion, there is usually no definable object that a pronoun can refer to in identical fashion (*Problèmes de linguistique générale*). What 'I' signifies, he explicates, is the person uttering the present instance of the discourse containing 'I'; and contrary to common nouns, it no longer refers to a previously existing subjective substance, but rather to its own saying, becoming itself the 'referent' that it is supposed to signify. In this sense, 'I am' is no longer a constative, locutionary phrase, but a constantly renewed

performative, referring vertiginously to its own utterance: to say 'I' is to both to name and to act. Crucial here is how 'I' collapses the distinction between the signified and the referent, since utterance simultaneously creates what it represents. The importance of this to Beckett's *Company* (and, in fact, to many of his post-trilogy works) is found, on the one hand, in how the production of meaning by 'I' is a 'work in progress': the Beckettian 'I' continuously renews, rewrites or reutters itself, with a denial of continuity between instantiations; and, on the other, in the way Beckett stresses the 'I' as a sign which can never be saturated by the subjective consciousness it is meant to carry. In the first case, much as the 'I' strives for a temporality of coincidence, the Beckettian prose denies it by troubling the grammatical and syntactic structures on which the continuity of the reference of the 'I' depends.

In *Company*, what is perceived as the referential immediacy of the 'I' is conveyed by a skilful narrative choice which suspends the naming of it. 'I', as Roland Barthes so aptly points out, is 'nothing other than the instance saying I' ('The Death of the Author'). In the second case, as the Beckettian subject talks, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to invest the 'I' with definite subjective intentions which make it his 'I' and not someone else's. In other words, 'I' no longer cleaves the crucial distanced between the self and the other, but becomes simply a designating mark in a series of grammatical, syntactic and narrative options. Once first-person utterances and subjectivity (which comes to depend upon the former) are rendered problematic, the entire range of teleological suppositions displayed in Beckett's works becomes equally unstable. Consequently, 'only a small part of what is said can be verified' and the whole of *Company* shows an 'I' that does not actually coincide with the image of the self produced by a conscious self: it tenaciously remains plural against all the traps of conceptual unifications.

Ultimately we see a totally different narrative strategy that signifies a step further in the writer's aesthetic quest. Of this quest, the most recurrent theme is perhaps that of human subjectivity, which *Company*'s addresses with an ongoing suppression of the subjective 'I' and its dispersal into the second- and third-person

narratives: a new hermeneutics based upon a revised conception of the relationship between language and reality. If in his early literary production Beckett had used language to scan reality, and reality to denounce the 'falsifications' of language and literature, he has since then used language as inseparable from reality, no longer maintaining the possibility of their opposition. With his late works, however, the two are no longer conceived of as being susceptible of separation.

Theatre as the Site of Subjective (De)construction

While the theatrical stage is generally considered to be a privileged space of presence or of the 'present', rooted as it is in the 'here and now' of the stage, Beckett plays representation against presentation and indeed presence, working not only in and through the dramatic medium, but against it, challenging its boundaries and codes and undermining its supposedly characteristic properties. Rather than a place of presence, the stage becomes a space where the processes of representation are repeatedly staged.

Samuel Beckett's late plays are both immediately, engrossingly present and troublingly absent, unfinished even while they are rigorously formed. They are theatre pieces that seem to pick apart the seams of the theatrical event; they both involve and baffle the spectator, giving her or him both the promise of physical immediacy (for, if nothing else, the late plays are troublingly there; each one relies for its effect on the precise delineation of a carefully crafted stage image) and the frustrating certainty that, in this world, few if any conventional dramatic processes are in operation.

Having said that, we might be tempted to ask what is so remarkable about Beckett's theatre. After all, the plays, from *Waiting for Godot* onwards, call into question those relations that exist, unremarked, in conventional theatre: the role of the spectator in decoding the text; the status of the image and of the text; and the relation between the two. It has also been widely noted that Beckett's dramas, from

the first, rely on a reconfiguration of the conventional idea of time and space normally encountered in theatrical performance. There, we identify a fundamental confusion in the plays between the time and space of the drama and the time and space of the actors on the stage.

This, of course, raises a fundamental question about these characters' subjectivity: Is the character in a Beckett text occupying a world mapped out by the text or one delimited by the confines of the stage? Is he or she immediately present or infinitely removed from presence? How can she or he be understood by an audience, if the form of the play itself makes such an understanding problematic if not impossible? How can we, as audience members, make sense of these 'people' (Beckett's own preferred term) if we are unclear about their precise location and of their precise position in what is normally considered to be the linear narrative of life? In the canon of Beckett criticism, a standard answer has evolved, one that relies implicitly on a conventional idea of the way in which subjectivity is fixed in dramatic space and time. It is fair to say that, in most pieces of theatre, the relation of space to time follows a standard pattern: the time-space indicated in the play exceeds the time-space of performance, but the two are sequentially related. That is, the enacted events are themselves excerpted from a larger number of events, imagined as taking place offstage. Similarly, the setting of the play is to be imagined as only one of a number of simultaneously existing settings that together form the world described in the text. The spatial and temporal hierarchy thus established will, if described in a manner that is internally consistent, allow the audience to accept the subjectivity of the characters presented; they exist in performance time-space because they are firmly rooted in dramatic time-space – because they have a coherently and sequentially described existence outside the immediate confines of the performance. A consistent narrative, therefore, relies on the sequential ordering of events in two time-spaces, simultaneously invoked by the dramatist and understood by the audience.

Writing of the Abject

A mere glimpse at the titles of Beckett's works is enough to give us a sense of their abjection: *The Expelled*, *Six Residua*, *The Unnamable*, *Disjecta*, and above all, *Not I*. His writing is riddled with images of expulsion (-pulsion and -jection are his favourite suffixes), of things, mainly body parts of contents, that have to be got rid of. What clearly dictates this is an abject need to expel the primary object which threatens engulfment, to keep shouting 'Not I', as so many of his characters do.

If, as Julia Kristeva suggests, abjection is the movement by which the body and psyche dispute and affirm identity, it equally has important implications for reading a text, for reading can no longer be regarded as the depot of an assimilable meaning, but becomes the rather phantasmatic site of a series of negotiations and transmissions. The abject calls into question not only psychic but *textual* propriety, authority and appropriation: as is indicated by the baroque opening of Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, it is into literary *style* that subjectivity may retreat, and yet the possibility of selfhood prior to the subject's entry into language is ruthlessly questioned.

As I shall illustrate, saying 'not I' in Beckett's work is always underpinned by this dark abject lining. It is as if the failure of the signifier (this 'I' that language uses to refer to me alienates me) collapses something more psychologically disturbing, a disruption of the clarity of 'I' *versus* 'not-I' which every infant has to learn to negotiate. Instead of facing up to accepting a relationship of separation from the object, whereby the not-I becomes an autonomous 'she', the Beckett character harks back constantly to the trauma of that break and refuses to give due recognition to the 'she'.

From the taut interplay of the 'abject' in selfhood and the narrative in which it may be seen to participate, we shall see a larger formal concern of the relationship of the literary work itself to conceptions of the organic whole. Beckett's work displays an anxiety at constitution and separation around its *own* boundaries which may be seen to resonate with abjection. If I have been concerned, so far, with the periodic fusion and divergence of the abject with the signifiable, it is perhaps appropriate that

I now turn to an area in which the agency of the writer would be expected to be at its most marginal, and his or her concerns at their least visible. The tendency of writers and critics to refer to texts collectively as 'corpus' or 'body of work' may be no more than a metaphorical extension of the human, a fallacious visualisation of written production against the template of the body. It would nevertheless be difficult to pursue a study of the textual framing of the abject body without reversing the equation and examining the role texts play in promoting propriety and wholeness (or otherwise) through their collectivity and organisation. Apart from this, it will be argued that Beckett's bilingualism poses a threat to conventional notions of what constitutes a proper body of work.

Return to the Maternal Body

In the previous part I outlined, following Kristeva, how abjection stems from the infant's non-separation with the mother in the 'archaic dyad'. From Peggy Guggenheim's memoirs and from John Gruen's interview, we are aware that at least twice in his life, as early as 1937 and as late as 1961, Beckett personally admitted his fearful memories of being swallowed up inside his mother's womb. In this light, Deirdre Bair's record of the turbulently ambivalent relationship between Beckett and his mother becomes all the more meaningful for explaining Beckett's compulsion to speak.

The engulfing dyad, to begin with, is both desired and feared, capable of giving rise to ambivalence. Talking about the subject's fear of engulfment, Norman Holland quotes Edmund Bergler who 'has suggested that all writers are involved in this deepest of human wishes; that writers emit words as a way of defending against the fearful desire to obliterate oneself in a total at oneness with some primal mother.'[1]

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[1] Norman N. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, p.38.

Indeed, a psychological defense attempts to satisfy both the wish and the defense against the wish. Ambivalent to the end, Beckett had a fictitious ego ramble all the way to silence, trying to imagine himself free of the wish to return to the womb. Admittedly in Beckett, there is abundant textual and biographical unease with motherhood to take hold of our attention. If this unease does not welcome a psychoanalytic interpretation like Richard Stephenson's, there is always to the possibility of such an intertextual reading as the similarities are encouraging.

Beckett, too, shows a similar ambivalence towards motherhood. There is, on the one hand, the image of an inhospitable mother, as shown in various works such as the short story 'The End', the second book of the Trilogy, *Malone Dies*, and *Company*. On the other hand, there is the surreptitious wish to return to the womb as an anchorage that the foetus is unwilling to relinquish. Elaborating on Beckett's own remark about the sound quality of his own works, I shall argue that his works can be thought of as an attempt to become attuned to 'fundamental sounds' at the limits of language, which is reminiscent of the mother's womb.

Drawing on Kristeva again, we can see this as a return to the Symbolic *chora*, which is described as a mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases, a dynamic space where differences exist without duality and where the subject is caught up in the continual process of construction and destruction. This rhythmic energy constitutes a subversive force which repeatedly launches its assaults on the traditional structures of the Symbolic.

Kristeva also associates the *chora* with the Freudian death-drive, through the interaction within the *chora* of the rhythm of the pulsions, and moments of temporary stasis, anticipating the final stasis of death: The semiotic *chora*, converting drive discharges into stases, can be thought of both as a delaying of the death drive and as a possible realisation of this drive, which tends to return to a homeostatic state. The mother's body remains the site where difference is reconciled, but instead of being embraced in a process where difference is endlessly produced and dissolved, the maternal body is both restored as the original lost object and provides a space where reconciliation of difference may be imaginatively realised or

rehearsed. The implication of this for Beckett is that stasis and change, desire and entropy, identity and dispersal, are always intertwined in such a way as to give the body *jouissance*.

[1]

'HE SHALL NOT … YOU SHALL NOT'[2]:
FIRST-PERSON ABSENCE AND THE HISTRIONICS OF PRONOUNS

In a 1961 interview, Samuel Beckett confessed to Gabriel D'Aubarède that he was
not sure what he had left to say after *The Unnamable*.[3] Coincidentally perhaps,
shortly after *How It Is* was published earlier on in the same year, critics on both sides
of the English Channel as well as across the Atlantic had voiced in near unison their
initial diffident worries about the Irishman's ability to 'push further his quest'.[4]
Raymond Federman, for one, had commented in somewhat understated compliment:

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[2] Samuel Beckett, *Company* [NO 4].

[3] Samuel Beckett in an interview with Gabriel D'Aubarède, first published in *Nouvelles
Littéraires* (16 February, 1961), now in English translation in Graver and Federman, *Samuel
Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p.216.

[4] See, for example, Maurice Nadeau, *Express* (26 January 1961) 25: 'After *The Unnamable* I
naively imagined that Samuel Beckett would not be able to push further his quest, […] After
The Unnamable there were *Texts for Nothing*, *All that Fall*, *Embers*, and today the
appearance of *How it is*, after which I would be tempted – had I not been taught by
experience – to repeat the same adventurous prophecy.' (Graver and Federman 224) Also,
Jean-Jacques Mayoux, *Mercure de France* (June 1961) 293-97: 'Reading *The Unnamable*
one might have thought that it was impossible to go further in the negation of the story, in the
rejection of characters, in the the Catharian harshness of a retreat into the absolute.' [Graver
and Federman, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1979, p.232]

'It seemed that after *L'Innommable*, Samuel Beckett had led the novel into some kind of impasse from which it could never emerge, unless by a repetition of what had already been done…. Having reduced the essential elements of the novel – plot, character, action, language – to their bare minimum, how could any writer push the experiment further? Yet with the publication of *Comment c'est*, Beckett once more manages to carry the form of the novel into a completely new and original no man's land.'[5] What he refers to as the 'impasse' is, it seems, both thematic and technical, but with the 'completely new and original no man's land' Federman is obviously slanted towards the latter in order to facilitate subsequent comments on Beckett's narrative innovations. Such a partial stance anticipates more or less a critical turn in the interpretation of Beckett's late works, where the 'thematics' in the narrow sense becomes less fascinating, while the vaguest, most aetheticised terms of stylistic analysis have gradually come into dominance. To this turn Jacques Derrida has lent his voice when he talked about the question of Beckett's 'nihilism':

> The composition, the rhetoric, the construction and the rhythm of his works, even the ones that seem the most 'decomposed', that's what 'remains' finally the most 'interesting', that's the work, that's the signature, this remainder which remains when the thematics is exhausted (and also exhausted, by others, for a long time now, in other modes).[6]

Derrida's comment rings true, in part at least, for it seems that after the *Trilogy* Beckett did come to a thematic dead-end, with 'impotence' (a theme not sufficiently explored before) having been brought into full play by himself in *The Unnamable*. Yet he was never bereft of words *re-saying* what he had said. It would not be seriously contradicted, I believe, to suggest that the entire output of Beckett's career, particularly that of the late period, can be best encapsulated as an ongoing process of *repeating* the already-said in increasingly radical forms.[7] Such repetitiveness must

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[5] Graver and Federman, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*, pp.594-595.

[6] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge. New York: Routledge, 1992, p.61.

[7] It might be better to refer to this 'repetition' as Beckett's 'self-reading' – a 'self-reading'

have been galvanizing for Paul Davies when he made the audacious claim that if Beckett had written no other works than the four *nouvelles* and the 'trilogy' of novels, 'these alone would have secured for him in this century the eminence won in earlier times by Dante for the *Divine Comedy*, by Milton for *Paradise Lost*, and by Goethe for *Faust*.'[8] While Davis's short-listing of these works has its own agenda, it is nevertheless highly suggestive of Beckett's laudable ability to say 'little' in much.

Of the themes that Beckett has explored over the years, the most important and recurrent is undoubtedly that of subjective enunciation. It is hardly conceivable that a writer as sensitive as Beckett, living in an intellectual climate bustling with discussions on language and mind, two of the functions on which any subjective experience has to depend, should not have responded intimately, if not consciously, to this field. This chapter will examine how the theme of subjective enunciation has been exploited in terms of pronominal deixis and first-person utterances in Beckett's works, with special emphasis on *Company*, the culmination of the Beckettian aporetic representation.

Early Formations and the Paranoiac Closure

Arguably, three stages can be identified in Beckett's life-long exploration of the possibilities of subjective representation.[9] Spanning from his literary debut to the late 1940s, the early stage was marked by a poetic aversion to mimetic representation and

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marked by the 'anxious realisation that there was nowhere to turn except towards the earlier, already petrified Beckett' (Renton 172). The most 'outrageous' self-reading is perhaps the last text published during his lifetime, *Stirrings Still*, in which we discern phrases, images, motifs, and themes reprised from works all the way back to the *Trilogy* (and even earlier).

[8] Paul Davies, 'Three Novels and four *Nouvelles*: Giving up the Ghost Be Born at Last' in John Pilling ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.43.

[9] Such categorical generalisation, though potentially perilous for the study of a writer as resistant to systematic theorisation as Beckett, is essential to our analysis of his aesthetic evolution, if not to anything else. It would stand more defendable, I think, if we take it less as strictly diachronic periodisation than as an attempt at conceptual and epistemic grouping.

a mocking attitude towards what he was doing as a writer. In *Murphy*, for instance, when he introduced a character like Celia with his ironic, hyper-detailed description [M 10], he was actually laying bare the techniques through which characters are defined and created in conventional mimesis. In *Murphy* still, we hear laughs from the author warning us that this is 'an expurgated, accelerated, improved and reduced account' of how the events occurred. In *Watt* and *Mercier and Camier*, it is once again through the narrator's voice that we are made aware of the systematic demolition of fiction and of the creator's playfulness. Despite these derisive attempts at deconstructing the novel, Beckett suffered in this stage from 'a fiction-making impulse or compulsion that was constrained to flow, in part at least, in conventional channels, even as it manifested itself in a more or less heterodox fashion which threatened to exhaust, expose and, in due course, dispense with all conventions whatsoever'[10]. This is best shown by the textual evidence that his fiction was still situated in relation to reality while ironically mocking this reality. Expectedly, like most young writers of creative vigour, Beckett was still obsessed with a definite, if not authoritative, subjective voice: the ultimate question that he would have asked in this respect would perhaps be 'with what authority does one speak?'

It was then, however, that Beckett finished the most important of his 'discursive' writings on the arts and literature: his talent as a writer seemed to have been outshone at this stage by his great acuity as a critic. In *Proust*, his 1931 introduction to *A la recherche du temps perdu*, we come across this passage:

> the identification with Albertine is retrospective […] and proceeds to her acquaintance by a series of subtractions. […] Thus is established the *pictorial* multiplicity of Albertine that will duly evolve into a *plastic* and moral multiplicity, no longer a mere shifting superficies and an effect of the observer's angle rather than the expression of an inward and active variety, but a multiplicity in depth, a turmoil of objective and immanent contradictions over which the subject has no control. [PTD 31-32]

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[10] John Pilling ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.17.

A precocious piece of criticism indeed -- it was not until decades later in *Company* that Beckett has fully achieved these results which he praised in Proust. To this we shall presently return in greater detail.

The early obsession with a definite subjective voice was to progress at the second stage towards its own negation[11]. We see a transformation from the early *anti-novels* into *a-novels* characterised by an emphasis on the absence of any ultimate subjective source, essence, or locus. Unlike most of our contemporary metafictions that attempt to erode the narrator's 'authority' by dismissing the first-person discourse, Beckett had ironically imposed the first-person narrative voice upon the reader, not so much to sustain the narrator's power as a near absolute monarch, though, as to raise the problem of whether a subjective voice existed at all – through what H. Porter Abbott identifies as the 'unmediated contact' between reader and narrator. By adhering to the first-person, such an 'unmediated contact' insists upon the reader's unconscious identification with the narrator on the one hand, and toys with the bizarre situation of the speaking one literally loses his voice and subjective stance on the other. The immediate result is that the whole of *The Unnamable* seems to be directed towards a phrase like 'I am the absentee again' towards the very end [T 417]. There is a double bind in this claim: inasmuch as no 'mediated' account is to be accepted, the subject has to claim its own absence; the subject's power to claim its own 'absence', however, necessitates the erasure of this very 'absence' it is meant to establish. From this need to testify to one's non-being and the dual impossibility this entails comes the nightmarish aspect of the Cartesian cogito for Beckett: the very fact of thinking 'I am not' proves that I am, yet should I cease thinking, how could I testify to this fact? The cogito depends on the self-reflexive moment at which thinking and thinking that one thinks are

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[11] Writing about Beckett's (dis)engagement with the 'I', James Olney observes: 'His [case] is the quintessential and comprehensive instance of the writer who would say *I*, would say the self – and did say it, especially early on – but who discovered that it was not the task of a moment or a single book but a life's work, which could be accomplished only by *not* saying I….' (James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-writing*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, 266)

simultaneous – it is, in fact, this concurrency that necessitates the constant repetition of the cogito in its function as proof. The phrase, 'I am absent', however, could never be achieved in a temporality of simultaneity: its very articulation undoes its claims.

A similar and yet more disturbing dilemma occurred later in the eighth *Text for Nothing*, where the narrator says: '…all I say will be false and to begin with not said by me, here I'm a mere ventriloquist's dummy, I feel nothing, say nothing, he holds me in his arms and moves my lips with a string, with a fish-hook…' [CSP 133]. The dilemma concerns the origin of the utterance, and the identity and authority of the voice saying 'I.' Whereas in traditional puppet-theatre, the absence of human bodies enables the audience's leap of faith (it is the puppets who say 'I'), in *Texts for Nothing* the ventriloquous presence of a human body (the ventriloquist) in the company of an obviously non-human body (the puppet) gives Beckett's reader an eerie thrill: the voice does not appear to belong where it should. The surrender of the voice results in an anarchy of authorities, since readers cannot help assigning authority to the one who says 'I' over what he says while he seems to surrender all authority (he calls himself the 'puppet') to another (the ventriloquist) who cannot, in turn, speak for himself. To begin with, if the speaking 'I' is not to be trusted, then the voice is indeed the puppet's and not some ventriloquist's. If the voice is indeed the puppet's, then the puppet is to be trusted because of its distinctive subjective stance. Once he is trusted, however, the deduction that the voice is indeed the puppet's is overruled, and then it is not the puppet's voice that is speaking, thereby validating the very claim that 'all I say will be false and to begin with not said by me', which surrenders the voice to the ventriloquist. Seen this way, the disqualifying and qualifying of the subjective voice can *never* coincide: in Beckett the methodical repetition is not that of a moment whose own finitude demands its eternal production, but rather the oscillation of two movements each of which always necessitates its own subsequent invalidation by the other: they can never achieve together a moment of finality.

It proves dilemmatic, then, to juxtapose the pronominal 'I' and the canceling of subjective position, for invalidation paradoxically presupposes validation. On the one

hand, the Beckettian subject is 'happy' in a true Cartesian fashion, being able to conduct his search for his self without the assurance of a body. On the other hand, once he realises language's failure to signify and its being the home of counterfeit being, he encounters a deadlock inasmuch as he has come to depend upon language itself to subvert linguistic indexicality: the Cartesian cogito thus assumes a nightmarish aspect. What looms from behind this nightmare is an irreducible division corresponding to that between enunciation and statement. The subject of the statement, being fixed in time, is a snapshot of a moment that has immediately passed, already fading in its enunciation. The speaker is already in principle out of the picture and all that remains is his representative in language. In other words, subjectivity comes into being in language alone and, in speaking, the subject is irreconcilably divided in himself: there is, therefore, a temporal disjunction between the subject speaking (enunciation) and the subject represented in speech (statement). What this implies is that with the single pronoun 'I', there are always at least two subjects: a subject who is speaking and a subject represented in speech. We expect them to coincide in an eternally present moment that covers up or sutures this fundamental disjunction, and the result is that a present moment (the moment of utterance) would eventually appear as a representation (the statement). In Beckett, however, the two variations of the old Cretan Lie present an 'I' that lives on beyond the 'I' who speaks and they obviously fail to coincide, which consequently leads to the above dilemma. This failure to either designate or cancel a definite subject position the Unnamable attributes to the nature of language: 'it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name, for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that…' [T 372]. Indeed, to think, or speak, in 'I' the subject has to perform the trick of cogito in the full assurance that 'he' is nothing but words.

Beckett's approach at this stage to the problem of subjectivity is inextricably linked with the deictic referential capabilities of pronouns and the first-person in particular. Distinguishing the deictic functions of common nouns and pronouns, the French linguist Emile Benveniste notes that while a common noun refers to a fixed or objective notion, there is usually no definable object that 'a pronoun can refer to in

identical fashion'[12]. What 'I' signifies, he explicates, is the person uttering the present instance of the discourse containing 'I'; and contrary to common nouns, it no longer refers to a previously existing subjective substance, but rather to its own saying, becoming itself the 'referent' that it is supposed to signify. In this sense, 'I am' is no longer a constative, locutionary phrase, but a constantly renewed performative, referring vertiginously to its own utterance: to say 'I' is to both to name and to act. Crucial here is how 'I' collapses the distinction between the signified and the referent, since utterance simultaneously creates what it represents. The importance of this to Beckett is found, on the one hand, in how the production of meaning by 'I' is a 'work in progress': the Beckettian 'I' continuously renews, rewrites or reutters itself, with a denial of continuity between instantiations; and, on the other, in the way Beckett stresses the 'I' as a sign which can never be saturated by the subjective consciousness it is meant to carry. In the first case, much as the 'I' strives for a temporality of coincidence, the Beckettian prose denies it by troubling the grammatical and syntactic structures on which the continuity of the reference of the 'I' depends. In the second case, as the Beckettian subject talks, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to invest the 'I' with definite subjective intentions which make it his 'I' and not someone else's. In other words, 'I' no longer cleaves the crucial distanced between the self and the other, but becomes simply a designating mark in a series of grammatical, syntactic and narrative options.

The oscillation between assertion and denial, validation and invalidation creates a textual rhythm which Beckett's exquisitely balanced and paced narratives are careful to maintain. One name he gives to this rhythm, and the impossibility of regarding in isolation any of its particular rises or falls, is aporia. But aporia, in addition to naming this sort of rhythm, is also created by it. For Beckett, aporia is never considered as a stable state of unknowing: not only can one not know, one cannot know that one cannot know. Aporia, to truly be aporia, can never be accepted

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[12] Emile Benveniste, *Problems in General* Linguistics, trans. Mary Elizabeht Meek. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971, p.218.

as a certainty. Like the subject, it must be continually asserted as effaced, in a rhythm that can never have a moment of resolution. Due to their obsession with the first-person pronoun, Beckett's works of this period prove continuously compelling: however much it harps on fractured identity and dissolution of purpose, the narrative voice induces the reader to follow it along its tortuous ways and eventually end up in a mental vortex of indeterminacy and oscillation concerning subjective enunciation. As the reader tries desperately to extract a metaphysical subjective position from the work's aporetics, he inevitably get further entangled, for in order to lift himself from the aporia, he first has to admit its existence which is constantly being invalidated: either that there *is* aporia, and then there is not aporia concerning the existence of aporia, or there *is not* aporia, and there is not aporia. Here, the 'I' as a 'constantly renewed performative' is only a process of circular movement that brings the subject back to where it has begun. The result of this is a paranoiac closure within a text of internal rifts and ruptures.

The Deictic Carnival and the Enactment of the First Person

Beckett's (dis)engagement with the subjective 'I' is certainly not as simple and clear-cut as I have delineated. Apart from the 'I' as a mere puppet for a 'he' who gives the it speech and who is thus an 'I' beyond the 'I' of the text (*Trilogy*, *How It Is*, and *Texts for Nothing*), we have 'I's that disappear for a long time only to resurface in the most astonishing way, claiming to have been there all the time (*Watt* and *Mercier and Camier*), as well as 'I's that belong to someone dead before the story starts ('The Calmative' and 'The End'). Due to the above-mentioned paranoiac closure, however, Malone's promise, 'I shall say I no more' [T 285], was doomed to be broken in spite of all these absence and semi-absence of the 'I'. It was not until the third stage that the promise was kept and that Beckett could be said to have achieved the voice his explorations had been inexorably leading him to, a voice always in the third person (and, sporadically, the second) but with an undeniable and

overwhelming pressure of the first person behind it – I can cite *All Strange Away*, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, *The Lost Ones*, *Company*, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, *Worstward Ho*, and *Stirrings Still*. As Beckett himself has put it, 'Finally one no longer knows who is speaking. The subject disappears completely. That's where the crisis of identity ends'[13]. While the subject – the first person – does disappear from the later work, it is, thanks to this disappearance, paradoxically stamped all over his drama and fiction. In *Company*, for instance, Beckett has achieved a *Durcharbeitung*, or working-through, of the first person by dispersing it into the second and third persons, and by staying, in particular, with the second person 'you', the voice of the memory, behind which there is all the exigency and desire and anguish of an 'I'. The wish not to say I, which had ended up in saying 'not-I', is now fulfilled, after years of struggling.

Up to now my argument has centered around Beckett's prose work as if the story had transpired in the fiction only. He, of course, was also writing plays, which were undertaken in part try to circumvent the whole problem of the 'I' and point of view. Indeed, with the deictic mobility of stage performance, drama may have more easily shunned the dilemma rather than directly confront it, as narratives would. Inhabiting the margins between narrative and drama, *Company* undoubtedly leaves much space for coping with the dilemma.[14] Later in this chapter, I shall elaborate on the problems

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[13] Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett*. Academic Press Leiden, 1996, p.63.

[14] Despite the normal practice of putting it under the category of Beckett's prose work, S.E. Gontarski did once claim *Company* to be the writer's 'latest play' (Quoted in Constance Harvey, *Press Release* for Gontarski's stage production of *Company* in English. February 15, 1985). Indeed, since the composition of *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), the dividing line between Beckett's prose monologues and stage monologues has been less distinct, and this Gontarski again identifies as a 'generic androgyny' in Beckett's late prose. During an informal conversation in the winter of 2002, David Booth of the Theatre Action Company of Hong Kong remarked that Beckett's late prose was increasingly intended 'to be read aloud'. This drive 'to be read aloud' is significantly conspicuous in *Company*, and this, I think, must have been sympathetic to Katharine Worth when she observed: 'It is not a great step from being actively involved as a reader [of *Company*] to imagining the text in performance, its subtle music being spoke by a fine, resonant voice' [Katharine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.166]. Reading it aloud certainly makes Beckett's text eminently 'presentable' through the verbal articulation of all its deictic pointers.

it poses for performance and the implications for subjective positioning in stage production.

Opening with an injunction to 'imagine' a voice coming to 'one in the dark', *Company* immediately plunges us into an alternation between the third-person commentaries directed at the reader, and second-person descriptions of journeys into the past directed at the listener. If Beckett in the second phase had left the reader within a mental vortex of indeterminacy and oscillation concerning subjective enunciation, now he would allow no resting place for the reader, not with the initially comfortable notion of company which is progressively eroded but with the carefully prepared narrative structure which is itself a disorientating and alienating device. There are frequently moments in the third-person commentary when speculation leads the voice into the second person narrative or even the forbidden first, as, for example, in: 'To confess, Yes I remember. Perhaps even to have a voice. To murmur, Yes I remember. What an addition to company that would be! A voice in the first person singular.' [NO 12-13] In the course of this constant alternation, a throng of company is conjured up out of the dark. 'Memories come into play, fantasies, deep thoughts and imaginings; we are let into the process by which they are shaped and sculpted till they live, become true company – for the narrator and for us'[15]. The 'company', then, is no other than the accumulation of self-generated constructions in the form of inventions and memories, which the narrator and the voice address to the silent listener or unnamable 'hearer'. But among these three 'persons' of the fable there is a strange intercourse: 'Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not.' [NO 6] Here, the narrator describes, with painstaking care, not only the relationship between the supine figure and the voice, but also the grammatical patterning of the work with its explicit prohibition of the first-person pronoun. The precise scene-setting appears, at least superficially, to be the antithesis of the scene-dissolving that frequently occurs

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[15] Katharine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, p.164.

in works such as the *Trilogy* and *Texts for Nothing*; but far from establishing certainty, it wittily generates confusion about the relationship of the second- and third-person pronouns to the reader, the narrator, the author, as well as to the third (infinitely multipliable) possible 'other' to whom the narrator periodically alludes: 'May not there be another with him in the dark to and of whom the voice is speaking?' [NO 6].

Retrospective Subjective Reproduction and the Play of 'I'

I mentioned earlier the qualities that Beckett praised in *Proust* about *A la recherche du temps perdu*: the *retrospective* identification of Albertine as multiplicities effected by 'an inward and active variety' and by 'a turmoil of objective and immanent contradictions over which the subject has no control'. The significance of Beckett's observation lies not so much in its revelation of the writer's critical acuity as in its prophetic function: 'retrospective' was to become one of the defining keywords of subjectivation in Beckett's late dramatic and prose production.

In *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, Freud stated that psychoanalysis makes a 'basic assumption' about two things 'concerning what we call our psyche or mental life: first, its bodily organ and scene of action, the brain (or nervous system), and secondly, our *acts of consciousness*, which are *immediate data* and cannot be more carefully explained by any kind of description' (13, *emphasis mine*). Very early in his career, Beckett was aware of the inadequacies of mere 'descriptions' of the 'acts of consciousness'. The verbal drama of the *Trilogy*, for instance, has marked his suspicion about such 'descriptive' accounts, though his adherence to the 'I' has been suggestive of a vicarious attempt at another kind of 'description'. Now, through *Company*'s pronominal action, this early *diegetic* endeavour is forsaken in favour of a *mimetic* reproduction of the process of consciousness, foregrounding the fallacy of what he called 'the caricature furnished by direct perception' [PTD 14]:

In another dark or in the same another devising it all for company. This at first

sight seems clear. But as the eye dwells it grows obscure. Indeed the longer the eye dwells the obscurer it grows. Till the eye closes and freed from pore the mind inquires, What does this mean? What finally does this mean that at first sight seems clear? [NO 18]

The self-evident 'immediate knowledge' of the deviser's location, which 'at first sight seems clear', is for Beckett fallacious, for 'the longer the eye dwells the obscurer it grows'. Indeed, right after the opening of *Company* we were already reminded that 'only a small part of what is said can be verified', and the subject eventually manifests itself as one that never totally coincides with himself: his subjective position is being constantly revised and redefined, now not by himself as in the *Trilogy*, but by a multitude of 'others', or his own 'shadows' as Søren Kierkegaard would have it[16], conjured up in the deictic carnival of the text. Ultimately, the whole of *Company* shows an 'I' that does not actually coincide with the image of the self produced by a single conscious self: it tenaciously remains plural against all the traps of conceptual unifications. Its reproduction as a figure of *deferred* finality oddly echoes another statement in *Proust*: 'permanent reality, if any, can only be apprehended as a retrospective hypothesis' [PTD 14]. This early observation is now translated, in *Company*, as the deconstruction of the 'I' into 'immanent contradictions' of deictic plenitude so that it can be reconstructed 'retrospectively': the 'I' is no longer characterised as the first person but as the 'last' person:

> For why or? Why in another dark or in the same? And whose voice asking this? Who asks, Whose voice asking this? And answers, His soever who devises it all. In the same dark as his creature or in another? For company. Who asks in the end, Who asks? And in the end answers as above. And adds long after to himself,

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[16] The non-coincidence of the subject with himself is skillfully described by Kierkegaard while talking about the 'magic of the theatre': 'In such a self-vision of the imagination, the individual is not an actual shape, but a shadow, or, more correctly, the actual shape is invisibly present and therefore is not satisfied to cast one shadow, but the individual has a variety of shadows, all of which resemble him and which momentarily have equal status as being himself.' (*Fear and Trembling*, 154) Obviously, Kierkegaard's subject, like the one in *Company*, cannot posit either the verifiable objectivity of its 'whole', nor the verifiable 'truth' of its existence.

> Unless another still. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him. [NO 19]

Here, what is perceived as the referential immediacy of the 'I' is conveyed by a skilful narrative choice which suspends the naming of it. This deferral of the 'I' is a necessary deferral, as it reveals the 'I' only through the articulations of different acts of consciousness. The acts can structure the 'I' as the result of a verbal interplay of referents related to immediate perception and memory. Thus, in *Company*, what is perceived as the referential immediacy of the 'I' is conveyed by a skilful narrative choice which reflects a conception of the subject that is essential 'plural' and not immediate. The endless formulations which occur within the narrative show a constant movement within the linguistic referent: the subject-pronoun is caught and established by its relation to other pronouns.

> If the voice is not speaking to him it must be speaking to another. So with what reason remains he reasons. To another of that other. Or of him. Or of another still. To another of that other or of him or of another still. To one on his back in the dark in any case. Of one on his back in the dark whether the same or another. So with what reason remains he reasons and reasons ill. For were the voice speaking not to him but to another then it must be of that other it is speaking and not of him or of another still. Since it speaks in the second person. [NO 8-9]

The effect of this kind of 'reason-ridden' speculation is to draw attention to the general literary question of who speaks and who is being addressed. Readers as well as the multitude of supine listeners conjured by the writing are drawn into the wide circle of speculation. In this process of being infinitely multiplied, the 'one on his back' loses any tenuous identity that he may have been gathering. The reader, too, is forbidden identification of any kind as the 'one' loses its unitariness and the single focus of traditional third-person narrative on a specific 'he' or 'she' is splintered. The effect of this is to keep the reader's attention wary and mobile, forcing it away from any central focus, enabling it to move freely from the worlds of the work to the worlds of reading and writing. This identificatory mobility is structured around what Daniel Katz identifies as the 'or-ness' of the work's narrative pattern: 'Indeed, one of

the book's principal stylistic traits could be called its "orness" – often two conflicting constatations of a given situation or condition will be placed on either side of an "or", with neither being assigned definite validity. The "or", then, is *one of the text's major devices for troubling ontological stability and grounding*'[17]. Upon this, one may recall the aporetic oscillations we examined a while ago, which create a circular paranoiac closure where the subject gets hopelessly trapped. Yet there is a fundamental difference between this 'or-ness' and earlier paranoiac oscillations, for the 'or' is presented here more as an emphasis on the status of the subject of enunciation rather than a focus on any particular fictive enunciator: a primarily schizophrenic structure. '[L]iterature,' write Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, 'is like schozophrenia; a process and not a goal, production and not an expression', and they argue for an understanding of language as 'no longer defined by what it says, even less by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow and to explode – desire.'[18] *Company* is, in this light, a work driven by clusters of conflicting desires. Yet, unlike many other Beckett works that explore the problem of the speaking subject, it does not generate a sense of despair or futility. Although it is schismatic to the point of schizophrenia, it is creatively and constructively so too.

Thus the 'I' is established as the outcome of the dialogue of several selves. In this sense, Beckett's *Durcharbeitung* of the first-person pronoun is achieved through an *a posteriori* reconstruction of a character through a series of hermeneutical hypotheses concerning identity, hypotheses that transform the text into a pronominal action suppressing the subjective 'I' and dispersing it into second- and third-person narratives. In other words, where the narrative used to presuppose an *a priori*, troubled 'I', we are now treated with a feast of fragmentary subjective positions neatly structured around the second and third persons. Very early in the text we read:

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[17] Daniel Katz, *Saying 'I' No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999, p.166. [*my emphasis*]

[18] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.133.

Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not.' [NO 6]

Were it not of him to whom it is speaking speaking but of another it would not speak in the second person but in the third. [NO 9]

These two pieces of reasoning relate to the fact that the voice *is* speaking to him. Therefore we can infer that it is also of him that it is speaking, since it is speaking in the second person (were the voice speaking to him of another, it would speak in the third person). This laborious disclosure of a referent (*a* subject to whom and of whom the voice is speaking) is achieved only after the disclosure of a system of referentiality, on which the specific reference is shown to be totally dependent. In other words, the narrative suspends the direct reference to an 'objective I', and tells us precisely that the 'I' apprehends himself only by moving through a network of deictic referentialities. Far from being *a priori*, the 'I' is now achieved *a posteriori* by a voice which constitutes the subject as metonymical and as subject to temporality. It is metonymical insofar as it is one instance within the pronominal system, and it is temporal inasmuch as the subject of the enunciation is diachronically realised as the connection of different metonymical instances provided by the various subjects of each utterance.

Beckett's suspicion about 'immediate knowledge' and his representation of subjectivity as 'deferred finality' signify a move from the diegetic to the mimetic. This move was significantly prefigured by one of Beckett's remarks on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* back in 1929: 'Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.' [D 27] If the *Trilogy*, with its conflation of form and content, can be described as 'mimetic', it is only superficially and impurely so because this mimesis has evolved around 'self-narrated' protagonists who are torn between the need to presuppose an 'I' and the imperative to question the

subjective position of this 'I'.[19] Consequently, the narrative task becomes paranoiac and teleological, totally incapable of moving beyond the looking glass of traditional mimesis, that is, beyond a pre-conceptualised, though fragmented, image of the self. Now in *Company*, the protagonist is 'enacted' rather than 'self-narrated', whose aesthetic reproduction entails a dramatic, open, and dialogical imitation. This 'imitation' is accomplished through fabling a 'mirror' which contains a reflection or image but which has no model or subject outside to reflect: the image in the 'mirror' is a pure reflection, with no external object available as its material referent. Yet the construction of the fable involves tremendous problems. As Eric Levy aptly points out, the story 'cannot simply present a magical mirror hanging on a wall somewhere and containing an unfortunately stranded reflection, because in that case there would be something outside the mirror, and these externals would modify the reflection inside by entraining the mimetic expectations Beckett wants to avoid' (99). If the 'mirror' in *Company* is to escape these problems, it must 'occupy the entire text'; the entire text must 'become the representation of a mirror which has nothing inside it but the pure reflection and nothing outside but the act of imagination creating that reflection' (Levy 99). In other words, the narration here is 'more than self-reflective'; it abolishes the 'clear, tenable boundary between the diegesis of the of the story told and the mimesis of story-telling'[20]. The abolition of that 'tenable boundary' requires that the self telling the story be incorporated into that story, that the diegetic be dissolved into the narrative to make up an *uncontaminated* mimesis of the acts of consciousness. The opening sentence of *Company* provides an illustrative example of this dissolution:

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[19] It seems that only through such a questioning can the Benjaminian 'embarrassment' be banished. Writing about the writer's role as 'storyteller', Walter Benjamin asserted as early as 1936: 'there is embarrassment all around when the desire to tell a story is expressed.' [Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p.83]

[20] Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the World: Samuel Beckett's Prose Works after the Nobel Prize*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990, p.164.

A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine. [NO 5]

At first glance, the injunction seems to enhance the diegetic description by specifying the context of the message uttered by the voice. However, it also exceeds the borders of the diegetic text by being directly oriented towards the reader, inviting him or her to imagine, that is, to read. It is in fact an invitation to see the expanding boundaries of the text, moved by the constructive, imaginative act of reading. Thus *Company* is not conceivable as detached from 'performance': the text cannot be reduced to a mere diegetic discourse, because the reader's imaginative experience has been prompted as the performance of the text. Therefore, the real implication of the above passage from *Disjecta* for our analysis is not so much in its exaltation of form-content conflation as in something that Beckett implied but did not quite say himself: 'It is not *to be* written at all'. This suggests that, for Beckett, the text does not want to be written: it cannot be written with all diegetic weightiness; it has to be *performed* in the course of being read. Behind the mask of second- and third-person narratives, we sense the exigency and desire and anguish of an 'I' *retrospectively* constructed after the pronominal masquerade.

Memory and Second-Person Utterances

It is interesting to note how the second-person narrative is frequently devoted to the telling of stories whose mode is autobiographical in spite of the second-person construction they adopt. Some of these stories are more evocative of highly significant personal experiences in childhood and youth than anything else Beckett has written. Unlike the protagonists of the *Trilogy* who tell their own 'stories' in the first person, the 'one in the dark' in *Company* has an extraneous, and perhaps ventriloquous, voice telling him of a past that is possibly his own. The use of the second-person narrative imposes upon him all these recollections: 'As for example when he hears, You are on your back in the dark. Then he must acknowledge the

truth of what is said.' [NO 5] He listens, trying to see if it is his past or someone else's, trying to see if the incidents repeated are significant or sentimental or simply invented for company. This second-person 'autobiography' is highly significant for Beckett's late aesthetics in that the immediacy of presence brought by the autobiographical mode 'wins credence' for a 'you' that is probably non-existent ('the greater part of what is said cannot be verified'), but shows an interlocutionary, implied 'I' that does not actually coincide with a conscious self.

'I suppose all is reminiscence from womb to tomb,' Beckett once wrote to James Knowlson about the numerous literary reminiscences in Winnie's near-monologue in *Happy Days*.[21] Many things could be meant by Beckett's apparently simple sentence, and, being Samuel Beckett, he no doubt intended them all. The sentence could mean that there is no perception and no cognition that is not altered by the intervention of memory. Before a perception can be registered in consciousness and thus become to us a perception, time will have passed and thrown it into memory, where other memories will affect and transform it.[22] Herbert Read once said that we truly experience a colour or a sound only once, the first time, and that any subsequent experience of the colour or sound will be altered by this first encounter. Going beyond Reed, one could argue that even this first time is not pristine; yet we never know, because we cannot really *remember* any such first time as the one Reed indicates. To foreground the problematic nature of memory, Beckett has resorted to a narrative choice that forces the second person upon the supine listener(s) as well as the reader (or the audience in the case of a stage production), defamiliarising them from the process of subjective construction via memory.

Very early in *Company* we read: 'Use of the second person marks the voice. That

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[21] James Knowlson, 'Beckett's "Bits of Pipe"', in Morris Beja, S.E. Gontarski, and Pierre Astier, 16.

[22] This is what Antonio Damasio has in mind when he writes: 'Present continuously becomes past, and by the time we take stock of it we are in another present, consumed with planning the future…. The present is never here. We are hopeless late for consciousness.' [Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Avon Books, 1994, p.240.]

of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not.' [NO 6] Now, the impossibility of the first person comes not only from the impossibility of self-reference ('of whom') as in the *Trilogy*, but equally from the impossibility of auto-address ('to whom'). The question is not only one of memory and self-knowledge, of speaking 'truthfully' and accurately about one's past, but also of the 'capacity' to speak to oneself, to hear oneself, to witness one's own identifications and subjective positionings. The significance of Beckett's second-person imposition is thus manifested in: (1) its imperative for the reader to rethink terms like 'real' and 'accurate', which have lost all sense because no one can now say with certainty that this *given* memory is accurate, or pronounce with seeming assurance as one otherwise would: '*I know* this is the way it happened'; (2) the undeniability of the 'memories': because they are 'imposed', they are practically undeniable – undeniable both in the sense that it cannot be denied that these are memories and in the sense that the memories are obsessive and will not be denied -- consequently the question becomes: 'Whose are the memories? His? Yours?', from which arises the ultimate impossibility of auto-address: the memories can scarcely be *mine* because of the absence of 'I'. What does it mean, then, to say that I can have your memories, you can have his, or he can have mine? Kafka's famous axiom, 'I am a memory come alive', can perhaps be fairly rephrased here as 'I is memory come alive'. Much as this would suggest that memory is the sole ground of subjectivity and consciousness, it nonetheless brings to light how the continuity of being has been structured by language. Of this, one of the earliest examples from Beckett's oeuvre is the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp, whose voice of thirty years ago comes back to him, via a tape-recorder, to be answered by him, with both voices invoking the first-person pronoun that *theoretically* should have ensured sameness in spite of temporal separation. But is 'I' the same person 'I' was thirty years ago? In the end, Krapp seems to want to cry out in the tones of Mouth in *Not I:* '… what? … who? … no! … he! … HE! …'

'The important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced,'

writes Walter Benjamin, 'but the weaving of his memory' (*Illuminations*, 204). This tells us that the remembering writer is at least twice removed from the experiences he recalls – once by the act of recollection (which is an act of imagination) and once again by the act of writing. Both acts demand that experiences are sifted and sorted in ways that require as much forgetting as they do remembering – 'Penelope work', as Benjamin calls it, of weaving and unraveling. A memory is never complete or finite. It is open to endless revision and as Beckett well knows. *Company* demonstrates the extent to which remembering is not simply recuperative. It involves processes of cutting and editing: to remember is also to 'dismember'. To remember is both to come close to one's experience and to distance oneself from it sufficiently to observe it. It is simultaneously a journey back to lived events and an artificial construction of a new thing which itself alters the one who remembers. When Beckett offers variations on the formula, 'Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company' [NO 20], he is giving recognition to this paradox.

Beckett's choice of the second-person narrative for the memory segments throws into prominence the way in which a person is constructed by memory (and by imagination more generally), made 'other' by it, and even, in the process of 'conjuring something out of nothing', invented by it. 'He speaks of himself as of another' [NO 20]. His 1958 work, *Krapp's Last Tape*, was the first full exposition and dramatisation of memory as the essential ground and agent of subjectivity and identity. Krapp, a 'wearish old man' (stage direction), records a tape each year on his birthday, in which he reflects on the year just past; he has also got into the habit of listening to a tape from a previous year. On the night of his sixty-ninth birthday, he listens to a tape he made thirty years earlier, the year when his mother died, when he bade farewell to love, and when he had a revelation that, he felt at the time, would help him create his own 'opus magnum'. However, the sixty-nine year old Krapp has difficulty recognising his younger self, just as the thirty-nine year old Krapp could not understand the twetty-nine year old whose tape he in turn played ('Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I

was ever as bad as that'). *Krapp's Last Tape* is undoubtedly a precursor of *That Time*, a short play written in 1974, in which 'Listener' listens silently to three voices, all the same voice ('Voices A B C are his own coming to him from both sides and above'), remembering three different periods in his life. Voice A recalls his futile effort in maturity to return to a place (Foley's Folly) associated with an event from childhood; Voice B recalls a love that he 'gave up for good' when he decided he has to let the dark in; Voice C recalls his failure as an old man attempting something we might imagine to be the artist's project. Beckett successfully weaves the voices together to produce a unique time line and sequence of events that reflect the cause of the man's current state. Although each voice carries an individual mood and central focus, each is primarily concerned with finding 'that time'. The voices demonstrate throughout the play, however, that the search for this time is merely another means of the self-illusion to keep the silence out and that a time that has passed cannot be relived or recreated.

Thus Beckett is stripping human experience of the most fundamental of all certainties -- personal identity -- and he does it by exploiting the *locus classicus* for all affirmations of identity: the mirror. As I have pointed out, *Company* fables a 'mirror' that contains a reflection or image with no model or subject outside to reflect: the image in the 'mirror' is a pure reflection, with no external object available as its material referent. Logically, identity means to be the same as oneself, as 'A equals A' is the formal statement of A's identity. The self in front of the mirror affirms his identity by claiming his reflection; he knows himself as this self by recognizing the relation of sameness obtaining between himself and the reflection. But the pure reflection can have no such identity, for there is no other term outside the mirror in virtue of which a relation of sameness can be constituted: 'And you as you always were. Alone.' Even within the mirror the pure reflection cannot posit a relation of sameness with himself and thus confirm his identity. His experience is wholly the hearing of a voice that cannot be named and whose relation to the listener remains unknowable.

To fully grasp the significance of this pure reflection we must understand that

the special mirror imagination has created for him is the mirror of memory: his present experience concerns a voice narrating a past he cannot claim. The mirror in *Company* will seem clearer if we elaborate upon the conventional approach to memory suggested earlier. Memory is the private mirror each of us holds up to see in the images of the past a reflection of our identity now. More precisely, from the succession of past images which the mirror of memory reflects, we construct the idea of a linear life, a journey or evolution through whose unfolding we discover our present identity. Beckett attacked this notion of memory in *Proust*, and his remarks there will help us grasp the function of memory in *Company*. In *Proust*, Beckett distinguishes between two types of memory: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary memory, the conscious summoning of past impressions, cannot reveal any truth about the past and hence of present identity, for the images it reproduces are inaccurate records structured by our prevailing habits of attention. In these impressions, we do not see the past so much as repeated examples of our distorting processes of noticing. As Beckett writes of voluntary memory, 'The material that it furnishes contains nothing of the past, merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism -- that is to say, nothing.' [PTD 32-33] Involuntary memory, on the other hand, triggered by the sudden association of a present stimulus with a past sensation; it is not simply a re-experiencing but a discovery. By making what now is a then into a now again, it uncovers the truth of the original experience: '… thanks to this reduplication, the experience is at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal.' [PTD 75]

Yet, where to Proust, through involuntary memory, the present becomes a means of achieving a clarifying perspective on the past, of reflecting the true meaning of the past, in *Company*, memory can only reflect the same emptiness in both past and present, the same experience without identity. In fact, memory as such is impossible for the pure reflection; his now always has been. Once again we can quote, adding the emphasis: 'And you as you always were.' The reminiscences narrated by the

voice are not the impressions of a genuine succession through time, but instead superimpose different contexts on the same inner darkness and isolation. Elements of the paradigmatic situation involving a supine body hearing a voice in the dark of isolation are recapitulated in the scenes of rememoration: the infant on his back in the cradle, hearing the murmur of his parents above him: 'No trace of love,' observes the narrator [NO 38]; the young boy alone on the diving board 'high above the sea,' pushed by the 'far call' of his father: 'Be a brave boy' [NO 14]; the young man lying supine in the 'trembling shade' of an aspen, hearing the voice of his lover: 'Your eyes opened and closed have looked in hers looking at yours. In your dark, you look in them again' [NO 39]; the young couple in 'the little summerhouse' [NO 26], after some unexplained rupture, silent, each 'with eyes closed' [NO 59]; the old man on the strand, head bent over his walking stick, hearing the tide ebb in the night: 'Were your eyes to open dark would lighten' [NO 44].

Subjective Immediacy and Illusions of Presence on Stage

Writing about her personal experiences with Samuel Beckett's theatre, Katharine Worth observes: 'It is not a great step from being actively involved as a reader [of *Company*] to imagining the text in performance, its subtle music being spoke by a fine, resonant voice'[23]. Indeed, ever since its publication by John Calder in 1980, *Company* has exerted a strong pull on actors and directors alike. In the very year of its publication, a reading by Patrick Magee was broadcast by the BBC and a staged reading was arranged by John Russell Brown as a platform performance at the National Theatre. A French production directed by Pierre Chabert was given in Paris in November 1984 with Pierre Dux as the sole role (an English-language version of his *Compagnie* was directed by S. E. Gontarski in Los Angeles the following year). A conversation with Pierre Chabert had led Katharine Worth to approach Beckett for

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[23] Katharine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, p.166.

the rights to produce a new English stage adaptation, the outcome being a staging at the Edinburgh Festival in 1987 with Tim Pigott-Smith as the director and Julian Curry as the Figure.

Given *Company*'s deictic mobility, the most fundamental question about the staging would be determining the stage image. The original prose text posits a duality between a 'he' voice and a 'you' voice, while the narrator, the nexus of those two voices, is barely suggested: all the while it remains so illusory and imaginative a figment. The second-person voice, despite the obvious autobiographical touch of the past it creates for the third-person, is merely imaginative renderings, each episode of which the third person rejects, insisting, in effect, 'that was not I'. This voice is, as it says, 'devised for company', but it does not provide much comfort[24] and is periodically contrasted with another voice, that of the third-person, which, erecting a series of hypotheses, comments on the ambiguity and futility of the whole company-fabling enterprise. Now the snare that awaits all directorial endeavour would be the temptation to stage two characters, equally foregrounded and respectively for the second- and third-person narratives. This is certainly an effort-saving juxtaposition, yet as the audience's attention is shifted from one figure to the other, the original prose's pronominal action that builds towards a final, though illusive, 'I' consequently crumbles inasmuch as the narrator is now reduced to a mere onstage voiceover (which is more distractive than contributive) while the supine

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[24] Almost all the incidents that the voice evokes are painful to the supine figure in the dark. They suggest a loveless childhood where the boy was rebuked or derided by his parents for his comment on the perception of the sun [NO 8], or for his report of being able to see the mountains of Wales from his 'nook in the goose' [NO 19] in the Wicklow Hills. There is the loveless parents 'stooping over cradle'; 'the lack of parental concern for a child who, in desperate need of attention, throws himself from 'the top of a great fir' [NO 17]; or the embarrassment of the child's being on exhibition, standing naked at 'the tip of a high board' before the 'many eyes' of his father's cronies as he is urged to 'Be a brave boy' [NO 14]. The child in the memories seems never to have been the boy or man his parents wanted. The voice also recounts horrid, embarrassing and naïve incidents: the boy who believes he can play God by intervening in the life of an ill hedgehog, only to find it dead in the end [NO 23-24], or the child who can look out the summer house window to see that 'all without is rosy'. Even the sensual moments are painful. The erotic episode of the young adult's feeling the 'fringe of her long black hair' on his face is intimately connected to the story of the loved one's pregnancy, with its puns about her being 'late'. The episode's concluding line hints at the disastrous end to the love affair, 'All dead still' [NO 34].

figure becomes a humble locus of 'spectator complicity' (which serves only to further destabilise the work's pronominal action). In other words, the dramatic functions of the second-person will be substantially altered if it is overtly dramatised or brought too much into physicality.

It is not surprising, then, to see how all the above-mentioned productions have consciously avoided evoking the listener's immediate physical presence: it is a common practice among directors to treat *Company* as a monologue, the narrator of which is situated in a murky, typically Beckettian dungeon-like closed place. In Katharine Worth's production, for instance, though apart from the Figure (played by Julian Curry) there was 'an effigy created (with the aid of a tailor's dummy) out of a shabby, long-skirted, greenish coat, broad-brimmed hat, and stick', throughout the performance the latter had remained 'a dim shape, only just visible in the background […]; then once or twice lit so as to become a suggestive shadowy "other".'[25] An earlier production by S. E. Gontarski had gone even further by evoking no 'shadowy other' at all. In such cases the figure on stage becomes narrator, hypothesiser, and 'supine' listener in one; he is the principal – albeit illusive or ghostly – icon mediating the two pronouns, sharing the characters of both and yet refusing to identify with either. Understandably, the move to centrality demands a different stage position, if not more mobility, for the figure than that of 'lying on his back'. In lieu of a 'supine' figure, both the Gontarski and Worth productions have opted for a figure sitting in a chair[26], the only major difference being that where the Gontarski Figure could not rise from the chair, the Worth Figure was allowed a variety of postures: 'sitting on or resting against it, or standing behind and looking over', till at the end it lay prone, 'arms crossed on his chest'.[27] Such changes are benevolent, for

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[25] Katharine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, p.170.

[26] The choice of the chair was probably inspired by *Rockaby* (1980).

[27] Katharine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, p.170. Contrary to Figure's relative mobility in Worth's production, Gontarski's character had been sparing, and perhaps more stylistically so, in bodily movements: 'In the hypothesising mode Figure could move and speak normally in his chair. Here he existed in real time. The listening mode, however, would be highly stylised. As listener, Figure would move in slow, balletic motion searching

what works in writing would have been flat if simply transferred onto stage; and they undoubtedly give better, and more natural, expression of the energies in the original.

Predictably, both productions have used the Figure's real voice for the third-person narrative and his recorded voice for the second-person.[28] On the one hand, the Figure resists the second-person imposition of memories, not only because these memories are painful to him (as I have pointed out earlier), but also because the voice has been objectified. 'In order to be perceived,' Gontarski observes, 'voice needs to be objectified, separated from the perceiver, and so voice must always be something other than the subject, the self; it cannot be accepted as part of the I. In fact, both figments Figure creates, the figure of one lying on his back in the dark and the voice he hears, have been objectified and thereby separated from the perceiving self.'[29] Consequently, such second-person company-fabling fails in a way strikingly similar to that dramatised in Beckett's 1974 dramaticule, *That Time*, where we witness much the same pronounced split between the voice and the self: a spotlit head listens while three voices, coming from the darkness on both sides and above, describe events from a life increasingly devoid of human contact. The idea that the person in each voice is making up people or events is stated or suggested, as when voice B says, 'Just one of those things you kept making up to keep out the void' [CDW 390], only to prove the eventual loneliness when he admits that he keeps making up the same scene, bringing into question whether the girl in the earlier scene is real [CDW 393]. This solitude in B then starts to parallel the theme of solitude in A and C that is apparent throughout the work. In C, the man is ignored by the people

out for the source of the voice….' [S.E. Gontarski, '*Company* for Company: Androgyny and Theatricality in Samuel Beckett's Prose' in James Acheson & Kateryna Arthur eds., *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*. London: Macmillan, 1987, p.196]

[28] Insufficient time for preparation had denied Pierre Chabert's adaptation a recording, though Beckett, then partially involved in the production, had desired one. Yet Chabert had painstakingly worked out a way of lighting the actor's face to disguise the fact that it was he who was speaking the second-person lines [see Katharine Worth, *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, p.168].

[29] S.E. Gontarski, '*Company* for Company: Androgyny and Theatricality in Samuel Beckett's Prose' in Acheson & Arthur eds., *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*. London: Macmillan, 1987, p.199.

around him: 'The eyes passing over you and through you like so much thin air' (394). In A the man goes back to the places of childhood mentioned in B apparently to restore his memories of childhood and presumably to defy the solitude, but his attempt fails and he leaves as he comes: alone. Early in his preparation for the French adaptation of *Company*, Pierre Chabert had planned to minimise the narrator's corporeality by staging a floating head. He decided to mask the source of light and so created a black box large enough to accommodate the lighting and the figure sitting on a black chair. Shrouded in a black cassock, the actor's body would be invisible save the head, lit by sourceless light. This approach was apparently inspired by *That Time*,[30] in which the severed head with 'long flaring white hair as if seen from above outspread' is simultaneously character, stage prop, and stage set, the rest being all silence. Enoch Brater in his study of Beckett's late style in theatre notes that such a bodiless head 'heightens the sense that one is watching a theatrical performance: this is a staged world, where script, direction, and design place props and characters at will.'[31] For me, however, it is less a meta-dramatic deliberation than a mere theatrical device which serves to evaporate the illusions of subjective immediacy by highlighting the inconsistency between the listener and the second-person voice. This again recalls *That Time*, where we have voices that allegedly belong to the face on stage ('Voices A B C are his own…'); but in performance the arrangement of the voices around the head gives the impression that the voices emanate not from his subconscious but from somewhere outside him. Here in *Company*, even if the voice recounts incidents from his past more or less accurately, its second-person imposition reminds the figure on stage that these accounts could be selected, recorded, re-emphasised versions of the past.

On the other hand, the Figure as hypothesiser is not a stable reality or a transcendental creator either. He keeps an eye not only on his 'supine' creature, but

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[30] It was perhaps because of its close affinity to *That Time* that Beckett rejected the floating head image on the first rehearsal.

[31] Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in Theatre*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.38.

over his own shoulder as well, wondering whether he too is only a figment, a created creature, or an imaginative construct. So finally, he is, for he is not an actual hypothesiser, Beckett continuously reminds us, but an actor, a representation in an art work created by a particular set of cultural forces that for convenience we call Samuel Beckett. But this Samuel Beckett too is glancing over his shoulder, wondering if he too has been written. Beckett thus explores the fictive possibilities of such an infinite regress by suggesting an infinite series of devisers: 'Devised deviser devising it all for company' [NO 37]. A transcendental unity is finally always arbitrary, for one can always ask, 'Who asks in the end, Who asks? … And adds long after himself, Unless another still. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The thinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him.' [NO 19] Consequently, the 'I' as 'deferred finality' is never verified, though all the while the text's pronominal action has been building towards it. As the Figure recoils from the mention of the 'I' saying 'Quick leave him', he is in fact recoiling from the unverifiability of his self and perhaps from the unverifiability of that same unverifiability. This testifies to my earlier discussion of *Company*'s fable of the 'mirror', which contains a reflection with no model or subject outside to reflect: the uncertainty about the I's finality stems exactly from this absence of an external referent, though the 'I' keeps haunting the Figure with its ever-unverifiable presence. Plagued by the second-person memories and his being a 'devised deviser' with no ultimate deviser, the Figure is disturbed to the utmost by these closing lines:

> But with face upturned for good labour in vain at your fable. Till finally you hear how words are coming to an end. With every inane word a little nearer to the last. And how the fable too. The fable of one with you in the dark. The fable of one fabling of one with you in the dark. And how better in the end labour lost and silence. And you as you always were.
>
> Alone. [NO 52]

Typical of Beckett's late theatre, language, rather than subjective presence, which the voices tend to highlight, is now central to *Company*. Language creates

stories as much as it 'unwords' the subject. The narrator's phrasing, the often baroque, inverted, elliptical, poetic phrasing of both voices, is as much, if not more, a source of company as the actual hypothesising. Conscious of this, S. E. Gontarski avoided in his own adaptation a literal illustration of the text, maintaining that the text's linguistic emphasis should be retained as much as possible, and that no attempt should be made to 'dramatise the stories of the second-person voice' or to 'illustrate the image of the third-person as described …'[32]. With an idiosyncratic Beckettian directorial touch, he limited the range of theatrical sign systems on stage, and such reduction of what theatrical semioticians would call 'transmitters' (that is, costume, props, lights, etc.) not only erases possible illusions of subjective immediacy brought by too much physicality, but more importantly focuses the audience's attention on the imaginative and illusive nature of the figure and propels them into more linguistic engagement with the play.

Earlier on I talked about the reason-ridden passage as a reminder of the question of the speaker and the addressee ('If the voice is not speaking to him it must be speaking to another. [...] were the voice speaking not to him but to another then it must be of that other it is speaking and not of him or of another still. Since it speaks in the second person'). In a stage production of *Company* in which the Figure is only an illusive presence, such speculation naturally becomes, specifically and urgently, that of dramatic indexicality. Writing about the function of deixis in theatre, Keir Elam remarks:

> Deixis […] allows the dramatic context to be referred to as an 'actual' and dynamic world already in progress. Indeed, deictic reference presupposes the existence of a speaker referred to as 'I', a listener addressed as 'you', a physically present object indicated as 'this'. It resides in 'shifters' […] in so far as it does not, in itself, specify its object but simply points, ostensively, to the already-constituted contextual elements.[33]

[32] S.E. Gontarski, '*Company* for Company: Androgyny and Theatricality in Samuel Beckett's Prose' in Acheson & Arthur eds., *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*. London: Macmillan, 1987, p.194.

[33] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London: Methuen, 1980, p.140.

As dramatic communication is so much dependent upon deictic markers, an indexical expression such as 'You are on your back in the dark' remains totally ambiguous unless uttered in a context where the 'shifter' *you* has an evident referent. Yet 'you' is never evident in *Company*, for a multitude of supine listeners have been conjured by the writing and drawn into the wide circle of speculation. Thus the 'one on his back' loses any tenuous identity that he may have been gathering. The audience, too, is forbidden identification of any kind as the 'one' loses its unitariness and the single focus of traditional third-person narrative on a specific 'he' or 'she' is splintered.

Conclusion

Beckett's narrative strategy, so obstinately paradigmatic, fragmentary and obscure, posits here the question of the legitimacy of translatability of persons into referents. This translatability occurs in language all the time, mostly through pronominal and tropological exchanges. However, in Beckett these exchanges do not and cannot mirror an uncracked, unified, 'I', endowed with referential self-sameness; at best they show a configuration of positions, never extraneous to language. This configuration becomes readable as a sequence or a coherence, and produces the effect of an 'I'.

The narrative makes clear the fact that the self administers but cannot master the full meaning of the subject, which is to say that consciousness can only capture the self as an object, ignoring the simultaneous double of its subject-object relation.

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‘STOCK STILL STARING OUT’[34]:
TEMPORAL-SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF PERFORMANCE

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<div align="right">

‘Let’s just say you’re not all there.’[35]

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Samuel Beckett’s late plays are, it might be said, both immediately, engrossingly present and troublingly absent, unfinished even while they are rigorously formed. They are theatre pieces that seem to pick apart the seams of the theatrical event; they both involve and baffle the spectator, giving her or him both the promise of physical immediacy (for, if nothing else, the late plays are troublingly there; each one relies for its effect on the precise delineation of a carefully crafted stage image) and the frustrating certainty that, in this world, few if any conventional dramatic processes are in operation.

Having said that, we might be tempted to ask what is so remarkable about Beckett’s theatre. After all, the plays, from *Waiting for Godot* onwards, call into

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[34] Samuel Beckett, *A Piece of Monologue* [CDW 425].

[35] Beckett to Billie Whitelaw during rehearsals for *Footfalls*. Quoted in Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.235.

question those relations that exist, unremarked, in conventional theatre: the role of the spectator in decoding the text; the status of the image and of the text; and the relation between the two. It has also been widely noted that Beckett's dramas, from the first, rely on a reconfiguration of the conventional idea of time and space normally encountered in theatrical performance (one thinks of Ruby Cohn's persuasive term 'theatereality', for example, a term that identifies a fundamental confusion in the plays between the time and space of the drama and the time and space of the actors on the stage[36]).

This, of course, raises a fundamental question about these characters' subjectivity: Is the character in a Beckett text occupying a world mapped out by the text or one delimited by the confines of the stage? Is he or she immediately present or infinitely removed from presence? How can she or he be understood by an audience, if the form of the play itself makes such an understanding problematic if not impossible? How can we, as audience members, make sense of these 'people' (Beckett's own preferred term) if we are unclear about their precise location and of their precise position in what is normally considered to be the linear narrative of life? In the canon of Beckett criticism, a standard answer has evolved, one that relies implicitly on a conventional idea of the way in which subjectivity is fixed in dramatic space and time. It is fair to say that, in most pieces of theatre, the relation of space to time follows a standard pattern: the time-space indicated in the play exceeds the time-space of performance, but the two are sequentially related. That is, the enacted events are themselves excerpted from a larger number of events, imagined as taking place offstage. Similarly, the setting of the play is to be imagined as only one of a number of simultaneously existing settings that together form the world described in the text. The spatial and temporal hierarchy thus established will, if described in a manner that is internally consistent, allow the audience to accept the subjectivity of the characters presented; they exist in performance time-space

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[36] Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theater*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980, pp.30-31.

because they are firmly rooted in dramatic time-space – because they have a coherently and sequentially described existence outside the immediate confines of the performance. A consistent narrative, therefore, relies on the sequential ordering of events in two time-spaces, simultaneously invoked by the dramatist and understood by the audience.[37]

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[37] It is precisely this model, it has been argued, that Beckett's theatre invokes and then frustrates. [See, for example, S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Drama*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.] The characters are simply present. Vladimir and Estragon may not know precisely what happened yesterday, but they know that their present existence is confirmed, if only by the presence of each other; similarly, Hamm and Clov are adrift in the present moment, relying on the dialogue to fix them in place. Krapp's past is, it seems to him, the tale of another man; Winnie's past drains away from her as she sinks into the earth; but both confirm themselves in the present time-space of performance each time they utter or move. All these characters exist in a dramatic time-space that is indistinguishable from the time-space of performance. They cannot rely on a past history to confirm their own existence, their own subjectivity; but they can define themselves, even if it is only from moment to moment, in the actions and the words that they perform day after day and night after night. However, I would argue that, in the later plays – from *Not I* (1972) onwards – the relation between time, space and the self changes yet again. The nature of this change is prefigured in an area of Beckett's work that has arguably yet to attract the dedicated study that its importance in his canon merits: the texts created for the electronic media in the 1960s. In *Words and Music: A Piece for Radio* (1962), *Film* (1965), *Eh Joe: A Piece for Television* (1966), and *Cascando: A Radio Piece for Music and Voice* (1963/64), Beckett, at first schematically but with a rapidly increasing ease and sophistication, uses the technical resources of the form to explore the fragmentation of the self. In *Film*, most obviously, Buster Keaton is pursued by himself. In *Eh Joe*, more interestingly, Joe tries to stifle a voice that is both his (it may, it says, be coming from his head [CDW 364]) and not his (the voice is a woman's; it is tied in some unexplained way to a moving camera and to a light that rises and falls with the voice). In the radio plays, the creation of the text is presented alongside the editing of the text. *Words and Music* plays at the bidding and direction of Croak; in *Cascando*, Opener breaks the last, gasping efforts of both Voice and Music into separate sections. The net effect of these texts is to render any notion of the single subject, present to itself in the time-space of performance, profoundly problematic. As an example of this, take the relationship between the camera, the voice, and Joe in *Eh Joe*. On paper, it would seem to be unproblematic; the camera and the voice both home in on Joe's face, presenting the viewer with a simple visual analogy for the inner workings of his guilt-ridden but defiant mind. However, as filmed, the relations are by no means as clear. Both voice and camera are experienced by the viewer as external, but not necessarily linked (in the original BBC production, Jack MacGowran looks to the camera's left in an attempt to locate the voice; a subtle gesture, but enough to invest the camera with an unstated but insistent agenda of its own). In *Cascando*, Opener would seem to be simply an editor; but the

'Will you never have done … revolving it all?': Beckett's Poetics of Offstage

Hanna Scolnicov, in an essay titled 'Theatre Space, Theatrical Space, and the Theatrical Space Without', draws a key distinction between theatre space and theatrical space: 'the physical space in which a performance takes place is its *theatre space*. Within a given theatre space, the production will create its own theatrical space'[38]. Moreover, she identifies the theatrical space:

> The unseen theatrical space is no less real and dramatically important than the visible theatrical space. Actions of great moment like Macbeth's murder of Duncan, may take place off stage, in which I propose to call *the theatrical space without* as opposed to *the theatrical space within*. The difference between them is the difference between perceived space and conceived space.[39]

In Beckett's earlier theatre, for instance, the 'theatrical space within' refers to the road, the tree and the mound in *Waiting for Godot*, the interior and ashbins in *Endgame*, the mound in *Happy Days*, and the darkness or semi-darkness in most later plays. Scolnicov goes on to explain the significance of the theatrical space in the theatre:

> In the novel all space is conceived, because its apprehension is always mediated

character displays momentary flashes of a subject never fully incarnated elsewhere in the text, and Opener's spatial and temporal relationship to both words and music is never made clear. In fact, one might say that Opener's editing function in the text creates an ambiguous spatiotemporal relation to that text; detached for much of the performance and then disturbingly engaged at the end, when it seems as though *Words and Music* may finally finish the tale of Woburn. Similarly, the late plays employ the idea of the editor, still working on the text, and the idea of a voice whose relation to the image is unfixed.

[38] Hanna Scolnicov, 'Theatre space, theatrical space and the theatrical space without', in J. Redmond ed., *The Theatrical Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.11.

[39] *Ibid.*, p.14.

by words, so that there can be no real perception of space. But, in the theatre, the theatrical space within is perceived directly and sensuously, and the theatrical space outside can be conceived as extrapolations of the concrete visible space on stage.[40]

The theatrical spaces within and without demand an imaginative response on the part of the spectator. This is significant as we look at subjectivity in Beckett late theatre pieces, which are usually short and austere, with the actions located essentially in the minds of characters who are often listening to the voices of consciousness reeling out, like Krapp's tapes, 'ends and odds' of disjointed memories and stories: the fragmented awareness of being in time, but not in harmony with it. The conflict, as almost always in Beckett's works, is between a disintegrating body/body part and the questioning mind, the former caught inexplicably in the presence of the theatrical space within, whereas the latter, while it escapes the stage presence, gets trapped in time – both slowly moving towards death.

So much of the drama in Beckett's late theatre takes place in a world offstage. It should be admitted that, while references to the offstage are normal, they are usually made in order to elucidate the onstage reactions of the characters primarily involved in dramatic action: Phèdre hearing with horror of the arrival of her husband, or Hamlet obsessed with the death of his father. Political and horticultural realities of a wider social world outside are given in detail in *The Cherry Orchard* because of their effect on the plot and characters onstage. But such counterfactual background in Beckett's plays is increasingly of quite a different order and has a different purpose. In the earlier plays, there are still more conventional interactions between time and space in the *theatrical space within*, the 'dialogue' between time and space on stage is still capable of making things 'happen', and the dramatic possible worlds still extend beyond the mimetic space in a sparse but fairly conventional way. Gogo, for instance, refers to a place where 'they' beat him up; Clov describes the 'corpsed' world outside and the boy; the wall between the interior and the outside world

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[40] *Ibid*., p.14.

represents a spatial line separating Hamm and Clove's future from the present; Winnie's life is controlled by the mystical space where the bell-ring comes from. From then on, however, the theatrical space on stage is gradually reduced to inactivity and darkness: the relationship between onstage signs and icons, references to possible worlds beyond, and spectator, consequently becomes more complex. There is no plot, only dynamic representation of a mental state, which becomes filled, peopled, rounded, and actualised in subtle and suggestive ways by the spectator.

In the 1974 play *That Time*, for example, the only visual material on stage is the image of the head of the Listener, situated just off centre stage, separated spatially both from the absent body and from the text which is in turn fragmented into three disembodied and recorded voices, issuing from loudspeakers to the left, centre and right of the stage. The image of the Listener therefore focuses on the function of perceiving, although utterance and perception are interdependent in almost all of Beckett's dramatic works. The only movement of the head, until the end, is the opening and closing of eyes, which highlights the activity of perception. Yet what the head 'sees' is the spoken text – the process of seeing is transformed into that of listening, and vice versa.

Unlike many of the earlier plays in which there are relatively dynamic stage image to dominate the content of the text, in *That Time* for the most part, there is little but the spoken text to maintain our attention. A space which is usually associated with the visual is therefore dominated by the verbal. Yet precisely because of the lack of visual scenic material, the faculty of seeing, both that of Listener and that of the audience, shifts from the outer 'eye of the flesh' to the inner eye of the imagination. The audience's imagination becomes the scene where the Listener's memories are staged. The two categories of perception, external or physical, and internal or imaginative, are thereby juxtaposed, creating both contrast and ambiguity.

As Anna McMullan suggests, '[t]he separation of the head from the three voices external to it emphasizes the ambiguity of the stage space'[41]. The visual image of the

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[41] Anna McMullan, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993, p.49.

head seems to suggest an external view of an old man on his death bed: 'Old white face, long flaring white hair as if seen from above outspread' [CDW 388]. Yet the haunting quality of the spotlit image, the pale skin and the long white hair, as well as the position of the disembodied head, situated unnaturally three metres above stage level and seen as if from above, has a disorienting effect on the spectator, preventing him or her from perceiving the stage space as a naturalistic death-bed scene. As the Listener closes his eyes to listen to the voices, he seems to be retreating into an inner world. While the voices appear to occupy a space that is external to the head, this space can also be seen as an externalisation of the inner space of the Listener's mind or memory. The impression of internality, even of intimacy, is reinforced through the sound of the breathing which is heard before the voices begin. This tends to transform the space into an internal cavern which threatens to engulf auditorium and stage, conflicting with the external perspective offered by the head. Indeed, much of the haunting quality of Beckett's dramatic texts comes from the power of evocation of *l'ailleurs*, despite the powerful visual images he always creates on stage, and despite the importance given to physicality in his stage directions and in his own productions.

The absence of body in *That Time*, apart from the head, and any other scenic information means that images or memories of body and world are produced solely through the text. While the stage image stresses the 'here and now' of the speaker's voices relayed to him across the stage space, the text recreates other spaces and other times, opening up a vast perspective of history: 'perhaps way back in childhood or the womb worst of all or that old Chinaman long before Christ born with long white hair'. Such a multiplicity of identities recalls Nietzsche's parade of historical masks. Yet this immense perspective is telescoped into the stage present, as the image of an old man with long white hair referred to in the text parallels the stage image of the Listener. Since the old Chinese man has just been born while the Listener is on his death-bed, the juxtaposition not only superimposes past and present, but death and birth, in a pattern that is repeated throughout the play, where the interplay between

identity and difference simultaneously posits and demolishes the spatial (here or there, internal or external, bounded or unbounded) and temporal (now or then, past or present, finite or infinite) categorisation of experience.

Gérard Genette distinguishes three modes of *récit*[42], or narrative, which relate to the categories of space and time, internal and external. The first two are *narration* and *description*, both of which tend to refer to experiences of the protagonist in the external world. Narration, however, tends to deal with the succession of events in time, while description is more static, fixing the objects described in space:

> Narration restores, in the temporal succession of its discourse, the equally temporal succession of events, whereas discourse must modulate, in discursive succession, the representation of objects that are simultaneously juxtaposed in space.[43]

Gérard's third category of *récit*, is termed *discourse*. The other two modes both have a certain visual reference, even the narration. The third, however, deals with the internal activity or functioning of the production of discourse. Whereas the first two describe external events or scenes, the third is concerned with the subject in its relation to language: '"subjective discourse" is that in which, explicitly or not, the presence of (or reference to) I is marked, but this is not defined in any other way except as the person who is speaking this discourse.'[44] Genette's first two categories seem to correspond in *That Time* to passages of movements and description in the *récit* of the protagonist's past, and the third to the regular breaks in the narration, particularly the repeated phrase 'when was that' which returns the focus to the moment of utterance or enunciation, as in the following passage:

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[42] I am using the French term of Gérard Genette to avoid confusion caused by its English equivalents, for '*Récit*' is often translated as discourse, plot, narrative, subject, or narration.

[43] Gérard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse*, trans, Alan Sheridan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1982, p.136.

[44] *Ibid*. p.138.

A: straight off the ferry and up with the nightbag to the high street neither right nor left not a curse for the old scenes the old name straight up the rise from the wharf to the high street and there not a wire to be seen only the old rails all rust when was that [CDW 388-389]

The text also shifts from image or narrative to the reporting of speech reduction:

A: or talking to yourself who else out loud imaginary conversation there was childhood for you ten or eleven on a stone among the giant nettles making it up now one voice now another till you were hoarse and they all sounded the same [CDW 390]

That Time continually shifts from the narrative to the descriptive mode – from an emphasis on movement and the passing of time to moments of description usually associated with an object or objects, when time seems to have been temporarily halted. Yet if these modes can be identified in Beckett's texts, their differentiation also serves to highlight their interpretation. The stillness of description is interrupted by the impossibility of arresting motion, either that of the body or that of time, while the experience of time is frequently presented in terms of spatial difference. Beckett therefore exploits two modes, yet also confuses them, so that if time is spatialised, space is also infused with time.

Indeed, as Martin Heidegger observes in *Being and Time*, the terminology available in Western languages for expressing time is remarkably impoverished. Since we lack adequate temporal language, we always express time in some spatial image or other, for example in the movement of the hands of a clock. Beginning with visual and performing arts, the organisation of space and time is critical and always constrained by particular limitations of form, mostly spatial, but sometimes temporal as well.

To this time-space (con)fusion, Mikhail Bakhtin has given a name, *chronotope*, or 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature'[45]. Upon this definition, chronotope means the

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[45] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist.

expression of the *relationship* between *time* and space. Regarding time and space as the basic structure of literary works, Bakhtin stresses the inseparability of space and time – time as the fourth dimension of space.[46] Besides inseparability, the relationship between time and space is complementary, i.e. they serve as twin axes of fictional worlds: 'In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterises the artistic chronotope.'[47]

Time, according to Bakhtin, is originally invisible. Once cooperative with spatial concepts, however, it becomes visible. The trace of time is reflected in space, and becomes significant to it: 'Space becomes more concrete and saturated with a time that is more substantial: space is filled with real, living meaning, and forms a crucial relationship with the hero and his fate'[48]. Therefore, the chronotope, or the intersection of time and space, makes the abstract explicit and visible:

> … the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materialising time in space, emerges as a centre for concretising representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel's abstract elements – philosophical and social generalisations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art do its work. Such is the representational significance of the chronotope.[49]

Here Bakhtin notes how the chronotope can function as the 'primary means of materialising time in space' and can become 'a centre for concretising representation'. In the literary chronotope, time and space can sometimes turn through ninety degrees,

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Texas: University of Texas Press, 1982, p.84.

[46] *Ibid*., p.84.

[47] *Ibid*., p.84.

[48] *Ibid*., p.120.

[49] *Ibid*., p.250.

as it were, and act as indicators on the other axis. Here, the indicators of time and space tend to fuse, allowing different spaces to be represented by different times, and different times to be represented by different spaces.

Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope is crucial for visualising and conceptualising spatio-temporal relations in literature of antiquity. He emphasizes the dominance of exteriority in this literature:

> The square in earlier (ancient) times itself constituted a state (and more – it constituted the entire state apparatus, with all its official organs), it was the highest court, the whole of science, the whole of art, the entire people participated in it …. And in this concrete and as it were all-encompassing chronotope, the laying bare and examination of a citizen's whole life was accomplished, and received its public and civic stamp of approval …. Here the individual is open on all sides, he is all surface, there is in him nothing that exists 'for his sake alone', nothing that could not be subject to public or state control and evaluation. Everything here, down to the last detail, is entirely public.[50]

Yet, Bakhtin also anticipates the fragmentation of chronotopes in modern literature, linking this development with the increasing emphasis on interiority, on the invisible and the unnamable:

> In following epochs, man's image was distorted by his increasing participation in the mute and invisible spheres of existence. He was literally drenched in muteness and invisibility. And with them entered loneliness. The personal and detached human being – 'the man who exists for himself' – lost the unity and wholeness that had been a product of his public origin. Once having lost the popular chronotope of the public square, his self-consciouness could not find an equally real, unified and whole chronotope; it therefore broke down and lost its integrity …. The human image became multi-layered, multi-faceted. A core and a shell, an inner and an outer, separated within it.

The text of *That Time* seems to contrast two different types of chronotope: first, the external images and narratives of the life-history of the protagonist, and second, the non-visual internal space animated by discourse. If Beckett's reduction of the

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[50] *Ibid.*, p.84.

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theatrical space within to darkness, its evocation of an outer metal conceptual space, as well as the narrative voice in a 'three-fold source' [CDW 387] emphasise the fragmented and divided (or, after Bakhtin, the 'multi-layered' and 'multi-faceted') nature of the 'self', then this fragmentation gains a special dynamics through the interplay of differing spaces and times both within the text, and between the text and stage, boundaries may shift, but, being two-dimensional, they cannot metamorphose into each other.

Take Voice A's narrative for instance. It relates the middle-aged protagonist's journey back to the city of his birth in search of the ruin where he used to hide as a child. Thus the interminable spatial trajectories of the body are linked with the protagonist's life-journal through time, in the attempt to make contact with an earlier space, time, and identity.[51] 'that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child when was that' [CDW 388]. But this is a failed journey, as all means to reach Foley's Folly, the goal of the protagonist's visit, are frustrated: 'not a wire to be seen only the old rails all rust' [CDW 389]. The halting of the journey is underlined by the shift from the narration of movement to description, particularly in section II, where the protagonist attempts to reach his destination by rail. The station proves not to be a stage on the way, but a terminus to his journey: 'no getting out to it that way so what next no question of asking not another word to the living as long as you lived so foot it up in the end to the station bowed half double get out to it that way all closed down and boarded up Doric terminus of the Great Southern and Eastern all closed down and the colonnade crumbling away so what next' [CDW 391]. Yet these supposedly static descriptions of the tram rails or of the railway station, or indeed of the childhood refuge, are descriptions of ruins, and are therefore impregnated with time and motion, evoking the same passage of time and processes of decay to which the protagonist and his

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[51] Here we are reminded of Bakhtin's association of the temporal and spatial 'peregrinations' of the protagonist of Apuleian fiction: 'The most characteristic thing about this novel is the way it fuses the course of an individual's life (at its major turning points) with his actual spatial course or road – that is with his wandering.' [*Ibid*., p.120]

'loved ones' (narrative of Voice's B) are also subject. Here, static spatial terms are temporalised into a fluid progression.

Not I begins with a movement from incoherence to coherence; the text instructs the actress to ad-lib from the text until the image – Mouth, gabbling away upstage to the audience's right, suspended in the darkness, auditor dimly lit downstage to the audience's left – is revealed [CDW 376]. The text proper begins at a conventional moment (the birth of the character); we seem to be at the beginning of a comprehensible, if extreme, narrative. But then, almost as soon as this story is begun, it seems on the point of ending:

> Mouth: … out … into this world … this world … tiny little thing … before its time … in a godfor- … *what?* … girl … yes … tiny little girl … into this … out into this … before her time … godforsaken hole called … called … no matter … parents unknown … unheard of … he having vanished … thin air … no sooner buttoned up his breeches … she similarly … eight months later … almost to the tick … so no love … spared that … no love such as normally vented on the … speechless infant … in the home … no … nor indeed for that matter any of any kind … no love of any kind … at any subsequent stage … so typical affair … nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when – … *what?*... seventy?.. good God!.. coming up to seventy … wandering in a field … looking aimlessly for cowslips … to make a ball … a few steps then stop … stare into space … then on … a few more … stop and stare again … so on … drifting around … when suddenly … gradually … all went out … all that early April morning light … and she found herself in the – … *what?. .who? .. no!.. she!..* [CDW 376–77, *my emphasis*]

The play's *récit*, as we can see, is largely in the narrative mode that is dominated by action and movement. Unlike *That* Time, in which the protagonist's attempt to make contact with an earlier space, time, and identity is interrupted by the descriptive mode which slows down the narrative time. In *Not I*, however, within the first minute, we have moved from birth to a state close to death: we have no sooner learned that the girl's parents have both vanished, than we are with her at the age of (perhaps) seventy, at the moment when the world in which she has lived in the intervening time fades to nothing. A conventional departure leads to a conventional ending (birth moves to death), but the movement is abrupt, disorienting, unsignalled. Also, the

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narrative is frequently mediated by an unheard voice that edits the narrative (marked by the Mouth self-interrogations in italics), the mediation directs the narrative back to the enunciating present as is the case with the phrase, 'when was that', in *That Time* when the focus is shifted back to the moment of utterance.

For the duration of the play, the audience listening to Mouth's narrative is as dislocated in time as she is; we move back and forward through the life she describes without any sense of the fragments of experience ever cohering, or, indeed, any sense that they are ever likely to cohere. When, as the voice begins to fade, it declares, 'no matter … keep on … […] hit on it in the end …' [CDW 383, *stage directions omitted*], we as an audience are still unsure what 'it' is, or, indeed, whether we or Mouth will recognize it when we hear of it. The dislocation, though, goes deeper than this. It is not simply that the timeline of the play is uncertain: the character of the woman whose story we hear seems to be alarmingly contingent, as though Mouth, at the promptings of an unseen voice, is deciding on the facts as she speaks. Note, in the speech quoted above, that the sex of the child is not immediately established; Mouth needs the prompting of the unheard voice before she decides that the child is female.

It would seem, given the play's title and the emphatic nature of Mouth's repeated denials, that the question of the relation of the character described to the speaking voice should be easily decided; the character described is Mouth, and Mouth's refusal to accept this identity is evidence of her extreme mental dislocation. However, the sheer contingency of the narrative constantly undercuts the easy identification that we might otherwise be inclined to make between Mouth and her narrative. It seems as though we are listening not simply to one voice recasting its experience but to *the interaction of three characters in one narrative* – the narrating voice, the unheard voice that edits the narrative, and the absent subject, never entirely incarnated either in the narrative or in the narrator. This is established not only in the text but in the ambiguous spatial relations that the play in performance establishes. The auditor gazes at Mouth: its intentness is signaled only in the hopeless gestures that accompany Mouth's denial of identity. However, the text in performance

suggests the unseen presence of a third character, to whom Mouth defers. One might imagine this as an internal voice questioning and prompting her; however, it can also be imagined as external, an interrogator unseen and unheard by the audience, but ever present to Mouth. A linear narrative, establishing a character unambiguously in time and space, is fragmented not only in the matter but in the manner of its telling; the very idea that this narrative describes and incarnates a subject (even though the subject might deny subjectivity) has been fatally undermined.

Another play, *A Piece of Monologue*, is mapped out in different types of chronotope. Unlike *That Time* and *Not I* which tell of life-stories in the past, *A Piece of Monologue* focuses on the present and future times, rather than with the past, as Linda Ben-Zvi has aptly pointed out: 'the focus is less on a replaying of the past than on the experience of the present and the future'[52]. Certainly, within the text of *That Time*, the present is not directly mentioned at all, while the narrative in *A Piece of Monologue* frequently refers specifically to 'Now. This night.' Yet, as in *That Time*, the whole relationship between the temporal categories and past and present, and indeed between narrative and stage present, becomes problematic. In *A Piece of Monologue*, the present, whether that of the stage or of the narrative, is presented as merely one frame in a series of identical frames stretching both backwards and forwards in time, between the poles of birth and death: 'Birth was the death of him. Ghastly grinning ever since. Up at the lid to come. In cradle and crib. At suck fiasco. With the first totters. From mammy to nanny and back. All the way. Bandied back and forth. So ghastly grinning on. From funeral to funeral. To now. This night.' 'This night' becomes almost immediately 'Every nightfall'. The 'now' of the narrative present, and indeed of the stage present, becomes engulfed in a series of identical past reflections, like a temporal equivalent of the receding image within an image. Yet the temporal distance between the moment of birth and the (however temporary) present is also emphasized, the reference to funerals underlining the losses imposed

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[52] Linda Ben-Zvi, 'The Schismatic Self in *A Piece of Monologue*', in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 7 (Spring 1982): 12.

by Time. The process of existence is seen not only as a continual repetition of the same, but as a series of repetitions with ever-diminishing material, a gradual process of reduction or fading: 'Dying on. No more no less. No. Less. Less to die. Ever less'.

However, despite the evocation of vast stretches of time, the text also emphasizes the relationship or parallels between birth and death and between coming and going, where the one seems to metamorphose into the other. As in Nietzsche's theory of the eternal return, such perpetual repetition questions the very notion of beginning and close, as origin and end are continually reproduced within the cycle. This ambiguous relationship between beginning and end also characterizes the relationship between the two main scenes to which the text returns.

While the first lines of *A Piece of Monologue* are mainly concerned with the evocation of repeated cycles of movement, the first visual image presented by the text is the scene of birth, the origin of the protagonist's life in time. Yet the process of birth is not itself described, but rather the room in which it implicitly occurs. Indeed, the activity of birth seems to have been displaced onto the description of the budding of the young leaves beyond the room in which presumably the protagonist has been born: 'Born dead of night. Sun long sunk behind the larches. New needles turning green. In the room dark gaining. Till faint light from standard lamp. Wick turned low'. Death and birth, however, are also juxtaposed within the image, as Linda Ben-Zvi has noted: 'the death of the day is contrasted with the birth of the year'[53].

Footfalls begins, if not in the real world, then in a world in some respects more concrete than that of *Not I* and *That Time*. A woman, fully (if dimly) visible, conducts a conversation with a voice situated offstage; the relationship between the characters (daughter speaking to mother) is established quickly and clearly:

M: Mother. [Pause. No louder.] Mother.
    [*Pause*.]
V: Yes, May.
M: Were you asleep?
V: Deep asleep. [*Pause*.] I heard you in my deep sleep. [*Pause*.] There is no

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[53] *Ibid.*, p.13.

sleep so deep that I would not hear you there. [*Pause. M resumes pacing. Four lengths. After first length, synchronous with steps*.] One two three four five six seven eight nine wheel one two three four five six seven eight nine wheel. [CDW 399]

Not I and *That Time* begin in indeterminacy; we as an audience have to wait for the narratives to cohere – and we are never given the unambiguous promise that this coherence will come about. Here, we have characters fully accepting not only their subjectivity but also their relation to each other; more than this, the text exactly describes the image before us – as Beckett's own stage directions indicate, the words synchronise with the action.

However, as the play develops, once again this identification becomes more and more uncertain. The very formality of the initial exchanges casts their status into doubt: this seems more ritual than conversation – and this sense is heightened by the near-exact repetition of the exchanges, recast into the past and into the third person, in both May's and V's monologues. By the time these exchanges recur, our sense of the reality of the opening dialogue has been further eroded, not only by the switch from dialogue to monologue but also by the spatiotemporal displacement of the story. From V, we hear of the prehistory and evolution of the image. The story she tells is a familiar Beckettian one: the child, marked as different from her earliest days, slowly degenerating into the ragged figure who paces before us. But the tale is clouded by the overt intrusion of the vocal tone that so characterises *Not I*. As we hear the tale, we are always aware that it is being edited for us, and perhaps that the version that we are hearing is not authentic but is being adapted moment by moment:

V: I walk here now. [*Pause*.] Rather I come and stand [*Pause*.] At nightfall. [*Pause*.] She fancies she is alone. [*Pause*.] See how still she stands, how stark, with her face to the wall. [*Pause*.] […] Where is she, it may be asked. [*Pause*.]) Why, in the old home, the same where she – [*Pause*.] The same where she began. [*Pause*.] Where it began. [*Pause*.] It all began. [*Pause*.] But this, this, when did this begin? [*Pause*.] When other girls of her age were out at … lacrosse she was already here. [CDW 401]

The narrative begins with a momentarily confusing statement ('I walk here now'); although the impression is only fleeting, for an instant it seems as though the image of the absent mother has been transposed onto the visible image of the daughter. From here to the narrative's end, the insistent presence of an editorialising voice is felt as strongly in *Footfalls* as in *Not I*; indeed, in this play, its impact is not limited to the audible rejoinders to an inaudible prompting. V's voice incorporates both narrative and editorial ('But this, this, when did this begin?').

With May's monologue we return to the characteristic rendering of experience found in the first two plays under discussion. May speaks, apparently, of herself; but she recasts her experience into the past and narrates and edits it as though the experience were not hers. The story she has to tell, though, is far more halting and unsure than V's; indeed, at one point it seems to be on the verge of total collapse:

> M: […] The semblance. Faint, though by no means invisible, in a certain light. [*Pause*.] Given the right light. [Pause.] Grey, rather than white, a pale shade of grey. [*Pause*.] Tattered. [*Pause*.] A tangle of tatters. [*Pause*.] Watch it pass – [*Pause*.] – watch her pass before the candelabrum, how its flames, their light … like moon through passing rack. [*Pause*.] Soon then after she was gone, as though never there, began to walk, up and down, up and down, that poor arm. [CDW 402]

M finds it nearly impossible to arrive at an adequate description of the image she embodies; the voices – narrating and editing – compete for mastery of the unfolding story until the final, haunting image ('like moon through passing rack') is eventually reached. M can achieve this description, however, only by adopting the invocations previously used by V ('Watch her pass…' echoes V's 'But let us watch her move…' [CDW 401]). An adequate description, it seems, can be achieved only by abandoning all pretense to a single, unfragmented experience; M can speak of herself only by speaking of herself as other. The following sentence – 'Soon then after she was gone' – mirrors the compressed prose found in Beckett's later texts ('Still', 'For to End Yet Again', and so on). It comes close to indecipherability both in word choice and in phrasing – the individual clauses seem to have only the most tenuous link to each

other ('as though never there, began to walk').

The only way to continue is to retreat. M recasts her narrative not simply into the past, as V has done, but into a new/old story within the drama. The mother/daughter relationship established so strongly at the play's beginning is now recapitulated in the story of Mrs. Winter and her daughter Amy, a couple trapped in the same relation as M and V. However, these characters are introduced to the audience as though they had already been encountered ('Old Mrs Winter, whom the reader will remember' [CDW 402]), and the narrative that contains them also contains echoes of the narrative reported by both M and V (the child always disassociated from her surroundings, the church in which she speaks and walks, and the repeated question 'Will you never have done … revolving it all?' [CDW 400, 403]). In effect, *Footfalls* tells the same story three times; but with each retelling the story is distanced further and further from its original source, and its status as the unambiguous relation of direct experience is rendered increasingly problematic. The effect of this displacement is similar to that encountered in other Beckett texts, most notably the troubling prose work *How It Is*: the apparent suffering of one character is multiplied as mirror images of that suffering are described. As this happens, the original story is lost. At the end of *How It Is*, the narrator dismisses the story he has told us; at the end of *Footfalls*, M disappears, her story unresolved, its motivating factor – the thing 'revolving … In [her] poor mind' [CDW 400, 403] – still unexplained. Retrospectively, she has cast doubt over the apparent 'reality' of the opening exchange; before she disappears, she does not recreate but re-enacts a version of the opening exchange, using three registers – Mrs. Winter's, Amy's, and, in a low, hoarse whisper, that of a stage manager, telling the audience the speaker's name. She has shifted herself away not only from a new incarnation as Amy but also, perhaps, from her first incarnation as May. The opening exchange, reviewed in the light of the play's ending, now seems very far removed from immediate presence (it is worth remembering that her name in the printed play is not May but M; May may be nothing more than the momentary tag assigned to an unclassifiable entity).

Catastrophe seems something of an anomaly in Beckett's theatre. Its visual style

is less obviously late Beckettian – indeed, a bare summary would indicate that the play itself is a pointed joke at Beckett's expense: a tyrannical director treats a silent actor as an object, moulding him into the correct, if rather humiliating, final image. The dialogue consists mainly of curt instructions intended to facilitate the creation of the perfect 'catastrophe':

> A: [*Finally.*] Like the look of him?
> D: So so. [*Pause.*] Why the plinth?
> A: To let the stalls see the feet.
>   [*Pause.*]
> D: Why the hat?
> A: To help hide the face.
>   [*Pause.*]
> D: Why the gown?
> A: To have him all black. [CDW 457]

However, a closer examination reveals the distinctive pattern of Beckett's late work; but this time the pattern is worked out in reverse, as it were. The three plays discussed above use a coherent spatial organisation (at least in terms of the development of the image) against a temporal framework that becomes increasingly uncertain as the narrative supposedly incarnated in the text is displaced further and further from the present time of the image. In *Catastrophe*, we watch a text, a narrative, unfold sequentially, in a perfectly conventional fashion; the image, though, that had been so fixed in the other plays, is this time the contingent factor in the production. It cannot be trusted; it must be refined, worked on, edited:

> D: [*Finally.*] Something wrong. [*Distraught.*] What is it?
> A: [*Timidly.*] What if we were … were to … join them?
> D: No harm trying. [*A advances, joins the hands, steps back.*] Higher. [*A advances, raises waist-high the joined hands, steps back.*] A touch more. [*A advances, raises breast-high the joined hands.*] Stop! [*A steps back.*] Better. It's coming … [CDW 459]

Note that it is not a matter of simply refining the image: both D and A are unsure of the final version of the stationary character whose body they are manipulating. If the

body of the actor is the play's text (as it seems to be: D and A's obsessive worrying away at the image would seem to suggest that, in *Catastrophe*, the actor's body is the equivalent of *Footfalls*'s 'it all', *That Time*'s memories, or the unnamed 'it' that Mouth in *Not I* hopes that she will finally express), then it is an unfinalized text. As in the other plays, there is no predetermined narrative for the characters to unearth, no straight path for them to take. However, the play's end overturns their efforts; and it does so by disrupting the spatial organisation and the chronotope that the play, to this point, has carefully established. The figure, this time, it seems, confronted with an audience, raises his head (against instructions) and gazes back at them; this simple gesture is enough to still the applause that has greeted the director's final version of the image. However, there is some confusion over the precise provenance of this move. It seems, initially, to take place in the director's imagination:

> D […] Now … let 'em have it. [*Fade-out of general light. Pause. Fade-out of light on body. Light on head alone. Long pause.*] Terrific! He'll have them on their feet. I can hear it from here. [Pause. Distant storm of applause. (…)] [CDW 461]

But the figure's unexpected movement seems to happen not in the director's imagined chronotope but in the chronotope of performance. The moment is unsettling, both because it is an assertive act from an otherwise passive object and because it cannot be wholly understood as the assertion of subjectivity in a decisive act of defiance. We do not know why the figure has reacted like this; we do not know when the reaction happens; we do not know where the reaction takes place. The fragmented subject, shaped by the influence (visible this time) of an editor/director, has declared itself without, as would have happened in the earlier work, establishing its subjectivity through action.

<center>*</center>

Beckett's plays are studies in absence; from the moment when Victor Krapp turns his back on the audience, through Godot's non-arrival, through the unprovided

conclusions of *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*, the unacknowledged past in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the missing rings in *Come and Go*, the plays have always relied for their theatrical effectiveness on the audience's awareness of gaping holes in the dramatic chronotope as explored in performance.

In the late plays, however, the nature of that absence changes. To return to the categories briefly outlined in the opening section, it could be said that, in the plays from *Godot* (1953–1955) to *Breath* (1969), dramatic chronotope equals performance chronotope. All that we can be sure of in the lives of these characters, and in the lives of these plays, is what we see in front of us in performance. Similarly, the characters do not find their selfhood in a coherent past or in a planned-out future: they exist only as they act. In the later plays, even that certainty has gone. The chronotope of performance is still closely structured; even the monologue in *Not I* betrays a pattern, a rondo constructed around Mouth's denial of selfhood. The dramatic chronotope – the constructed, coherent, organized sequence of thoughts, actions, and events that provides the basic structure of the self in conventional drama – is still being created for us, however, even as we view the play. We watch events, and listen to words, whose precise spatial and temporal arrangement cannot be finally determined; because of this, we encounter characters whose subjectivity can never be fully incarnated, since their place in the actions and the words of the play can never be grasped, even from moment to moment. As Beckett told Billie Whitelaw, M in *Footfalls* is 'not all there'. The comment applies to all the characters in the later works, characters whose subjectivity is disturbingly evanescent, performed as it is in fragments of action that have no clear temporal or spatial connection with each other. These late plays are still studies in absence; now, though, they are studies of the partially absent self through the interplay between an (half-)empty stage and 'vast tracts of time' evoked offstage, between the perceptual and conceptual when other times and places are contrasted with the visceral power of the stage present.[54]

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[54] Beckett is, of course, not alone in such explorations, though he may well be one of the most radical experimentalists in this respect. As Leo Essif argues in *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage*, the greatest contribution of twentieth-century dramatists to the historical evolution of theatre art has been 'the development of a new poetics of space for the text, one

In other words, much of Beckett's late theatre challenges the individual borders of identity and shift between the space-time perspective of the actor and that of the spectator. His plays seem to imply a recognition of the identity as a series of masks, as the representation of 'self' becomes the reproduction of interchangeable images of existence. Through the juxtaposition of scenic and textual forms, spaces, and, by extension, times embedded within, there is a constant evolution in the perception of what is being represented, as the categories of time and space, past and present, external and internal, absence and presence, identity and difference, are undermined. Behind the apparent immobility of the stage space, there is always a dynamic lying in the shifting perspectives in Beckett's theatre, particularly within the perception of stage and text. As Stanton B. Garner argues:

> It is Beckett's genius in his later plays to explore the activity lodged within stillness and to sound the depths of visual latency. The result … is to etch the contours of performance even more within the spectator and to replace a theatre of activity with a theatre of perception, guided by the eye and its effort to see.[55]

Significance of the Stage Present

In Beckett, as we can see from the above, the stage reality within the mimetic space is often a pretext for evocation of another reality – another place, another time, another self – a seeming negation of the importance (or solidity) of the events within the mimetic space.

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based on emptiness' in order to 'rid themselves of the straightjackets of naturalism and bourgeois psychology.' One of the major challenges for them, Essif goes on to argue, is the 'portrayal of inner life on the stage. […] One cannot deny that this century has been s shift toward a new interest in the mind as space. Thanks to Freud and the surrealists at the beginning of the century, we have begun to think of our mental space as an independent spatial field.' [Leo Essif, *Empty Figure on an Empty Stage: The Theatre of Samuel Beckett and His Generation*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001, pp.19-20.]

[55] Stanton B. Garner, 'Visual Field in Beckett's Late Plays', in *Comparative Drama*, Vol. XXI, No. 4, Winter 1987-88, p. 371.

Such duality, this ex-centricity or off-centredness, as Colin Duckworth suggests, is 'the source of the strange relationship that develops between a Beckett performance and aware spectators'[56]. In a review of Carla Locatelli's *Unwording the World*, the poet Lachlan Mackinnon quotes Andrew Bush's statement that Beckett 'creates a new interior space – indeed recreates the *res cogitans* as a *res extensa*'. Mackinnon, echoing Beckett's marginal note in his copy of *That Time* 'Less is more', goes on to comment: 'The paradox of late Beckett is that the narrower the area surveyed, the more ground there is to be covered.'[57] Shimon Levy, in *Samuel Beckett's Self-Referential Drama*, focuses the idea along lines that interest me for present purposes, saying that 'in presenting the stage full of emptiness, Beckett activates the audience's imagination and involvement, and extends an invitation to make this stage space their own.'[58] A realistic *décor* may appeal to the eye, but cannot compete with the suggestiveness of an empty one.

Levy's topoanalysis of the major plays is attractive, but involves a simplification of degrees along the stage/offstage/inner space axes. How, for example, can one speak of 'emptiness' of Beckett's stage without failing to recognise the strongly visceral power of the visual image he creates there?

The precarious links between the verbal and the visual in the later plays have been subtly analysed by Enoch Brater in his *Beyond Minimalism* – indeed, it is very difficult to go beyond Brater, only to have a dialogue with him. I wonder, for example, if it is true to say that '[t]he experience for the audience in the theatre is like the experience of reading a poem, except that in this instance the poem has been staged.'[59] What poem I wondered, when I first read this, what poem, read by an actor

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[56] Colin Duckworth, 'Beckett's Theatre: Beyond the Stage Space', in *Beckett and Beyond*, ed. Bruce Stewart. Monaco: The Princess Grace Irish Library, 1999, p.95.

[57] Lachlan Mackinnon, 'Gripping Simplicities', in *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 December 1993 – 3 January 1991, p.1407.

[58] Shimon Levy, *Samuel Beckett's Self-Referential Drama: The Three I's*. London: Macmillan, 1990, p.17-18.

[59] Enoch Brater, *Beyond Minimalism: Beckett's Late Style in Theatre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.17.

on stage, can establish the same intense and haunting relationship between performer and spectator/auditor as, say, *Ohio Impromptu*? Of course, if one calls 'a very short metaphysical poem'[60], as Stephen Barker has suggested it might be, then one extends the genre to include almost any text. I doubted Enoch Brater's postulation of the staged poem experience until I first saw *Not I* performed, on videotape. I was alone in my room, the screen at one side, I sitting at the other. Without the reassurance of other bodies breathing and coughing as in a theatre, I was perhaps more intensely conscious of the intentional isolation of visual metaphor on the screen and of my own peculiarly transformative response to that isolation, but I trusted that response as real. After the voice had ceased, I sat alone in the dark, my mind racing, aware perhaps for the first time that 'I' was not 'me', that the only 'self' I could claim was the communicative energy I had just experienced as activity -- outside my body and moving away from any identity that I had previously thought mine. I still trust that response. Now, every time I see *Not I* performed, either on video or on the stage, I collide with the feeling of being in the presence of the unspeakably sublime that I felt seeing the play for the first time.

When played on stage, *Not I* requires a nearly naked and unnaturally dark stage set that bleeds into the undisguised dark of the auditorium. The solitary actress is cloaked, boxed, and elevated above the black painted stage with only her mouth opening and closing, cleanly and clearly, against the dark, teeth visible and disturbingly white, lit by a single spotlight. Located downstage from the Mouth, a tall figure, the Listener, cloaked from head to toe in black, hands and face covered with fabric, stands also elevated above the stage platform. This wordless figure is turned obliquely from the audience so that s/he may look directly on the moving Mouth. Both figures are fixed with an uncomfortable permanence to the stage and the space between them vibrates with an electric absence.

Even before the first word was spoken that afternoon in my half-empty room, I

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[60] Barker, Stephen, 'Recovering the Néant: Language and the Unconscious in Beckett,' in *The World of Samuel Beckett*, ed Joseph H. Smith. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1996, p.269.

was overwhelmed by an awareness of loneliness so acute that it felt as if attached to my skin with invisible barbs. I was both separated yet incomprehensibly linked to the two fixed figures on the stage (or on the screen, to be exact) -- the cloaked standing shadow man and the moving Mouth. I felt the weight of the space between performers and the darkness settle as marked distance on my spine. My bones itched, and by the end of the performance, my mind was melting as if thawed by unexpected winter warmth. I was as speechless as the solitary Mouth had been overrun with rapid overflow of words. In less than one-half hour, I had collided with a complete life compressed into an explosive energy that, when released, flooded the surrounding dark and entered my every pore. Somehow, that released life belonged with me but not to me.

Today, I can think about *Not I* as separated from that volley of silence and word I felt that afternoon. I came to see how Beckett carefully ordered his play to transform text -- a series of signs -- to unfailing agency. I understood how he used the unwritten symbols of *Dark* and *Mouth* both metaphorically and metonymically to evoke an awareness of the intense isolation necessary for the emergence of a 'self' that knows the impossibility of its own existence at the very moment that existence is recognized. Stripped of excess and filed to spareness, *Not I* unveils the painful yet exquisite core of human experience: the knowledge that the very characteristic that grants human beings their unique position on the planet -- the singular ability to identify the 'self' as separate, thinking, and individual -- is, after all is said and done, an artificial construction. To abandon possession of the 'self' as a marker of being human is to lose a sense of grounding, but if at the same time that the 'self' as possessed 'self' disintegrates, we also discover ourselves as connected to others, we then find new moorings more various and numerous that are, ultimately, more stable and useful.

Watching *Not I*, we are disconnected from the conventional and the familiar and as a consequence, we become hyper-sensitive to our need for connections; our minds substitute the desired for that which has been preternaturally removed. Using the power inherent both in the confrontation of opposites (silence against sound, light against dark) and in the representation of isolation (mouth separated from body,

viewer separated by dark from conventional response), Beckett focuses our awareness of multiple connections. We hunger for human interaction because the lack of activity on stage denies us such interaction. We are conscious of presence because of absence, sense light because we are in the dark, and feel our bodies because the Mouth on stage has lost its frame.

Accepting these transformative substitutions based on the experience of seeing the play is easy, but analysing how the transformation occurs is another story. I believe that Beckett crosses and 'folds' visual metaphor into verbal metonym in a manner that Roman Jakobson recognizes with his theories concerning both binary opposition and metaphoric/metonymic competition as essential to effective poetic communication. Roman Jakobson suggests that we have a tendency to analyze imagery and meaning using either metaphor or metonym, deciding whether 'the symbols and the temporal sequences used are based on contiguity ... or on similarity'[61] and further suggests that the poetic function of language is foregrounded when metaphoric dimensions are projected on -- and somehow entangled with -- metonymic functions. I would agree, and I would also suggest that the most effective art, such as Beckett's *Not I*, depends on such dynamic intersection of metaphor with metonymy for an effective delivery of transformative message. This 'folding' of metaphor and metonym dissolves the expected and juxtaposes the unexpected, and we respond emotionally and intellectually to both metaphoric and metonymic substitutions without privileging either, thus entering into a fresh philosophical dialogue unimpeded by conventional expectation either of cause and effect or of plot design.

Both metaphor and metonymy construct meaning through an imaginative reconstruction of the familiar world, and both require a trust of psycho-social and historical signifiers within the language, but as a conceptual process that uses likeness or analogy between actual object and its signifier, metaphor is perhaps more

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[61] Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*. The Hague: Janua Linguarum, 1956, p.95.

visually oriented than metonymy. Because of its associative quality, defining (often through cause and effect) logical relationships between objects, metonymy includes time -- and the vagaries of time -- as an essential element in the construction of new meaning[62]. If we consider metaphor and metonymy thus, we understand how the Mouth both as a metaphor for sexual orifices and as a synecdoche for the human body can serve as an icon for the producer and the consumer of words while simultaneously acting as a metonymy for the ongoing processes of entry and exit, birth and death. Such an intersection of metaphor with metonym alters the initial metaphor and causes conceptual and even metaphysical transformation.

Beckett's dark theatre and black stage, for example, alarm us at first because such darkness metaphorically signifies death and dissolution. We are culturally aware of that particular metaphor, and instinctually, we feel threatened when we are abruptly confronted by such unyielding dark, but as the play progresses, the intrusion both of narrative voice and of the notion of time passing remind us of the metonymic significance of Dark both as night and as a necessary complement to light. By overlaying the paradigmatic functions of Dark as Death with the metonymic function of Dark as Passage, the Mouth's non-stop narration overrides the static and symbolic structuring of the stage set, permitting us to revise the visual metaphors for death and for isolation that confront us as the play begins. As the disconnected and slightly threatening Mouth discusses the ineffectiveness of light, the viewer turns to the Dark for comfort. The Mouth tells us that the moon comes and goes, 'always shrouded' and that April morning is experienced with the Mouth's disconnected 'face in the grass'. Initial spoken 'sudden flashes' are followed by the repetition of the word 'foolish', and the slant rhyme of 'flash' and 'foolish' erases, or at least confuses, any impulse to understand 'sudden flash' as enlightening, so when later 'sudden flashes' are followed by expressions of negativity – 'even more awful', 'it can't go on', 'not that either' -- we accept this rejection of light in favour of the dark. Describing the

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[62] Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974, p.20.

Dark through the inadequacy of light highlights the metonymic functioning of Dark in *Not I* as positive and progressive, thus eroding the powerful and emotionally affective metaphor of Dark as Death.

When the Mouth tells us that words come like a sudden unexpected thaw in winter months during 'days of darkness', we understand intellectually that speech, and consequently poetry, is born not of gathered light but of gathered dark, and because that understanding comes at the very moment that we are physically experiencing the dark for the first time as embracing, rather than threatening, Mouth and Dark, essential to the visual setting of *Not I*, lose their ability to terrify. Another transformation of visual metaphor then occurs as the Mouth, initially encountered as an isolated metaphor for sex (the vagina with teeth or the 'mouth' of the anus), is transformed through the narration from menace to a symbol having a metonymic relationship with speech and thus with history. Grappling with its staged isolation as metaphoric threat, highlighted in darkness, the Mouth speaks to have its histories heard -- by the dark, by the watchers in the dark beyond the fourth wall, and by the dark-dressed listener, standing yards away elevated on a platform just high enough to preclude any movement towards or away from the Mouth.

When those histories are heard, the visual metaphor recedes in importance as the verbal reasserts its power. Speech itself acquires its own metaphoric existence that projects neatly on its own metonymic agency. Signifying the gate between life and death, the portal of sexual and verbal intercourse, when limits are erased, when silence gains volumes, when dark moves to light, the Mouth spills words in bursts as metaphoric of the 'little death' of orgasm, primary for the continuance of life, as they are metonymic of poetry, that spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, primary for the continuance of the creative life. Then, as the disconnected Mouth tells stories in floods of words collapsed into an all embracing dark, the stark misery of those stories told collides with the captured status of the voice, boxed and removed from human gesture. As a result of that confrontation, viewers inevitably experience a compassion birthed by an awareness of the obvious physical imprisonment of voice and of the psychological imprisonment of the incomplete narrated histories of isolation and

abandonment. With the emergence of that compassion, the terrifying metaphor of mouth as toothed vagina is banished and an open embrace of the metonymic relationship of the Mouth to open passage occurs. Once again, metaphor folds into metonym, and a clear transformation occurs.

This transformation of metaphor -- Dark as Death, Mouth as Dangerous Sex -- through an intersection with metonymic function creates an open environment that permits that redefinition of the 'self' that I experienced that late afternoon when 'I' shifted to 'not I', and I realised that I only existed because of my connectivity. *Not I* opens with the mouth forming words that cannot be heard, and we first see those moving lips as iconic of the human possessed of a 'self' grounded by language. Isolated from both head and body, the Mouth serves both as a visual signifier of the 'word' -- an essential marker of the human -- symbolizing speech as clearly as it symbolizes the human who speaks the words, but then, speaking in the Dark, the mouth is stripped of its metaphoric threat by its own narration. Listening, we are acutely conscious at first of ourselves as being isolated and in the dark, but when the narration shifts both Mouth and Dark from being zones of danger to being zones of comfort, we become aware of ourselves first as listeners, individuals, and then unexpectedly, as beings connected to Dark as Passage, Mouth as History. One repeatedly performed gesture, the raising and lowering of the silent Listener's arms, accomplishes this transformation.

'What? ... Who? ... No ... She!' the Mouth demands again and again, first acknowledging herself and then isolating herself in the third person as the generic 'she'. That deliberate isolation nearly always draws a response from the on-stage Listener who raises and drops masked hands in a gesture of 'helpless compassion', suggesting the inevitability of setting aside the 'I' in favour of the 'she', of moving from 'self' to 'unself' in order to discover the 'self', of knowing that the 'self' exists neither as narrated nor remembered, and of knowing the utter surrender required to accomplish any of that. The single repeated gesture of the Listener interrupts the current of words, ceaselessly delivered by the Mouth, and that interruption reintroduces the palpable loneliness of the wordless opening of the play.

Re-experiencing that loneliness as the mouth narrates a tale of moving from silence to speech focuses the audience on the 'self' as separated exactly at the moment when an awareness emerges of the existence of 'self' as dependent on communication, on being heard at a time when the 'self' must move closer to the 'unself' and recognise itself as wholly dependent for its existence on knowing not the 'self', but the space that exists between the 'self' and others -- the active space of creative communication.

In conversation with Morton Feldman, an American composer, Beckett once said that that there was only 'one theme in his life'. When pressed by Feldman to reveal that theme, Beckett wrote this on a musical score Feldman handed him: 'To and fro in shadow, from outer shadow to inner shadow. To and fro, between unattainable self and unattainable non-self'. After scribbling those words, Beckett promised to write Feldman if he thought of anything he might add. Several weeks later, Feldman received a postcard with the following revision penciled on the back:

to and fro in shadow
from inner to outer shadow
from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself
by way of neither [CSP 258]

The unattainable becomes the impenetrable, and the non-self becomes the unself while self and unself remain separated yet linked by their mutual essential 'not'-ness -- not attainable, not penetrable, not in full light, not free of shadow, not stable. Always in motion, as trajectory, as agency, this struggling 'self' of 'Neither' resembles the self/unself of *Not I*. The Mouth of *Not I* moves rapidly from being mutely unconscious of self to an acute speaking awareness of Self. 'What?... Who? ... No ... She!'

The possession of existence, the claiming of the 'I', is of no consequence whatsoever. What creates the Self may not be our ability to speak, to remember, to create stories, but rather the fact that to really speak -- to really be ourselves -- we must be understood by at least one other human being. When the Mouth speaks, it

addresses no one except the watcher -- inside the Dark and away from light, the real flesh and blood person, who can reply only with a gesture of helpless compassion.

Memory and Time

The only access to history or memory that Beckett's characters have is through language. For the characters of Beckett's late plays, language appears to give access both to variety of form, spaces and light of the external world, absent from the darkness of the stage present, and to the accumulated knowledge or memories of the past, whether their own past or that of a civilisation. Yet this past can be seen simply as a function or a construct of the language system, preserved in the pages of dusty tomes in public libraries or deployed in the present moment of utterance. History and memory are presented both as means of restoring the past and as the collected debris of the present, emphasized by one of the images in voice B of a dead rat floating down the river. And A's trip to Ireland has been a failure: not only has he been unable to visit the ruin where he hid as a child, he has been denied the possibility of gaining a firmer grip on his identity by revisiting an important childhood scene. His sense of who he is and was slips away from him, and he finds himself 'making it all up on the doorstep as you went along making yourself all up again for the millionth time'.

In *Proust*, Beckett quotes the author of *A la recherche du temps perdu* who insists that true possession of the other (or of the self) is dependent on possession of the entire history, the merging of discrete spatial and temporal moments of a life into a homogeneous whole:

> We imagine that the object of our desire is a being that can be laid down before us, enclosed within a body. Alas! It is the extension of that being to all the points of space and time that it has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess contact with such a place and with such an hour we do not possess that being. [PTD 58]

Yet, as the author of *Proust* emphasizes, such an ideal is impossible to achieve since 'all that is realized in Time (all Time produces), whether in Art or Life, can only be possessed successively, by a series of partial annexations – and never integrally and at once' [PTD 17-8]. Hence the narration of the protagonist's past is splintered into the three separate voices, each dealing with a different period in the Listener's life. According to Walter Asmus' report, Beckett specified that B is the young man, A the middle-aged man and C the old man. Moreover, each period is not narrated continuously, but is broken into fragments, intercut by the fragments of the other two periods[63]. Memory, inscribed in language, therefore produces a myriad of times, spaces and identities, transforming the space of the stage into a space animated and ruptured by temporal differences, while such temporal differences are presented on stage as spatial discontinuity. The reassuring 'wholeness' or fixity of the stage space as stable visual ground is disrupted.

The attempt to possess or perceive also ironically creates another level of difference – between the subject and the representations of his own existence in language, questioning the illusion of unity and identity suggested by the pronoun 'I': 'did you ever say I to yourself in your life come on now'. This alienation or divorce is indicated within the text – where the subject is referred to as 'you', creating a difference between the enunciating or narrating subject and the subject or persona of the narrative – and on stage through the separation of voice(s) from the listener. The stage image therefore concretizes in spatial terms the divisions between listener-perceiver, voice and textual persona(s), while the spatial and temporal fragmentation of the text emphasizes the lack of continuity between the fragments which constitute the representation of the old man's life-history. The interplay between head and voices and between various fragments of the text thus prevents the audience from locating any stable, unified center of subjectivity in the play.

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[63] Walter Asmus, 'Practical aspects of theatre, radio, and television: Rehearsal notes for the German premiere of Beckett's "That time" and "Footfalls" at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt, Berlin', in S.E. Gontarski (ed.), *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*. New York: Grove Press, 1986, p.340.

All times and spaces are engulfed or contained in the indeterminate space-time of the mind, reversing the categories of internal and external. The ambiguity of the space is emphasized through the juxtaposition of installments where the space described is sometimes the space of the mind and sometimes the interior of a room, frequently used by Beckett as a space which is simultaneously external and internal. The 'background' space is therefore foregrounded and the focus shifts from the narratives to the spatial frame into which they are inserted.

This space is not static, but is animated by the process of perceiving and the desire for these images to relieve the darkness. The tension 'outward', the imaginative recreation of the external world, is contrasted with the return to darkness. This image also links text and stage spaces, as the audience also has been concentrating on the content of the images until the two intervals in the text, where there is silence for three seconds and then breathing for seven seconds before the voices resume, confronting the spectators with a silent, almost empty stage, apart of course, from the Listener. The description within the text therefore acts as a 'mise en abyme' for the performance as a whole, where the darkness of the stage is relieved by the image of the head and the scenes related by the voice, as the darkness of the protagonist's consciousness is relieved by the remembered scenes.

Since the scenes appear as contained within the space-time of stage or skull, they appear not as recreations of a previous reality, but as concretizations of the void, shapes and sounds constructed from silence and darkness by the function of the imagination/memory: 'hard to believe harder and harder to believe you ever told anyone you loved them or anyone you still just one of those things you kept making up to keep the void out just another of those old tales to keep the void from pouring in on top of you the shroud'.

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Nothing of the pompous monolithic architecture of our ego can resist the torrent of Beckett's prose when it first surges most ruthlessly out of zero in a flux of scatological images:

> The smell of corpses, distinctly perceptible under those of grass and humus mingled, I do not find unpleasant, a trifle on the sweet side perhaps, a trifle heady, but how infinitely preferable to what the living emit, their feet, teeth, armpits, arses, sticky foreskins and frustrated ovules. ['First Love', CSP 26]

> I'll let down my trousers and shit stories on them: stories, photographs, records, sites, lights, gods and fellow-creatures, the daily round and common task. Observing all the while, Be born, dear friends, be born. Enter my arse. You'll just love my colic pains. It won't take long, I've the bloody flux. [*The Unnamable*, T 383-4]

The vindictive glee of such passages bespeaks a significance well beyond the scatological mockery of Modernist aesthetics, the high valuation of writing, that it might at first seem to be.

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All this has arguably begun with the mother.

Critics have long been interested in Beckett's textual unease with motherhood. From Peggy Guggenheim's memoirs and from John Gruen's interview, we are aware that at least twice in his life, as early as 1937 and as late as 1961, Beckett personally admitted his fearful memories of being swallowed up inside his mother's womb.[64] In this light, Deirdre Bair's record of the turbulently ambivalent relationship between Beckett and his mother becomes all the more meaningful[65] for explaining Beckett's compulsion to speak.

If the mother represents, in Freudian terms, the primal object of the subject's desires[66], then the non-separation of the 'archaic dyad' between the infant and the

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[64] In *Confessions of an Art Addict*, Peggy Guggenheim writes, recalling Beckett's ambivalence about his love for her: 'Ever since his birth he had retained a terrible memory of life in his mother's womb. He was constantly suffering from this and had awful crises, when he felt he was suffocating.' [*Confessions of an Art Addict*. New York: Universe Books, 1979, p.175.] On another occasion, Beckett confirms these 'memories' with John Gruen: 'I have a clear memory of my own fetal existence. It was an existence where no voice, no possible movement could free me from the agony and darkness I was subjected to.' [John Gruen, 'Samuel Beckett Talks about Beckett', in *Vogue*, 127 (February 1970) no.2, P.108.]

[65] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. New York: Vintage, 1991.

[66] We recall, first of all, that in psychoanalytic theory of Lacanian inspiration, the acquisition of language during the mirror phase marks the intervention of the Symbolic (Name-of-the-Father) into the child's universe, and his/her separation from the idyllic state of harmony which, psychically, *is* the mother. A resultant experience of loss is constitutive of language and desire. The loss, we have noted, is illustrated by Freud's 'Fort-Da' anecdote. In effect, the acquisition of language allows the subject to symbolise his/her pre-Symbolic existence – a time when the 'I' (subject) was united with the 'mother' (object). The extent to which the prior state *is* symbolisable is a measure of *actual* separation. To experience this loss, to be subjects of this loss and thus subjects of language, is to be quintessentially human. In my unarticulated fantasy, then, I desire the idyllic state which existed before my separation from my object. Before separation, too, all my desires were satisfied; in fact, desire as such did not exist, and I wished for nothing. Now, every as-yet-unsatisfied desire awakens the original sense of loss; satisfaction of them, the original harmony. Let it be underlined: I *desire* this state. For Lacan, moreover, one is fundamentally a subject as subject of desire. Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, suggests that the Lacanian position needs to be nuanced: its strokes are just a little too bold. Indeed, are there not things (let us not call them objects) outside of me which do not give me the least satisfaction, and which I find repulsive.

mother, as in Beckett's case, represents such a threat to the subject, who 'risk[s] the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being'[67], that the object of desire must be violently jettisoned in an attempt to maintain the clarity of psyche and bodily boundaries. This results when the lure of merging with the mother is so strong that it threatens individuation. 'I imagine a child,' Julia Kristeva graphically explains, 'who has swallowed up his parents too soon, who frightens himself on that account, "all by himself", and to save himself rejects and throws up everything that is given to him – all gifts, all objects.'[68]

It was to these expelled objects that Kristeva gave the name 'abjects'. We experience abjection, she writes, 'only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be "me"'[69], only if there has been, as it were, an unlawful takeover of the ego. In this case, the stakes are so high that only the most violent of battles will enable the ego to survive 'separately'. For the body 'must be what the French call *propre*' – both clean and one's own. It must bear no trace of its debt to nature'[70] if it is not to be 'defiled'. Horror arises when the borders between subject and object collapse, when the edges break down and the body's contents flow out, threatening repulsive engulfment. Kristeva writes:

Whence, then, comes this repulsion, or, in its strongest form, horror? If the objects in the world are a fundamental displacement of my desire for my mother, what is the status of these things? In broad outline Kristeva's answer is that before the full intervention of the Symbolic begins, a prior state is necessary, one which will be the repressed desire and the Symbolic. Before the beginning of the Symbolic, there must have already been moves, by way of the drives, towards expelling/rejecting the mother. The point is that the symbolic is not, of its own accord, strong enough to ensure separation; it depends on the mother becoming abjected. *'The abject would thus be the "object" of primal repression.'* [Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, 12. Original emphasis.]

[67] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.64.

[68] *Ibid.*, p.5-6.

[69] *Ibid.* p.10.

[70] *Ibid.*, p.102.

It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents. Urine, blood, sperm, excrement then show up in order to reassure a subject that is lacking its 'own and clean self'. The abjection of those flows from within suddenly become the sole 'object' of sexual desire -- a true 'ab-ject' where man, frightened, crosses over the horrors of maternal bowels and, in an immersion that enables him to avoid coming face to face with an other, spares himself the risk of castration. But at the same time that immersion gives him the full power of possessing, if not being, the bad object that inhabits the maternal body. Abjection then takes the place of the other, to the extent of affording him jouissance…[71]

So the abject is above all the ambiguous, the in-between, what defies boundaries, a composite resistant to unity. Hence, if the subject's identity derives from the unity of its objects, the abject is the threat of unassimilable non-unity: that is, ambiguity. Abjection, therefore, is fundamentally 'what disturbs identity, system, order'[72]. Thus, the corpse which is both human and non-human, waste and filth which are neither entirely inside or outside of the socio-subjective order, are examples of the abject.

'I'll let down my trousers and shit stories on them': Writing Abjection

Simply to list the titles of Beckett's works is to place his writing within a context of abjection: *The Expelled*, *Six Residua*, *The Unnamable*, *Disjecta*, and above all, *Not I*. His writing is riddled with images of expulsion (-pulsion and –jection are his favourite suffixes), of things, mainly body parts of contents, that have to be got rid of. What clearly dictates this is an abject need to expel the primary object which threatens engulfment, to keep shouting 'Not I', as so many of his characters do.

If abjection is the movement by which the body and psyche dispute and affirm identity, it equally has important implications for reading a text, for reading can no longer be regarded as the depot of an assimilable meaning, but becomes the rather

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[71] *Ibid.*, p.53-54.

[72] *Ibid.*, p.4.

phantasmatic site of a series of negotiations and transmissions. The abject calls into question not only psychic but *textual* propriety, authority and appropriation: as is indicated by the baroque opening of Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, it is into literary *style* that subjectivity may retreat, and yet the possibility of selfhood prior to the subject's entry into language is ruthlessly questioned:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated ... Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself.[73]

This is essentially a writing practice that is impregnated with its objects: an engagement with the recovery of a paradoxical plenitude from bodily sickness and disintegration demands a stylistic practice which deals not in the monolithic but in the aformal, multiple, and discontinuous. At this point, we shall recall Roland Barthes' *jouissance*, the free-falling potential for liberation which style contains, is defined by gravity, by the prospect of falling and annihilation, and by abjection's wrestling of value or identity from the very edge of dissolution, extinction.

In light of this, the range of grammatical and psychoanalytic meanings that can be attributed to the phrase 'not I' makes it an ambivalent nodal point of Beckett's works. Let us begin by tracing its polysemantic progress in the third novel of the trilogy, *The Unnamable*. Here, clearly, saying 'not I' involves at one level an investigation of narrative practices, in particular what it means for the narrator to say 'I'. As I have illustrated in Chapter 1, Beckett was not alone in the 1950s in his challenge to conventional concepts of narrative voice and identity. As the novel moved out of the Modernist period, which had culminated in the work of Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, and James Joyce, among others, concepts of stable identity began to erode into a scepticism about the possibility of representing identity.

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[73] *Ibid.*, p.1.

Beckett has sometimes been referred to as a writer of anti-novels, for the reason that his novels seem to be preoccupied with *un*telling stories rather than telling them, with revealing the arbitrariness and absurdity of the conventions of truth telling, reliability, coherence, and meaning on which the novel as a genre has traditionally depended.

So when the Unnamable says 'I say I, knowing it's not I' [T 408], we are clearly being asked to participate in a tragic-comic uncertainty about semantic boundaries. If narrators adopt a first-person mode, what is their relation to their characters? Where the nineteenth-century novelist generally replied 'omniscient and proprietorial', Beckett clearly replies that the relationship is one of ignorance and impotence. I, the Unnamable, has unlike Malone given up all attempt at creating 'characters'. His problem is that this 'I' may also 'be' one of several names or characters lurking in the wings – Basil, Mahood, or Worm in particular. Let us trace the progress of this doubt throughout the novel:

> But now? Is it I now? I on me? Sometimes I think it is. And then I realise it is not. [T 312]

> But it's time I gave this solitary a name: nothing doing without proper names. I therefore baptise him Worm. It was high time. Worm. I don't like it, but I haven't much choice. It will be my name too, when the time comes, when I needn't be called Mahood any more, if that happy time ever comes. [...] But let me complete my views, before I shit on them. For if I am Mahood, I am Worm too, plop. Or if I am not yet Worm, I shall be when I cease to be Mahood, plop. On now to serious matters. [T 340]

> But enough of this cursed first person, it is really too red a herring. I'll get out of my depth if I'm not careful. But what then is the subject? Mahood? No, not yet. Worm? Even less. Bah, any old protagonist will do, provided ones sees through it. [T 345]

> I don't know where I end. [...] The stories of Mahood are ended. He has realized they could not be about me. [...] Worm. [...] To think I saw in him, if not me, a step towards me! To get me to be he, the anti-Mahood... [T 348-349]

> In the meantime no sense in bickering about pronouns and other parts of blather. The subject doesn't matter, there is none. [T 363]

This 'blather' about pronouns, touching sardonically on but never really engaging with fundamental ontological questions, begin about half way through *The Unnamable* to turn into the more postmodern question of the role of language in signification. From a linguistic convention, a signifier which misses its mark, the 'I' becomes that which is held in thrall by others – 'they', who dictates the terms of its use and rob it of its individual ownership. 'Is there a single word of mine in all I say?' [T 350], the Unnamable wonders, anticipating by nearly two decades the arguments that were to be put forth in the late sixties by Roland Barthes for 'death of the author'. What Barthes would come to call the 'tissue of quotation'[74] which makes up the storehouse of a writer's repertoire Beckett calls 'the voices and thoughts of the devils who beset me' [T 350]. These voices, mimicking conventions of pronoun consistency, have the Unnamable say that 'since I couldn't be Mahood, as I might have been, I must be worm, as I cannot be.' [T 350]

However, traces of nostalgia for authenticity remain:

I imagine I hear myself saying, myself at last, to myself at last, that it can't be they, speaking thus, that it can only be I, speaking thus. Ah if I could only find a voice of my own, in all this babble! [T 351]

Trouble arises when he is silent, for silence reveals the yawning chasm – 'these gulfs' [T 351] – of unsignifiability beneath the babble. Neither he nor 'they' dare be silent for long, as 'the whole fabrication might collapse' [T 351]. And yet as soon as he starts talking, guilt about his complicity with 'their' manipulation returns:

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 ventriloquist. [T 351]

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[74] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. S. Heath. London: Fontana, 1977, p.146.

What distinguishes Beckett's view of ventriloquism from Barthes' is both this guilt and a psychic anxiety about the 'gulfs' beneath words. Immediately after exposing language as a set of arbitrary signifiers, all surface, he 'falls' into a terrifying but desirable phantasy of a pre-Oedipal space beyond or beneath language, where it is safe and protected, where Worm might 'be':

> all their balls about being and existing. Yes, now that I've forgotten who Worm is, where he is, what he's like, I'll begin to be. Anything rather than these college quips. *Quick, a place. With no way in, no way out – a safe place. Not like Eden. And Worm inside. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, capable of nothing, wanting nothing*. Until the instant he hears the sound that will never stop. Then it's the end, Worm no longer is. We know it, but we don't say it: we say it's the awakening, the beginning of Worm. For now we must speak, and speak of Worm. It's no longer he, but let us proceed as if it were still he [T 351 *my emphasis*]

The italicised in the middle, embedded within the enclosing narrative, represents an anxious, guilty snatch at a 'not-Eden' (the denial is again telling). The moment of safe enclosure in a womb-like space with 'no way in, no way out', beyond verbal or physical incursion, remains an evanescent and precarious utopia at the centre of Beckett's nightmare, in-between landscapes – before language takes up again to continue on its stupefying yet reassuring way.

Saying 'not I' in Beckett's work is always underpinned by this dark abject lining. It is as if the failure of the signifier (this 'I' that language uses to refer to me alienates me) collapses something more psychologically disturbing, a disruption of the clarity of 'I' *versus* 'not-I' which every infant has to learn to negotiate. Instead of facing up to accepting a relationship of separation from the object, whereby the not-I becomes an autonomous 'she', the Beckett character harks back constantly to the trauma of that break and refuses to give due recognition to the 'she'.

Kristeva:

'If one wishes to proceed further still along the approaches to abjection, one

would find neither narrative nor theme but a recasting of syntax and vocabulary – the violence of poetry and silence.'[75]

It is indeed through aporetic 'recasting[s] of syntax', the 'violence of poetry and silence', that Beckett's works can ever be said to 'end'. Each end is always a 'going on'; to conclude is to mark where one text/body ends and another begins, to draw a clean line of demarcation. For the abject phantasy, the impossibility of marking boundaries takes the form of a perpetually frustrated attempt to do so. From the *Trilogy* on, Beckett never moved far beyond the problem of where one person or narrative begins and another starts. If the *Trilogy* is essentially a narrative quest for the right (pro)noun, the conclusion is, as the Unnamable puts it at the end, that 'there is no name for me, no pronoun for me' [T 408]. All is overtaken by continuity or flows (or sometimes dribbles), whether these be the flowings on of language, endless verbiage, or the vast array of fluids that gush, ooze or leak out of the decrepit bodies. According to the logic of separation, as Kristeva puts it, 'it is flow that is impure. Any secretion or discharge, anything that leaks out of the feminine or masculine body defiles.' [*Powers of Horror*, 102] The messy 'going on' from one text, body or pronoun to the next is the only *jouissance*.

After *The Unnamable*, published in the early 1950s, Beckett's fiction did the inevitable but seemingly impossible and 'went on', in spite of ever-decreasing momentum. By the end of the decade he was saying that he had given up all thought of writing for theatre and radio for the time being and was 'struggling to struggle on from where the Unnamable left me off, that is with the next next to nothing' [Knowlson 461], that is, with the text that would become *How It Is*. This text plunges us as it does still further into an abject space, beyond the minimal props of the shambles, asylums, and marine drifts of the *Trilogy*, into an exclusively digestive terrain where the narrator's progress, in struggle and involuntary spasm, is through the human gut. Eaten but unable to be spewed, 'no going back up there' [HII 8], he wallows like a worm in an intestinal morass of 'mud' which is both the source of

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[75] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.141.

nourishment and its end product.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Julia Kristeva clarified the mystical element in our ambivalence toward the fascinating and yet repulsive images of the violated and ugly bodies through her theories of the 'abjection'. An artist at boundary positions, according to Kristeva, goes through abjection, 'whose intimate side is suffering and horror its public feature'[76]. The abject is the filthy and bad parts that the body/culture/history wants to cleanse away. It is not because of its lack of cleanliness that causes abjection, but 'what disturbs identity, system, order; what does not respect borders, positions, and rules; the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'[77]. We could not tolerate the ambiguous within us, the violence, the terror, the madness, in the same way that the culture executes its purgation. Sliced-open corpses, torn-out eyes, and severed limbs, are the extreme abject conditions that we fear to face. Through art, or through language, we see the artist's 'sublimation of abjection' in the scenes of violence, madness and *jouissance*, through the process of working-out and working-through[78]. Going through or experiencing the process of the sublimation of abjection, we come to realise what had been suppressed or excluded within us.

It can be contended that, underpinning Beckett's own life, there was a strong sense of abjection – of his country, his (conscious) memories, his 'mother' tongue – so too his texts jettison as much as possible to clear away for an eerie spatial and temporal borderland, between inside and out, beginning and end, life and death. One can understand his liking for the word 'limbo', which he suggested as a subtitle for his story 'The end'. Limbus, in Latin, means a border or edge, and by extension the edge of nowhere, oblivion. 'The End' is about (a memory of) 'a story [told] in the likeness of my life', a story 'without the courage to end' [CSP 99]. For ending means

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[76] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.140.

[77] *Ibid*., p.4.

[78] *Ibid*., p.26.

separating, which is the one thing Beckett's texts never stop representing their inability do.

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Now, from the taut interplay of the 'abject' in selfhood and the narrative in which it may be seen to participate, arises the larger formal concern of the relationship of the literary work itself to conceptions of the organic whole. Beckett's work displays an anxiety at constitution and separation around its *own* boundaries which may be seen to resonate with abjection. If I have been concerned, so far, with the periodic fusion and divergence of the abject with the signifiable, it is perhaps appropriate that I now turn to an area in which the agency of the writer would be expected to be at its most marginal, and his or her concerns at their least visible. The tendency of writers and critics to refer to texts collectively as 'corpus' or 'body of work' may be no more than a metaphorical extension of the human, a fallacial visualisation of written production against the template of the body. It would nevertheless be difficult to pursue a study of the textual framing of the abject body without reversing the equation and examining the role texts play in promoting propriety and wholeness (or otherwise) through their collectivity and organization.

As abjection is itself the sign of the unsignifiable, the degree to which it may be apprehended in narrative is highly problematic. If images of food abomination, coprophilia, coprophagia as well as necrophilia that are normally related to the body abject are more liberally strewn all through the earlier and middle works up to *How It Is*, the later texts as a whole undergoes a yet larger-scale formal translation of abjection into Beckett's *corpus* of works.

Beckett takes a rather problematic standpoint towards wholeness, apparently associating literary production with a weary disgust like that shown sex and reproduction in his works, and only admitting collections to the corpus under the sign of bodily expulsion. The *Precipitates* which accompany 'Echo's Bones', the six *Residua*, *Tête Mortes*, and the *Foirades* all evoke cast-off bodily material, as does the later collection edited by Ruby Cohn, *Disjecta*. 'Precipitates' designate solids left

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over after a chemical process, 'residua' indicate what remains of a pre-existing whole, a 'foirade' (rendered as 'fizzle' in English) is a sort of feeble farting noise, and a 'tête morte' a dried skull. The overwhelming impression is that Beckett's anthologies are deeply marked by the spectre of the abject body. *Disjecta*, however, is the most striking: the term is etymologically very close to *abjection* (we might even coin *abjecta* as a collective description of the fallen bodily matter which is never far from Beckett's protagonists). Cohn's foreword to the collection cannot help but dramatize the relish of the unpublished in the uncomfortably bodily terms:

> I believe that the miscellany harbours an esthetic, but Beckett's criticism nevertheless resists a Procrustean coherence. Beckett himself observes (on Feuillerat's 'ordering' of Proust): '[…] a beautiful unity of tone and treatment would have, as it were, embalmed the whole'. To avoid embalming the whole, we should savour Beckett's morsels in all their variety. [*Disjecta*, 7]

The remark posits material seen as extraneous to the literary corpus precisely as bodily waste which becomes the object of a ghoulish delectation; and as Cohn says, '*Disjecta* is Beckett's own title for this miscellany of criticism and a dramatic fragment', deliberately figuring the attachment to the main body of work of 'improper' texts in terms of bodily expulsion.

How is this strange correspondence between form and thematics to be understood? While it might be suggested that, by the time of the publication of *Disjecta*, Beckett was well-placed to make the judgment that the body's incessant dynamics of breakdown and expulsion were central to his literary production and decided to punningly anthologize his miscellaneous texts accordingly. There is plenty of evidence that something rather more subtle is implied in the relationship of the narrative presence of an abject body to the corpus at large. If it is underwritten with morbid gourmandise, *Disjecta* also carries a promise of plenitude, offering, precisely by supplying these miscellaneous texts, to make Beckett's literary corpus complete. The move implied both the restoration of 'proper' material which has been mistakenly removed and, more sinisterly, the prospect of the closure of the body of

work which was to be announced by Beckett's own death. If abjection describes the body's spasmodic wrestling with itself from the threat of death, literary corpus, conversely, is finally constituted as properly complete only by the biological death of its human agent (who could imagine a proper 'Compete Works' of a living author, though Harold Pinter's *Complete Works* was already out in 1990[79] while he lives to receive the Nobel Prize in literature in 2005? Precisely by the fact of continuing to function as a living being, the author disables the claims of the corpus to wholeness.) Beckett's own conceptions of the unity (or otherwise) of his written production, however, disrupt the end-determined scheme.

Beckett made a number of remarks which distinguish relatively clearly between a primary and secondary body of work. He claimed 'I wrote all my work very fast – between 1946 and 1950', that *The Unnamable* represented a terminus in the creative process ('there's complete disintegration. No 'I', no 'have', no 'being'. No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There is no way to go on'), and that the *Texts for Nothing* constituted 'an attempt to get out of the attitude of disintegration, but it failed'[80]. I do not propose these comments as tenable value judgments, but as indicative of a certain standpoint taken by Beckett towards the form of his literary corpus. If all the works except the *Trilogy*, on the basis of these remarks, may be said to be radically fragmentary and abortive, a view emerges of a body of work which so thoroughly problematises the status of certain works as to utterly deny them admission to it. This is body which constitutes itself by a radical inner disavowal, by disowning part of its matter.

As readers of a breadth of material which indisputably extends beyond the *Trilogy*, we may be tempted simply to dismiss the remarks in which all the other works are sidelined. The comments may have a *formal* significance beyond the message they purport to convey, however: like Beckett's comment on the two thieves,

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[79] Harold Pinter, *Complete Works* vols.1-4. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.

[80] Beckett, quoted in Israel Shenker, 'An Interview with Beckett', *New York Times*, 5 May, 1956, section II, reprinted in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, p.148.

flimsy contents are sometimes the vehicle for larger formal concerns. A comment which Beckett made on the *Residua* in response to the 'questionnaire' sent to him by Brian Finney replicates the form of the remarks on the Trilogy in a different context:

> 'They are residual (i) severally, even when that does not appear of which each is all that remains and (ii) in relation to whole body of previous work.'[81]

If the categorisation of the *Residua* as 'minor' works left over in the wake of the constitution of the main corpus recalls Beckett's earlier pronouncement on the status of his writing after the Trilogy, it also comes close to contradicting it. The marginalisation of the *Residua* is plausible *except* for the fact that all works other than the Trilogy have already been dismissed as secondary. The reader is caught between envisaging a progressive 'residualisation' of Beckett's works, each newcomer designated as a fragment expelled from the unit formed by its predecessors and excluded from body of work which they constitute, or concluding that the remarks are mutually contradictory. In the latter case, the only possible conclusion is that the comments fulfill some rhetorical or phatic function other than the apparent one, and that Beckett is talking about something other than the works in question. It is possible that Beckett's taut formulation is really angling at the form or dynamic by which the exclusion to which he refers takes place, that is, *expulsion itself*, which, properly *abject* (abjection's fundamental movement), can only be signified by proxy. Indeed, this view is promoted by the first part of the comment: Beckett explicitly stated that the composition of the *Residua* is predicated on the non-appearance of an entity of which it was previously part, so that literary expression itself is caught up in a primal act of separation whose site cannot be recalled, and of which the text is a fragmentary remainder. Leslie Hill, in *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words*, identifies the central paradox of the derivation of wholeness from fragmentedness:

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[81] Beckett, quoted in Brian Finney, *Since How It Is: A Study of Samuel Beckett's Later Fiction*. London: Covent Garden Press, 1972, p.10.

The residues are described as the sole remaining remnants of a whole which, if it exists, is not available, but absent […] But their status as residues is solely a function of that whole. If it is absent, their residual character cannot be instantiated or verified. It remains external to them.[82]

Hill's argument brings a rare insight into these formal problems. Although it never mentions abjection by name, I suggest that it is deeply preoccupied with a struggle for differentiation like that in the experience of abjection, and with the paradoxical dialectic of a bodily wholeness derived from the threat of dissolution. The central paradox is that fragmentation is precisely the sign of integration in Beckett's body of work:

If Beckett's work is a whole body, it evidently must include the later residues, since otherwise it would cease to be whole. If the residues, as the author suggests, are not part of this whole body, the whole body can no longer claim to be whole. One could argue that Beckett does make a clear distinction here between his previous and present bodies of work. Again, however, if that is true, the whole body negates itself by dividing into two, into a whole body proper, and a supplementary corpus improper, part residual testament and past revisionary codicil. To do this denies either body the attribute of wholeness. Thus if one maintain the separation Beckett makes between the residua and his earlier texts, one must reject the terms in which that separation is formulated. The only whole body in evidence here is more like a phantom or ghost than a fully present organic structure. Neither the early nor the late bodies of work are whole, and if the residues have no part in a whole body which expels or rejects them, it is not only because they are residual or fragmentary in themselves but also because, as fragments, they are an integral part of Beckett's work.[83]

Beckett sections off the later works are 'residual' in such a way as to fragment the 'whole' body from which they are excluded: if the main body is not a whole, the fragment subtracted from it cannot properly be described as a fragment, since fragmentation necessarily implies a defining plenitude. Although the problem is in

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[82] Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words, Cambridge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.143.

[83] *Ibid*., p.144.

close proximity to Derrida's philosophy of presence, in particular the economy of the dangerous supplement[84], there is a distinction to be made. Rather than the 'phantom' corporality to which Hill alludes, the bodies of the large-scale organization of Beckett's work may be seen precisely *as* bodies. Their intermittence and threat of disintegration are indicative of those disturbances and dysfunctionalities most *proper* to human physicality rather than simply arising from the logistics of raw materials. The recurrent evocation of the experience of abjection in Hill's argument ('the fragmentary, residual text crosses the limit of frontier between inside and outside, inscribing and effacing the line of separation in the process' [145]) suggests that he is only a step away from describing Beckett's as an *abject* corpus, a description which that corpus so strongly invites.

The ambivalent standpoint to wholeness which is everywhere in evidence in the narrative of Beckett's fiction thus proves to have a subtle counterpart on the macro-level of the constitution of the literary corpus. If anthologisation is one instance of this unsuspected corroboration of the thematics of wholeness, propriety and exclusion, another crucial case is the bilingual aspect of Beckett's work. Although the problem of 'translation' or 'bilingualism' in Beckett has received considerable critical attention in recent years, its emulation of the refusals of unity in Beckett's narrative themselves has rarely been remarked upon. In what follows I do not propose a comprehensive treatment of this large formal problem, but rather a reading of Beckett's bilingualism in the light of the thematics of abjection.

Across Two Languages: Abject in Self-Translation

Beckett's bilingualism poses a threat to conventional notions of what constitutes a proper body of work. It has for some time been realized that Beckett's work inscribes

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[84] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997, especially Part 2 Chapter 2, 'The Dangerous supplement'.

a deeply felt instability within traditional ideas of 'original' work and 'translation'. While we might be tempted to conceive of a relatively finished literary work which is subsequently reproduced in another language, according to the demands of another set of linguistic constraints and cultural points of reference, the nature of Beckett's literary production in English and French throws this scheme into confusion. Not only does Beckett, like Joseph Conrad or Vladimir Nabokov, adopt a foreign language as a language of composition (most consistently from the *Trilogy* onwards), but the 'mother tongue' continues to play an important role. That 'versions' of Beckett's works begin to appear in both English and French after the success of the *Trilogy* destabilizes the distinction between author and translator, since Beckett is the author of both. For this reason, criticism has spoken of Beckett's 'self-translation'. The picture is frequently complicated, however, by the nature of the differences between the two 'versions': I suggest that there are important cases in which the differences cannot be accounted for by the demands of the language in question, nor even by the need to create recognisable cultural references. In this case, how may the curious slippage between 'original' and 'translation' be explained? One text cannot be properly be said to be a 'version' of its counterpart in the other language, and must be seen to be a 'version' or product of something else, the contingency of the two texts' composition producing an unexplained agency in which they are complicated, but which they do not contain.

It is interesting to see, in this context, that Deleuze and Guattari refer specifically to Beckett in the theorisation of a 'minor' literature:

> Usage de l'anglais et du français chez Beckett. Mais l'un ne cesse de procéder par exuberance et sur-détermination, et opère toutes les réterritorialisations mondiales. L'autre procède à force de sècheresse et de sobriété, de pauvreté voulue, poussant la déterritorialisation jusqu'à ce que ne subsistent plus que des intensités.

> [The use of English and French in Beckett. But the former does not cease to operate by exhilaration and over-determination, and brings about all sorts of the worldwide reterritorialisations. The other proceeds through dryness and sobriety, of willed poverty, pushing deterritorialisation to such an extreme that nothing

remains but intensities.][85]

Irrespective of whether the generalisation on Beckett's English and French styles can be maintained, the insight into the 'déterritorialisation' effected by bilingual writing is an important one. Although the poverty or disempowerment that it involves is frequently referred to in relation to Beckett's adoption of French, it may perhaps be seen to exist not at the level of style, but rather in the loss which occurs *between* English and French. If the coexistence of English and French works is constantly accompanied by an inexplicable patch of difference, the *form* of the body of work which they inhabit may be seen, once again, to produce loss and exclusion.

At this point, a discussion of the poet's role as self-translator seems to be in order. In one of the first essays to address Samuel Beckett's activity as a self-translator, Ludovic Janvier describes his experiences of translating *Watt* into French in collaboration with Beckett (as well as the experiences of other translators with whom Beckett worked, such as Robert Pinget and Richard Seaver) in terms of a conversation or dialogue: 'Beckett nous faisait entrer avec lui dans ce *dialogue à une voix* que l'écrivain entretient avec le langage où il cherche à s'installer le temps d'un livre' [*my emphasis*].[86] Raymond Federman also employs the notion of dialogue in his discussion of Beckett's bilingual production and concludes that 'Beckett, in his bilingual work, allows us to listen to the dialogue which he entertains with himself in two languages.'[87] It is hardly surprising that both Janvier and Federman evoke dialogue as a trope for what George Craig calls Beckett's 'double venture'[88] and what I would term his literary bi-discursivity, for the metaphor of *di*alogue, which

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[85] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: pour une litrérature mineure*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1975, p.35.

[86] Ludovic Janvier, 'Au travail avec Beckett', in *Cahier de l'Herne*: *Samuel Beckett*. Paris: L'Herne, 1976, p.108.

[87] Raymond Federman, 'The Writer as Self-Translator' , in *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*, p.16.

[88] George Craig, 'The Voice of Childhood and Great Age', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 August 1982.

presupposes the presence of two entities – a speaker and a listener, or in the case of a literary text, an author and a reader – and which calls attention to the materiality of language, enables the scholar to account for the basic dualities of Beckett's endeavor: the use of both English and French as the primary language of composition and the literal and figurative rewriting of each text that occurs in the act of self-translation.

However, while at first glance these formulations of dialogue or conversation may appear to embrace the duality (or multiplicity) that both characterises and governs Beckett's work, upon closer examination they reveal the same shortcoming as most theories of self-translation: they reduce duality to unity[89]. Whereas theorists

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[89] Walter Benjamin's notion of 'pure language' has led theorists of self-translation to reduce duality to unity. In 'The Task of the Translator' (*Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p.79), Benjamin asserts that outside of the original and the translation and their corresponding languages, there exists 'pure' language, which can only be approximated, never attained. In the act of translation, according to Benjamin when two languages come into contact with one another, one may catch a glimmer of this 'pure' language.

Benjamin's theory has attracted self-translation scholars. Beaujour, for one, talks about the versions in both languages 'rejoin[ing] one another and be[ing] reconciled' (as in the 'pure' language evoked by Benjamin) [*Alien Tongues* 112]. Fitch employs the identical terminology to describe the relationship between a text and its self-translation: 'with the coming into existence of [the] second text […] the [first] text is rendered *retroactively incomplete*: it is suddenly revealed to be *unfinished*' [*Beckett and Babel*, 131, *original emphasis*]. James McGuire also evokes Benjamin's 'pure' language to explain the relationship between what he calls Beckett's 'parallel texts': 'the two texts […] become interdependent, forming one bilingual text. The implication here of a third, extralingual text is clear, and it is reminiscent of Benjamin's concept of a "pure language"' [McGuire 260].

As we can see in the above quotations of Beaujour, Fitch, and McGuire, their primary move is to recast Benjaminian 'pure' language as 'pure' text, hoping to redeem the self-translated text as an object worthy of study; for, the translation is revealed to be an integral part of the original, rather than a mere copy. By taking this step, they are actually appealing to a pre-linguistic or non-linguistic entity, a concept that is the complete opposite of what Benjamin refers to as 'pure' language. In short, theorists of self-translation rely on the presence of a transcendental referent or universal meaning – what translation theory has long called the *tertium comparationis*, 'the "something" which presumably hovers somewhere between languages in some kind of air bubble and "guarantees" (no less) that a word in the language you translate into (target language) is, indeed, equivalent to a word in the language you translate from (source language)' [Lefevere & Bassnett 3].

The conception of a 'pure' text conflicts with Benjamin's notion of 'pure' language and his theory of translation on two levels. First, far from conceiving of translation as something that takes place outside of language, Benjamin views it, on the contrary, as 'a relation from language to language, not a relation to an extralinguistic meaning that could be copied, paraphrased, or imitated' [de Man 82]. Once again, theorists of self-translation have transformed what Benjamin says into its exact opposite: not extralinguistic becomes extralinguistic. Second, this 'pure' text functions in a manner similar to that of the *tertium comparationis* which is itself predicated on the belief that equivalence can be attained in translation, that equivalence is a valid criterion in the comparison and evaluation of a

of self-translation most often seek unity by positing the existence of a pre-existing 'pure' text, here, Janvier and Federman deprive dialogue of its multiple nature by locating it *within* Beckett himself -- with the attendant assumption that the self is a unified entity. Note that Federman qualifies the dialogue as being one that Beckett 'entertains with himself' and that Janvier refers to it as 'ce dialogue à une voix'; in short, Beckett assumes the roles of both speaker (author) and listener (reader). Ann Beer posits that this desire for unification and the concomitant appeal to authorial intentionality are inevitable reactions to the dilemma Beckett's bilingualism -- and, by extension, his activity as a self-translator -- poses for scholars: '[it] does not appear in the individual text, and can therefore only be discussed in some larger, and extra-textual, framework that examines the author or the *oeuvre* as a whole'.[90]

Brian T. Fitch, on the other hand, while viewing Beckett's bilingual production in terms of 'one work, two texts', is aware of the problematic orientation towards authorial intentionality and argues that the two versions of a given work should have a complementary relationship and that it is only 'in the coming together of the two' that we may begin to have 'an adequate representation of "what the author had in mind"'[91]. Fitch reluctantly and almost apologetically defends his approach against the critique he (correctly) anticipates will be leveled against it:

The underlying justification for such a manner of proceeding is obviously

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self-translated text and its original.

This (mis)reading of 'The Task of the Translator' is particularly problematic for it is precisely Benjamin's break away from equivalence that renders his theory of translation so useful to a poetics of self-translation, as Bassnett's remarks illustrate: 'Equivalence in translation, then, should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between two TL versions of the same text, let alone between the SL and TL versions' [29]. Indeed, only when freed from the constraints of 'equivalence' could scholars examine the differences among the multiple versions of a given text as something other than moments of 'unfaithful' translation.

[90] Ann Beer, 'Beckett's Bilingualism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.217.

[91] Brian T. Fitch, *Beckett and Babel: Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988, p.101.

related to authorial intentionality: it presupposes the preexistence of the fictive universe, subsequently realized by the text, in some nonlinguistic form antedating the actual writing of the work of which the two merged universes would somehow provide a more adequate representation than either one of them alone. Such a hypothesis, in spite of the indisputable problems it would pose in the context of contemporary literary theory with the latter's rejection of any transcendental signified, is not ruled out in the first instance [...].[92]

Despite Fitch's attempt to distance himself from authorial intentionality by moving the site of unification from the author to the fictive universe of the text, Lance St. John Butler accurately characterises Fitch as 'having immediate and frank recourse to the notion of authorial intentionality in order to hold his two texts in the same focus.'[93] Butler also clearly articulates the untenability of this position: '[the] status of this mystical X, this entity suspended in 'some nonlinguistic form' is surely too much for us to swallow at this time of day'[94].

Having rejected any appeal to authorial intentionality -- including Fitch's notion of a pre-linguistic Ur-text -- Butler turns his attention to the multiple versions of the texts themselves and, in particular, to the language(s) of which they are constructed.[95] In contrast to the approaches outlined above, Butler completely removes the author from discussion, stripping him of his agency; instead, language

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[92] *Ibid.*, p.101.

[93] Lance St. John Butler, 'Two Darks: A Solution to Beckett's Bilingualism', in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui: An Annual Bilingual Review/Revue annuelle bilingue* 3 (1994), p.124. Butler's comments pertain to Fitch's article, 'The Relationship Between *Compagnie* and *Company*: One Work, Two Texts, Two Fictive Universes', in *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett,* pp.25-35, which reappears in *Beckett and Babel* as part of chapter six. In the chapter on the status of self-translation that follows, Fitch further reveals his dependence on authorial intentionality: 'the crux of the matter here is not the *product* but the *process* that gave birth to it. In this case the writer-translator is no doubt felt to have been in a better position to recapture the intentions of the author of the original than any other ordinary translator for the very good reason that those intentions were, in fact, his very own. If no distinction is made between the two versions of a given work, it is because they appear to share a common *authorial intentionality*' [*Beckett and Babel* 125, original emphasis].

[94] St. John Butler, 'Two Darks: A Solution to Beckett's Bilingualism', p.125.

[95] Beer views this emphasis on textuality as characteristic of work done by scholars of the French-language tradition (in particular the Structuralists and Post-Structuralists) to whom she attributes the beliefs that 'the author is "dead" or a mere a construct' and that 'only textual reality is available' ['Beckett's Bilingualism' 217].

itself assumes the active role:

> where there are changes between the two versions they are imposed by the different grammatical styles of English and French. […] This is not Beckett arrogating an illegitimate freedom to himself or following some internal law that tells him to make his original intentions clearer; this is Beckett the good translator bowing to an external law -- the law that French goes one way, whoever is handling it, and English another.[96]

Once again, dialogue is reduced to a single element: language. In removing Beckett from the equation -- either as author or reader -- Butler's analysis becomes less a study of Beckett's literary bi-discursivity and more an exercise in comparative stylistics.

Both trends, as I see it, focus on the production of language (the speaker or the utterance) in isolation, and this is where the problem lies: the unity-sameness and the duality-difference approaches presuppose either a ruling, unchanging writing/translating subject, or two established, finished texts. In other words, they both look at the issue of language from without (language has therefore remained the *object* of discussion), while overlooking the author/self-translation's experience of language from *within*.

In what follows, I shall draw on the duality-difference approach by stressing the differences between two 'versions' based on their respective cultural and linguistic contexts. Revising unity-sameness approach (particular that of Fitch's), I shall argue that the two 'versions' evoke an unrecoverable but essential pre-linguistic or non-linguistic presence, i.e. the eventual production of each cannot be conceived of separately from a pure presence they do not contain, which ultimately leads to their *abjection*.

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[96] St. John Butler, 'Two Darks: A Solution to Beckett's Bilingualism', pp.122-123.

In January 1977, Beckett began work on a prose text in English entitled 'Verbatim' or the 'Voice'. A few months later, in a letter to Ruby Cohn, he explained that he had '[tried] to get going again in English to see [him] through, say for company, but broke down. But must somehow [...]'[97].   He did indeed 'get going again' and from May 1977 to August 1979 he worked on the piece that was to become *Company*. In contrast to the forty-year time lag between the composition of *Mercier et Camier* and its translation into English, Beckett began to translate *Company* into French almost immediately upon completion of the English manuscript; in fact, the manuscripts of *Company* and *Compagnie* share a single notebook. Moreover, both texts were published in the same year, 1980, but due to revisions of the English text, the French text appeared first. Hence, the cover of the first English edition intriguingly informs the reader that *Company*, although 'written in English, has already been translated by the author and revised in the light of the French text.'[98]

Each version of *Company/Compagnie* consists of fifty-nine numbered paragraphs that offer the reader a series of scenes and, thus, communicate certain themes in an impressionistic manner. Approximately half of these fragments center on the text's fictional 'characters' – the hearer, the deviser, and the voice – a fact that may give rise once again to the notion that Beckett's works are divorced from external reality. Yet, the other fragments relate scenes based on incidents in Beckett's childhood. In the inside cover of the manuscript notebook, Beckett clearly outlines the autobiographical moments in the text and reiterates them later on in the notebook, calling them 'Scenes from the past.'[99] As a result, it is hardly surprising to discover

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[97] Samuel Beckett, letter to Ruby Cohn, May 3, 1977, quoted in Knowlson, 574.

[98] Samuel Beckett, *Company*, described in Joseph Long, 'The Reading of *Company*: Beckett and the Bi-Textual Work', in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 32: 4 (October 1996): 315. It is precisely this revision and this back and forth between the two texts that prompt Krance to speak of 'transtextual confluence'.

[99] All references to the manuscript and published versions of *Company* and *Compagnie* are taken from Krance's invaluable bilingual variorum edition. Cf. *Samuel Beckett's Company/Compagnie and, A piece of monologue/Solo*, ed. Charles Krance. New York: Garland, 1993.

Anglo-Irish cultural references in *Company/ Compagnie*.

The English version contains numerous references to people, places, and things familiar to Beckett from his childhood in Foxrock: Dr. Hadden (or Haddon), Mrs. Coote, Connolly's Stores, the Ballyogan Road, Croker's Acres, Stepaside, and the De Dion Bouton. The question arises: what role, if any, do these references play in the text? Perhaps, despite their grounding in the 'real world', they serve a symbolic function. However, when asked about the potential symbolism or significance to be found in these names, Beckett dismisses any such reading: '[les] noms propres et de lieux n'ont aucun sens caché. L'épicier, l'accoucheur et la dame s'appelaient ainsi, Ballyogan et Stepaside s'appellent ainsi toujours. J'avoue que Stepaside a l'air inventé. De même, De Dion Bouton était une marque d'automobile de la belle époque.'[100] Furthermore, O'Brien notes that Beckett's father may have owned a De Dion Bouton and that, in any event, Sir Horace Plunkett, who lived in the area, did own one.[101] Perhaps then one might argue that despite the fact that these items mentioned in the text point to objects, locations, and people in the 'real world', they function solely on an autobiographical level, that is, within Beckett's personal frame of reference. Yet, although certain of the references are indeed autobiographical – such as Dr. Hadden and Mrs. Coote – most of them, particularly the topographical allusions (like those in *Mercier et/and Camier*), draw on a larger cultural store of knowledge and, hence, resonate with the text's Anglo-Irish reader.[102]

In his article on *Company* and *Compagnie,* Fitch devotes a great deal of

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[100] Beckett, letter to Antoni Libera, December, 11 1980, quoted in Marie-Claire Pasquier, 'Quand comparaison se veut raison', in *TransLittérature* 8 (Hiver 1994): 32.

[101] 'Plunkett was reputed to have owned the first motor car in Ireland, a fact subsequently proved incorrect. However, he did drive a De Dion Bouton' [Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country: Samuel Beckett's Ireland*. Dublin: Black Cat Press / London: Faber and Faber, 1986, 9n9].

[102] Long confirms that the places Beckett mentions in *Company* would be 'familiar to a Dubliner'; however, he cautions against 'a realist mode of reading', despite the fact that '[the] topographical references [...] may seem to encourage [it]'. Instead, he suggests that Beckett 'ironises the very notion of realist reference' [*Ibid*. 321]. ['The Reading of *Company*: Beckett and the Bi-Textual Work', p.321.]

attention to what he calls the 'discrepancy between their respective universes'[103]; in short, he examines the various omissions, replacements, and additions that occur in the translation. However, Fitch's primary concern remains the relationship between the two versions of the work as opposed to the relationship between the reader and the text; thus, despite the fact that he continually makes mention of the reader and of the 'mental images'[104] that he or she experiences in reading one version or the other, at no point in his discussion does he identify any examples as culturally specific. This is particularly odd given that at the very end of the article, he acknowledges 'the inevitable differences of connotation between words in different languages, not to mention the differences distinguishing the two cultures involved and hence their respective reading publics'[105]. Indeed, it is precisely Beckett's awareness of these different readers and their respective cultural frames of reference -- Anglo-Irish and French -- coupled with his desire to provide each of them with a point of entry into the text that may be said to influence certain of his decisions in translation.

Unlike Fitch, Long wishes to '[shift] perspective to the reader'[106] in an attempt to study '[how] the text, French or English, solicit[s] the reader'[107]. Thus, he does discuss how Beckett renders cultural references from English to French and concludes that 'topographical references and elements of local colour appear to have been expunged from the French version'[108]. In support of this position, he offers the example of Croker's Acres, which, he claims, 'are leveled out to common pastures,

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[103] Brian Fitch, 'The Relationship Between *Compagnie* and *Company*: One Work, Two Texts, Two Fictive Universes', in *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*, eds. Alan Warren Friedman, Charles Rossman, Dina Sherzer. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987, pp.25-26.

[104] *Ibid.*, p.27.

[105] *Ibid.*, p.34.

[106] Joseph Long, 'The Reading of *Company*', p.315.

[107] *Ibid.*

[108] *Ibid.* p.321.

"pâturages"'.[109] However, the situation is not as simple as Long would have it appear to be. First, the other topographical references found in the English version -- the Ballyogan Road and Stepaside -- both appear in the published version of *Compagnie*; hence, Beckett's deletion of Croker's Acres from the French version serves as an isolated incident and by no means reflects a desire on his part to continually 'expunge' external reality from the text. Second, Long chooses not to examine the manuscript variants of *Company/Compagnie*; he justifies this decision by asserting that the manuscripts are more appropriate for a discussion of the text's genesis, rather than the reader's reception of the text. However, as I illustrate below, an examination of the manuscripts reveals that not only did Beckett consider alternate translations of each of these topographical references, but more importantly, these variants are culturally specific.

All three of these references occur in the same fragment, number 27:

Nowhere in particular on the way from A to Z. Or say for verisimilitude the Ballyogan Road. That dear old back road. Somewhere on the Ballyogan Road in lieu of nowhere in particular. [Where no truck anymore.] Somewhere on the Ballyogan road on the way from A to Z. Head sunk totting up the tally on the verge of the ditch. Foothills to the left. Croker's Acres ahead. [...] Reckoning ended on together from nought anew. [As if] bound for Stepaside. When suddenly you cut through the hedge and vanish hobbling east across the gallops (14, the underlined portions of the text in brackets are omitted from the French version).

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[109] *Ibid*. Long goes on to suggest that this is 'an eviction which one may choose to regret, as Boss Croker was a picturesque figure, an émigré of the Irish famine years who made his fortune in the United States, returned to build a residence near Foxrock and became a pioneer in the breeding of Irish race horses. In 1907, he caused a near-scandal in British racing circles by entering an Irish horse for the Epsom Derby, and precipitated an even greater furore by winning that race, so that his name became hallowed in local folk memory' [321-322]. O'Brien notes that Croker's Acres were also known as 'Croker's Gallops' and that 'Beckett often trod the Ballyogan Road to the Gallops, situated some fifteen minutes walk from *Cooldrinagh*. If he continued climbing the Ballyogan Road, he came to the hamlet of Stepaside on the foothills of the Dublin mountains' [*The Beckett Country* 45, *original italics*].

Nulle part en particulier sur le chemin de A à Z. Ou pour plus de vraisemblance le chemin de Ballyogan. Ce cher vieux vicinal. Quelque part sur le chemin de Ballyogan au lieu de nulle part en particulier. | Quelque part entre A et Z sur le chemin de Ballyogan. Tête baissée dans tes additions au bord de fossé. A gauche les premières pentes. Devant les pâturages. [...] Fini le calcul en avant tous deux de zéro à nouveau. | Tout droit sur Stepaside. Mais brusquement vous coupez à travers la haie et disparaissez clopin-clopant vers l'est à travers champs (15, '|' indicates a place of textual omission).

Let us begin with Long's example: Croker's Acres. There is no doubt that Beckett found this a difficult item to render in French, for he does not translate at all in the first French manuscript; instead, he leaves a blank spot for it, as well as a red X in the margin. He considers rendering it as 'les Vingts Arpents', then 'les Longs Prés', and, finally, as 'les parages', before deciding upon 'les pâturages'. Although none of these variants convey the specific lore associated with Croker's Acres described by Long and O'Brien, each provides the French reader with a fairly accurate physical description of the locale. The first variant also implies the presence of a long history with respect to this location via its use of the archaic measure 'arpent' – equal to about an acre. The translation of 'Stepaside' follows a similar pattern; at first, Beckett does not translate it in the manuscript. He then considers the variant 'Averness' before rendering it as 'Stepaside', perhaps Beckett coins the bilingual neologism 'Averness', to reiterate the 'stepping aside' or 'averting' undertaken by the figure seen on the Ballyogan Road.[110]

It should come as no surprise that a similar situation occurs with respect to the translation of the Ballyogan Road. If one examines only the published versions, it would appear that Beckett merely carries over the Irish topographical reference from the English to the French. However, the manuscripts indicate that once again Beckett finds the translation troublesome and that in the first draft he does not translate 'the

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[110] Despite Beckett's assertion that are no hidden meanings in these references, I would agree with Coe when he suggests that 'undoubtedly, what Beckett loves best to light upon is the existence of a real place whose name conceals an accidental but resplendent symbolism' (46).

Ballyogan Road' at all. In the second draft, Beckett considers rendering it as 'le chemin de Mollien', then 'le chemin de Moisy', before deciding to retain the reference to the Ballyogan Road – 'le chemin Ballyogan'. The name Mollien may refer to two historical French figures. The first, Nicolas-François comte Mollien (1758-1850), was one of Napoleon I's ministers, after whom both a room and a staircase at the Louvre are named. The second, Gaspard-Théodore Mollien (1796-1872), a French explorer and diplomat, was one of the earliest European explorers of the West African interior. In addition, as with 'les Vingts Arpents' and 'les Longs Prés', several streets in the town of Calais bear the name 'Mollien'. As for 'Moisy', the name may refer to the clockmaker Jean Moisy (1714-1782) whose 1755 *pendule à orgues* may be found in the Musée du Petit Palais; if so, the name reinforces the clock imagery of the text, and prefigures the later passage 'Tu regardes en arrière comme tu ne le pouvais alors et vois tes traces. Une grande parabole. Dans le non-sens des aiguilles'[111]. Furthermore, O'Brien recounts that in 1984 Beckett asked him for 'the derivation of the name Ballyogan for translation into French. I assumed the derivation to be from Bally Eoghan, which in English would be the equivalent of Johnstown, but the derivation is thought to be from the "Town of St. Mochainn or Mocheim" a saint who died in AD 584'[112]. Beckett's request of O'Brien suggests that, despite his claim in his letter to Libera that the names in *Company* have no hidden meanings, the inclusion of Irish topographical references is not due to their autobiographical resonance alone. Rather, Beckett may also employ them for the associative chains of meaning that they might evoke for the Anglo-Irish reader; moreover, he seeks to reproduce similar associations for the French reader of *Compagnie*.

Other references in *Company* bring the Anglo-Irish larger cultural context into play via their attendant associative chains of meaning; consequently, in *Compagnie*, Beckett often translates these items with an eye to creating new associations for the

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[111] Eoin O'Brien, *The Beckett Country*, p.27.

[112] *Ibid*., 23n34.

French reader. For example, in the English version of the text the narrator recounts: 'A small boy you come out of Connolly's Stores holding your mother by the hand' (4). According to O'Brien, Beckett's mother often frequented Connolly's Stores, located near Cooldrinagh in the village of Cornelscourt. However, Connolly's was far more than just a grocery store: '[this] establishment had a distinct advantage over many general stores; it provided also that institution so essential to every Irish hamlet, a public house'.[113] This may explain, in part, Beckett's dissatisfaction with his first translation of Connolly's Stores as 'l'Epicerie Connolly'. Although 'l'Epicerie' accurately describes Connolly's primary function, it does not convey its larger role in the Anglo-Irish cultural world of Beckett's childhood. Thus, in the published version of *Compagnie*, Beckett renders 'Connolly's Stores' as 'la boucherie-charcuterie Connolly'; while a 'boucherie-charcuterie' may not reproduce the same associations as 'Connolly's Stores', it does suggest new ones to the reader of the French text for, unlike an 'épicerie', a 'boucherie-charcuterie' is an inherently French establishment.

Two other instances of cultural references in *Company* and their corresponding translations in *Compagnie* further illustrate how Beckett frequently bears in mind the reader's larger cultural context. The first occurs in fragment 24: 'Your mother is in the kitchen making ready for afternoon tea with Mrs. Coote'[114]. Beckett translates the sentence as: 'Ta mère est dans la cuisine se préparant au goûter avec Madame Coote'[115]. Whereas 'afternoon tea' forms an almost ritualised part of day-to-day Anglo-Irish life, it plays no such role in France; however, every French child looks forward to the snack, 'le goûter', that awaits him or her everyday after school. The second example takes place in fragment 40, in which Beckett translates 'Cloudless May day'[116] as 'Journée d'avril sans nuage'[117]. Fitch holds this passage up as

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[113] *Ibid*., p.22. In earlier manuscript variants of *Company* Beckett has 'Connolly's grocery'; 'Connolly's Stores' does not appear until the third draft.

[114] *Samuel Beckett's Company/Compagnie and, A piece of monologue/Solo*, p.12.

[115] *Ibid*., p.13.

[116] *Ibid*., p.26.

evidence of the incompatibility of the two fictive universes of *Company/Compagnie,* for he claims that 'by no stretch of the imagination can "avril" [...] be translated as "May"'[118]. However, as Butler points out, Fitch does not consider each of these months with respect to their roles in the reader's broader cultural context:

> 'May' from Chaucer onwards, is the sunny spring month par excellence and here Beckett needs a month that will be, as he says, 'cloudless'; any time spent in England or Ireland in the month of April will not lead to memories of cloudlessness – as we know, the 'glory of an April day' is 'uncertain' and it is April that brings the sweet spring showers. Now in France, "avril" is just that bit sunnier and drier that in England and thus a suitable candidate for the description 'sans nuage' in a way that English Aprils cannot be. Altogether, 'May' is a *better* translation of 'avril' that 'April' would be. This is not Beckettian licence stemming from his authorial authority, it is merely thoughtful translating.[119]

Moreover, I would argue, this translation is thoughtful precisely because it is governed by Beckett's awareness of a culturally specific reader.

Let us close with one example of how Beckett handles the literary allusions present in *Company*. Long suggests that '[the] most constant feature of the English version, and one which sets it most decisively against the French, is intertextual play [...], the conjuring up, either by direct quotation or by the suggestive power of rhythm and prosody, of another textual presence, be it Milton or Shakespeare, or the Bible'[120]; in short, the text appeals to a larger base of cultural knowledge. Long does not deny the presence of such intertextual references in the French *Compagnie,* nor

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[117] *Ibid.*, p.27.

[118] Brian Fitch, 'The Relationship Between *Compagnie* and *Company*: One Work, Two Texts, Two Fictive Universes', p.28.

[119] St. John Butler, 'Two Darks: A Solution to Beckett's Bilingualism', pp.124-125 [*original italics*].

[120] For a more detailed analysis of the literary allusions found in *Company,* see Joseph Long, 'The Reading of *Company*', pp.322-325.

the fact that these references 'occasionally enjoy a development independent of the English'[121]. However, he maintains it is only '[on] a few rare occasions [that] the French text compensates for the loss of the intertextual frame of the English by elaborating an alternative of its own'[122]. In support of this position Long offers the following analysis of Beckett's translation of the phrase 'hope deferred'[123], from the Book of Proverbs (XIII, 12) as 'l'espoir charlatan'[124], a reference to the *Maximes* of Chamfort:

> The phrase 'hope deferred' triggers the intertextual process, opening on to the Biblical text: 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick' [...]. The masked presence of the Book of Proverbs shapes the text to come, acting as matrix, leading into the theme of sickness – 'Till the heart starts to sicken' – and imposing the rhythm and formulation of a proverb: 'Better a sick heart than none. Till it starts to break.' In French, however, the scriptural reference has not entered the common coin of the language – 'Espoir différé: langueur du cœur' – and the same intertextual trigger cannot operate. The French version follows an alternate path, presenting the striking metaphor of 'l'espoir charlatan' and generating a more recondite reference, pointing to a maxim of Chamfort.[125]

As the terminology of these statements reveal, Long clearly privileges the English version and, in turn, views the French as a weaker text; thus, he views the translation of this particular passage, in which Beckett opens up new chains of associative meaning for the French reader, as a fortuitous and rare occurrence. In contrast, I would argue that this example is indicative of a key principle governing Beckett's translation: a desire to engage the French reader with the French version of the text, just as the Anglo-Irish reader does with the English version.

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[121] *Ibid.*, p.324.

[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *Samuel Beckett's Company/Compagnie and, A piece of monologue/Solo*, p.16.

[124] *Ibid.*, p.17.

[125] Joseph Long, 'The Reading of *Company*', p.325.

Indeed, despite his purported desire to move away from Fitch's emphasis on 'the referential world implied by each text'[126] and, instead, to focus on the each text's reader, in the end Long returns to the approaches discussed at the beginning of the chapter: he turns both to authorial intentionality and to the materiality of language. Witness his closing remarks in the article:

> [should] we understand that Beckett saw his native language rather as an ancient palimpsest [...], whereas French, a foreign tongue however well assimilated, appears as a blank page in the eyes of the foreigner? If that be so, then *Company* has brought us back to the vast palimpsest of memory; and the reader is invited not so much to explore a vicarious fictive universe as to enter into the labyrinth of language.[127]

As I have demonstrated, Beckett is clearly aware that no language -- be it the English of his childhood or the French he acquired later in life -- is 'a blank page'. Thus, 'the labyrinth of language' of which Long speaks may be applied equally well to both versions of *Company/Compagnie*. Furthermore, as I have illustrated, each text's 'palimpsest of memory' draws not from Beckett's personal experiences alone, but rather, from the shared cultural memory of its intended audience.

As we can see from the above, Beckett's handling of cultural references is indicative of one aspect of the poetics that govern his activity as a self-translator: in these instances, Beckett seeks not only to rewrite a given text in a new language, but also to inscribe the text into a new cultural field of reference. As my analysis will show, the cultural, philosophical, or literary references in Beckett's texts and their 'translations' draw on a wide range of elements belonging to what may be termed shared cultural knowledge. Some references appeal to the reader's familiarity with geographical locations or with certain cultural institutions and structures -- such as units of measurement, currency, and time or particular customs and practices --,

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[126] *Ibid.*, p.315.

[127] *Ibid.*, p.327.

while others involve the use of proper names -- including specific brand names (some of which take on an almost iconic status where the brand stands in for the product) --, or the use of literary allusions. Hill is correct in noting that 'it is far from self-evident that Beckett's practice as a self-translator can be reduced to a single uniform strategy'[128].

After discussing Beckett's handling of cultural references, I shall now probe deeper into the two texts, into their respective microcosmic linguistic space, to show how Beckett's prose rhymes serve as acoustic images of memory-encounters, particularly in the light of his remarkable feats of self-translation, encounters that translate the terms in which they are expressed into 'un langage nouveau', as Mayoux says of *Molloy*, that gives utterance to a genuine 'sense of failure' in the killing style of the reason-ridden voice.

The 'langue étrangère' of Proust's counter-senses is translated into a language created by the encounter between two languages, a language that fails at a deeper level than the texts' failure to make clear, to comprehend a context, to sustain a belief, the deeper failure to stop the life in the feeling imagination. I shall contrast the English and French versions of the texts to establish my ground for human confidence in the moments where one disbelieves the remorselessness of the form, where a purer imagination finds a form of life. The encounter between different aspects of the self, different selves to be precise, is externalized and given flesh by Beckett and is consequently strangely dehumanized. What the externalization does is to present the split selves as merely other, not memory-images at all. Watt's transformation of the piano-tuners into someone else's ill-told tale is achieved with the faculty of memory itself. The pseudo-couples are past selves fictionalized into unfeeling strangers, like French and English facing each other across the untranslatable. The rhyme-work, however, establishes a true meeting of those selves within the arena of felt memory recollected, in the same way as it demonstrates the

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[128] Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words*, p.46.

common ground possible between Beckett's two languages. When the two meet, a true memory is resuscitated (and/or fabricated) and the imagination is shown breathing again.

At the beginning of the French *Molloy* (FM), Molloy recalls two men coming towards each other outside the town:

> C'étaient deux hommes, impossible de s'y tromper, un petit et un grand. Ils étaient sortis de la ville, d'abord l'un, puis l'autre, et le premier, las ou se rappelant une obligation, était revenu sur ses pas. L'air était frais, car ils avaient leur manteau. Ils se ressemblaient, mais pas plus que les autres. Un grand espace les séparait d'abord. Ils n'auraient pas pu se voir, même en levant la tête et en se cherchant des yeux, à cause de ce grand espace, et puis à cause de vallonnement du terrain, qui faisait que la route était en vagues, peu profondes mais suffisament, suffisament. Mais le moment vint où ensemble ils dévalèrent vers le même creux et c'est dans ce creux qu'ils se rencontrèrent à la fin. [FM 9-10]

Molloy remembers what amounts to a staged act of memory. 'Le premier', prompted by memory, retraces his steps. The soundeffects make clear, however, that 'revenu sur ses pas' is identical with the motive 'las ou se rappelant', the 'rappelant'- 'pas' sound resemblance sufficiently reinforced by the surrounding phonemes to alert our attention – ('le premier, las ou se rappelant une obligation, étaient revenu sur ses pas'). The sound of 'pas' echoes through the succeeding sentences in the repeated 'grand espace' with 'séparait', in 'pas plus', 'pas pu' and 'puis à', with minor echoes in the 'vallonnement'-'vague' link and the phrase 'peu profondes mais suffisament, suffisament'. The first, by remembering, retraces his steps and meets himself walking along the road just where he had been moments before. It is the prose rhymes that tell us that this is so by identifying 'pas' with the act of weary memory and by then repeating the sound of his retracing mind on its way towards the meeting with the self of the immediate past.[129]

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[129] The unpublished draft '8' is a specific denial of the Molloy meeting: the 'ways' are one-way, there is no 'retracing the way up back down', there is 'no sign that none before' (Lake, *No Symbols*, 173).

Other features in the passage confirm this. For instance, Molloy's odd assertiveness that it was 'deux hommes', as though there could have been some doubt; the way calling one of the men 'l'autre' subtly changes the sense of the denial of likeness ('pas plus que les autres') – other past selves are suggested; the odd way Beckett manipulates common features of French, the reflexive, the 're-' verbs, a phrase like 'ils avaient leur manteau', hinting at an identity. The repetitions in the passage are curious too ('grand espace', 'suffisament', 'creux') – and even more so in the light of the fact that Molloy is remembering an act of memory. The two men are repetitions of each other brought together by the sound of their footfalls ('pas') which are little externalized acts of recall in action.

Here is the English version:

It was two men, unmistakably, one small and one tall. They had left the town, first one, then the other, and then the first, weary or remembering a duty, had retraced his steps. The air was sharp, for they wore greatcoats. They looked alike, but no more than others do. At first a wide space lay between them. They couldn't have seen each other, even had they raised their heads and looked about, because of this wide space, and then because of the undulating land, which caused the road to be in waves, not high, but high enough, high enough. But the moment came when together they went down into the same trough and in this trough finally met. [T 9]

'Rhymes: two men dressed the same, looking the same, two by two', Stephen had thought. One of Watt's backward sentences remembers Stephen's thoughts about rhyme: 'Dis yb dis, nem, owt' [W 166], or 'two men, sid by sid'. Watt and Knott are literally rhymes of each other, and Molloy's pseudo-couple rhyme too – 'small' and 'tall'. It is memory that, by repeating its original, creates a rhyme, the present self living side by side with its twin dead self. As in the French, 'remembering' and 'retraced' are aligned (weary or remembering a duty, had retraced his steps', an alignment reinforced by the r-run). The 'pas' rhymes are left untranslated, but 'retraced' is echoed in the 'wide space' repetition with a supporting ei-run (all the 'they's, 'lay', 'raised', 'waves'). The rhyming identity between the two men ('one small and one tall') leads to a rhyming meeting-place – 'high enough, high enough

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[...] the same trough and in this trough'.

The possibility that the scene is an allegory of memory, remembering mind retracing its steps to meet its trace, is underlined by the French 'pas'-string, and in the English with the full rhymes. In the English the two men are made one by the implications of the rhymes – they are rhymes of each other. In the French the two men are made one by the identity of their 'pas' with the act of recall itself. The two different routes meet in the final analysis, just as the two men meet finally in the same trough. The rhyming approach between the two versions sets out a memory-encounter that speaks of translation itself, the resemblances and differences between the two languages and their encounter in Molloy, Beckett's second major venture into French.[130] Northrop Frye first described the two halves of Molloy as a representation of an encounter between Irish English and French.[131] Over the undulating prose of the novel, Beckett's Irish-English imagination meets its French counterpart, his 'secondmouth language'[132]; 'traduced into jinglish janglage for the nusances of dolphins born'[133] the way is vice versa, a rhyme of itself.

The act of self-translation, then, could be seen as the linguistic manifestation of the particular malaise of the voice and its memory. The self over time is split into a series of distinct successive selves. Beckett's two languages make each other foreign. The persistent memory of the other language in the mind dislocates the lexical accents of the voice, making the native unfamiliar and the foreign close to home:

> Mahood's stories are not any old thing, though no less foreign, to what, to that
> unfamiliar native land of mine, as unfamiliar as that other where men come and

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[130] Molloy was written in French between Sept. 1947 and Jan. 1948. In 1947, Beckett had translated *Murphy*, written *Mercier et Camier* (the first major venture into French), 13 French poems, and also the early play *Eleuthéria* and *Quatre Nouvelles* in French. Molloy was translated into English in 1955 by Beckett in collaboration with Patrick Bowles.

[131] 'The Nightmare Life in Death', 442-9; corroborated by Hugh Kenner: 'Molloy and Moran are more or less the author's Irish and French selves respectively' (quoted Alvarez, *Beckett*, 53).

[132] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, London: Faber & Faber, 1975, p.37.

[133] *Ibid.*, p.275.

go, and feel at home [...] Not any old thing but as near as no matter. [T 300]

On one level, Beckett is talking about the strange relationship between his French stories and his Irish memory. The Unnamable, in keeping them distinct, wishes them both devoid of any relation to each other or to the real world, the 'dead tongue of the living' [T 314]. Rhyming-effects, present in both versions, bring them close together, implying rough identity between Mahood and voice, memory and self, and a certain kinship between French and English.

And they appear at the very point the Unnamable is asserting their differences:

Here, in my domain, what is Mahood doing in my domain, and how does he get here? There I am launched again on the same old hopeless business, there we are face to face, Mahood and I, if we are twain, as I say we are. [T 300]

The rhymes are there in the French: 'Ici, dans mon pays, que fait Mahood ici [...] Mahood et moi, si nous sommes deux, comme je le dis' [*L'Innommable* 47]. The rhymes bring both the Unnamable and Mahood together, just as the languages are by translation, together against the voice's arbitrary distinguishing of itself from Mahood. This rough unity is brought into a rhyming relation with the languages he speaks, the 'pays' of the original, the 'domain' of the translation. 'The self-accompaniment of a tongue that is not mine' [T 287] murmurs his deeper confession even when the voice believes itself to be coming clean. The 'tongue' is the voice of the 'autre être', the past self made stranger by the voice's extreme old age and by comic, manic dislocation.

It is also the foreign language Beckett prefers to write in and then translate out of. In 1977, Beckett told Charles Juliet that 'il écrit maintenant en anglais, car cette langue est devenue pour lui la langue étrangère'[134]. The persistence of the 'pas' and rhyme-sounds in the two versions of the passage from Molloy creates a background accompaniment to the fleeting, inconsequential meeting of the two men which

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[134] Charles, Juliet, *Rencontre avec Samuel Beckett*. Montpellier, 1986, p.49.

parallels the 'superflu' of the Mahood-moi rhyme in the later work. It merges the sounds the two men make beyond the limited encounter in the trough. Two languages, two selves pace out a secret acoustic kinship unawares.

The 'pas' rhymes of the French *Molloy* are of particular importance to Beckett. He told Juliet, friend of Bram van Velde, of 'l'importance du pas de l'homme, de nos pas sur cette terre':

> Toujours ce va-et-vient ... (Et de la main, il décrit ce mouvement du prisonnier dans sa geôle, du fauve dans sa cage.) C'est quelque chose que Bram connaît bien, ce bruit des pas ... [FM 47-8]

But their importance lies not only in the fact that they create the impression of men and women as prisoners, circus animals in endless come-and-go, but also in the fact they remind each man and woman of the species to which they belong. They recall to the isolated mind its elemental bodied humanity, the rhythm of the species. All Beckett's pseudo-couples reject this fundamental kinship in discarding all vestige of human mercy and companionship, and in so doing, reject each other's part in their lives. 'Pas' rhymes, 'ce bruit des pas de l'homme' to condense Beckett's phrasing, recall each one back into themselves, gather both divided selves into human history and into fleeting communion.

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The analysis above again allows us to speculate on the relationship of the two 'versions' of Beckett's works. As Connor says of *The Lost Ones* and *Dépeupleur*, 'each becomes merely a version of the other, and is apprehensible as itself only by virtue of its difference from its partner, which in turn has identity only in its difference from the other text'[135]. Although the finding fits into a Derridean abolition of the precedence of the original over copy, it also dissolves textual completion into

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[135] Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988, p.112.

an endless flux reminiscent of abjection. Brian Fitch's analysis of Beckett's writing process may be seen to confirm this. Although abjection is never approached in Fitch's work on Beckett's bilingualism, and although his hypothesis of an Ur-text is problematic, its affinities with the evocation of an unrecoverable but essential pre-linguistic or non-linguistic presence[136] are too striking to ignore. His analysis of *Bing* and *Ping* posits both texts as 'variants', suggesting that the eventual production of each cannot be conceived of separately from a pure presence they do not contain, referring to Beckett's own comment to Brian Finney on the *Six Residua*:

> Beckett said of the […] *Residua* […] that they were 'residual…even when that does not appear of which each is all that remains'. Likewise, *Bing* and *Ping* are variants even though 'that does not appear of which each is' a variant. *They are then variants of something that enjoys no tangible textual existence but whose existence is none the less implicit in their very co-existence.*[137]

Although Fitch does not make the connection with abjection, the 'residue' left over after an expulsion is an increasingly fruitful image in reading Beckett's writing practice. The work must be conceived as a 'pure' entity which makes a fraught shuttling of differentiation the form of its own composition, so that unity cannot be apprehended on the level of the text or work (Note the difference of this position from the theorists of self-translation), but in the presence which lurks behind both, the *textual abject*. Fitch addresses the same problem in the context of *Company/Compagnie*:

> The existence of *Compagnie* render *Company* subject to modification: what was originally complete in itself and autonomous (*Company*) is now rendered retroactively incompletely. In this sense, the first version is paradoxically in the

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[136] Please note that when I call it a 'pre-linguistic or non-linguistic presence', I am distancing myself from theorists of self-translation who view self-translation as a site where 'equivalence' is verified. I seek to posit no 'equivalence' as such, for it proves a futile endeavour in the case of Beckett's self-translation.

[137] Brian Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*, p.135 [original emphasis].

dependence of the second, and the classic classification of the translation's relationship to its original has been turned upside down.[138]

Since the name 'Beckett' is attached to works which have 'versions' or 'variants' in two languages, the work which appears second may be seen as 'rewritten', so that it operates as commentary or rewriting of the first version. Here we shall recall that Beckett finished work on *Company* in August 1979, and began to translate it into French shortly after. Both texts were published in the same year, 1980, but due to revisions of the English text, the French text appeared first. Hence, the cover of the first English edition intriguingly informs the reader that *Company*, although 'written in English, has already been translated by the author and revised in the light of the French text'. Here, the reversal of conventionally opposed values is the same as that in abjection, subverting what is apparently a clear line of logical reasoning: source text must precede translation, which is drawn from its preexisting essence. Fitch's argument inverts this causal relationship, and goes on to suggest that the reversal of conventional notions of original or derivative is written into Beckett's process of composition itself. The manuscript variants of *Bing/Ping* again explode the myth of a linear process:

> The final English version corresponds to a stage in the drafting of its French counterpart preceding the version that had served as the source of the earlier English version.[139]

While the preexistence of the 'finished' French text might be deemed the indisputable origin of its English counterpart in Beckett's composition, this proves not to have been the case. According to Fitch's investigation, Beckett frequently worked *backwards*, founding the revolution of the second text on a regression further

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[138] Brian Fitch, 'The Relationship Between *Compagnie* and *Company*: One Work, Two Texts, Two Fictive Universes', in *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*, eds. Friedman et al. University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987, pp.31-32.

[139] Brian Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*, p.73.

and further back into the early, discarded drafts of the text in the other language[140], as though the second texts speeds towards its ever-unattainable destination by retreating towards the non-existent origin of the first text.

Like Beckett's characters' preoccupation with bodily residues, his retroactive writing process propagates itself precisely by recourse to its own previously discarded drafts, its abject material, as the self-contained units of 'original' and 'translation' fracture into two parallel, simultaneous, unstable, mutually dependent bodies of work. The text is subject to abjection's spasmodic constitution and dissolution, calling into question its unitary identity, repositioning textual origin as retroactive, and constituting meaning via the unseen and marginal. Since no reference Beckett can be considered as a whole reference, always invoking the 'other' text, Beckett's corpus derives an unsuspected autonomy and plenitude precisely from its *failure* to achieve wholeness, the ironically celebrated failure of abjection.

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[140] *Ibid*., p.73.

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'TO AND FRO IN SHADOW'[141]**:**
REPETITION, MATERNAL SPACE, AND THE RHYTHMIC *CHORA*

To begin with, I have to quote the probably most-quoted passage from the entire Beckett oeuvre, that 'expression' manifesto in his 'Three Dialogues' with Georges Duthuit when he talked about:

> The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. [PTD 103]

While this statement of obligatory, agentless, sourceless, contentless expression has inspired much critical insight into Beckett's works, it has nonetheless become some sort of cliché in Beckett criticism, a necessary banality, perhaps, that seems to have in it a destiny of some sort, which the Beckett scholar is never to steer clear of. Indeed, the best part of the post-Godot Beckett canon – we are reminded of Lucky's famous monologue [CDW 42-43] – seems to coincide with this 'obligation to

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[141] Samuel Beckett, 'Neither' [CSP 258]

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express', an (in)voluntary verbal discharge so to speak.

If it is indeed necessary to speak, this is not simply because we are prey to language. It is also and above all because as soon as it is named that which is and of which we are obliged to speak escapes towards its own non-being. This means that the work of naming must always be taken up again, differently. On this point, Beckett reveals himself as a disciple of Heraclitus: being is nothing other than its becoming-nothingness. This is what is summed up in one of the *mirlitonnades*:

flux cause	flux causes
que toute chose	that every thing
tout en étant	while being
toute chose	everything
donc celle-là	hence that one
même celle-là	even that one
tout en étant	while being
n'est pas	is not
parlons-en [CP 75]	speak on[142]

On this basis, how can the imperative to speak, which governs in particular the imperative of the writer – and above all of the one who is 'good for' nothing else – attune itself with being? Have we some hope that language could stop the flux and confer upon a thing ('that one', 'even that one') at least a relative stability? And if not, what good is the imperative that we should 'speak on' (*parlons-en*)?

A Womb/Tomb with A View: Beckett and the Kristevan Chora

In his provocative study entitled *The Insanity of Samuel Beckett's Art*, Richard J. Stephenson argues that Beckett felt compelled to speak in order to establish a psychological umbilical cord and he felt compelled to speak to break contact with the

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[142] The translation here is by Nina Power and Alberto Toscano. See Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, ed. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano. London: Clinamen Press, 2003, p.1.

mother.[143] This is by all means a blatant claim, considering Beckett's own ridicule of the psychoanalytic critical process.[144] However, the abundance of textual and biographical evidence never ceases to tempt critics 'towards the ploughing of furrows through Beckett's work'[145].

In the previous chapter I have outlined, following Kristeva, how abjection stems from the infant's non-separation with the mother in the 'archaic dyad'. From Peggy Guggenheim's memoirs and from John Gruen's interview, we are aware that at least twice in his life, as early as 1937 and as late as 1961, Beckett personally admitted his fearful memories of being swallowed up inside his mother's womb.[146] In this light, Deirdre Bair's record of the turbulently ambivalent relationship between Beckett and his mother becomes all the more meaningful[147] for explaining Beckett's compulsion to speak.

The engulfing dyad, to begin with, is both desired and feared, capable of giving rise to ambivalence. Talking about the subject's fear of engulfment, Norman Holland quotes Edmund Bergler who 'has suggested that all writers are involved in this deepest of human wishes; that writers emit words as a way of defending against the

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[143] Richard J. Stephenson, *The Insanity of Samuel Beckett's Art*. Colorado: Paint Brush Press, 1990, p.37.

[144] Beckett is known for his comic send-ups of psychoanalytic terminology and practice – the 'dog vomit jargon' used in sifting through 'time's forgotten cowpats' [Phil Baker, *Samuel Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis*. London: Macmillan, 1997, xi.]. When the well-known analyst Didier Anzieu, author of the 1989 essay 'Beckett and Bion', put his interpretations to Beckett in 1984, Beckett dismissed them as 'a psychoanalyst's phantasms!' [*Ibid.*, p.9]

[145] Mary Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama: Her Own Other*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993, p.161.

[146] In *Confessions of an Art Addict*, Peggy Guggenheim writes, recalling Beckett's ambivalence about his love for her: 'Ever since his birth he had retained a terrible memory of life in his mother's womb. He was constantly suffering from this and had awful crises, when he felt he was suffocating.' [*Confessions of an Art Addict*. New York: Universe Books, 1979, p.175.] On another occasion, Beckett confirms these 'memories' with John Gruen: 'I have a clear memory of my own fetal existence. It was an existence where no voice, no possible movement could free me from the agony and darkness I was subjected to.' [John Gruen, 'Samuel Beckett Talks about Beckett', in *Vogue*, 127 (February 1970) no.2, P.108.]

[147] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. New York: Vintage, 1991.

fearful desire to obliterate oneself in a total at oneness with some primal mother.'[148]

Indeed, a psychological defense attempts to satisfy both the wish and the defense against the wish. Ambivalence to the end, Richardson again suggests, Beckett had a fictitious ego ramble all the way to silence, trying to imagine himself free of the wish to return to the womb. Admittedly in Beckett, there is abundant textual and biographical unease with motherhood to take hold of our attention. If this unease does not welcome a psychoanalytic interpretation like Richardson's, there is always the possibility of such an intertextual reading as the similarities are encouraging.

Beckett, too, shows a similar ambivalence towards motherhood. There is, on the one hand, the image of an inhospitable mother. It makes its first appearance as a scene observed by the protagonist of 'The End' as he makes his way through the garden of the cloister in which he has been staying:

> There was that straight light which follows a day of persistent rain, when the sun comes out and the sky clears too late to be of any use. The earth makes a sound as of sighs and the last drops fall from the emptied cloudless sky. A small boy, stretching out his hands and looking up at the blue sky, asked his mother how such a thing was possible. Fuck off, she said. [CSP 53]

At the moment of his own expulsion from asylum ('[n]ever come back here whatever you do, you would not be let in' [CSP 53]), the protagonist witnesses a scene of maternal rejection. The child's wonder is met with a violent retort. What is recognisably the same episode appears again in *Malone Dies*, this time in much more detail and as one of Malone's own memories. He has heard an aeroplane flying overhead:

> I was present at one of the first loopings of the loop, so help me God. I was not afraid. It was above a racecourse, my mother held me by the hand. She kept saying, It's a miracle, a miracle. Then I changed my mind. We were not often of the same mind. One day we were walking along the road, up a hill of extraordinary steepness, near home I imagine, my memory is full of steep hills, I

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[148] Norman N. Holland, *The Dynamics of Literary Response*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, p.38.

get them confused. I said, The sky is further away than you think, is it not, mama? It was without malice, I was simply thinking of all the leagues that separated me from it. She replied, to me her son, It is precisely as far away as it appears to be. She was right. But at the time I was aghast. I can still see the spot, opposite Tyler's gate. A market-gardener, he had only one eye and wore side-whiskers. That's the idea, rattle on. You could see the sea, the islands, the headlands, the isthmuses, the coast stretching away to north and south and the crooked moles of the harbor. We were on our way home from the butcher's. My mother? Perhaps it is just another story, told me by some one who found it funny. The stories I was told, at one time! And all funny, not one not funny. [T 269-270]

Again it is a scene of maternal rejection, and it appears, again in *Company* in a final version:

A small boy you come out of Connolly's Stores holding your mother by the hand. You turn right and advance in silence southward along the highway. After some hundred paces you head inland and broach the long steep homeward. You make ground in silence hand in hand through the warm still summer air. It is late afternoon and after some hundred paces the sun appears above the crest of the rise. Looking up at the blue sky and then at your mother's face you break the silence asking her if it is not in reality much more distant than it appears. The sky that is. The blue sky. Receiving no answer you mentally reframe your question and some hundred paces later look up at her face again and ask her if it does not appear much less distant that in reality is. For some reason you could never fathom this question must have angered her exceedingly. For she shook off your little hand and made you a cutting retort you have never forgotten. [NO 12-13]

Paul Lawley provides an interesting interpretation of this scene: 'The separation of hands is a detail that figures in this version but is mentioned in neither of the previous ones. Again, it is the phrasing that attracts attention. As the first of *Company*'s past episodes, this one precedes the birth-scene […]; yet it may be read as anticipating it. The mother's retort, with which she shakes off the "little hand", is a "cutting" one. She does not figure, is not even mentioned, in the birth-scene […] But here, in an adjacent scene, and within the framework of a text to which the image of birth is vital, the separation from the child by a "cutting" appears by a process of metaphysical displacement. This too is a birth scene, in which the hands represent the

umbilical link.'[149]

Lawley's analysis leads us to the other side of Beckett's ambivalence towards motherhood. If the image of the mother is an inhospitable one, for the Beckettian consciousness which holds 'a great love in my heart too for all things still and rooted' ['From an Abandoned Work', CSP 159], the womb is still an anchorage that the feotus is unwilling to relinquish. In *Fizzle 4*, the foetal consciousness is permanently split, half ('he') felt to be facing the ex-uterine world, the other half ('I') remaining inside: 'I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be, it was he, I was inside, that's how I see it' [CSP 234].

This peri-natal vacillation is most manifest when the maternal scenes in Beckett's work appear in the form of vibrant and rhapsodic soundscape, like the following from *Malone Dies*:

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

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[149] Paul Lawley, 'Samuel Beckett's Relations', in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, NS Vol. 6, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 39-40.

The scene, as Lawley has aptly pointed out, 'evokes a rapture of reciprocity both with and between sounds and sights at the edge of perception. The sounds animate the things of the environment in all their particularity and the barking of the dogs composes a topographical antiphony within which wilderness is made compliant without ceasing to be wild. The human lights merge with those of the stars and the moon. The largest reciprocity is between sound and silence, light and dark, and – in the boy's own experience – continuance and ending.'[150] Here the subject is enveloped by a womb-like realm of sounds and silences, and accompanying images indistinguishable from the speaking self. This is, to borrow from Julia Kristeva, a *chora*-like semiotic space[151] in which the formative subject dwells.

In Kristeva's theory, the symbolic is not always the most powerful mode of signification. The disruptive, digressing semiotic, forever lurking, can break in and disrupt the more orderly process of symbolic signification:

> Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a mobility that is as full of movement as it is regulated.[152]

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[150] *Ibid.*, p.35.

[151] Kristeva borrows the term from Plato's *Timaeus* to 'denote an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases' [see Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M. Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, p.24.]. But even with Plato on her side, Kristeva's notion of the *chora* is hazy: the *chora* is often translated as womb or receptacle, but Kristeva does not seem to mean that it is just a space; she says it is an articulation, a rhythm, but one that precedes language. It is, in other words, the meaning that is largely semiotic: the echolalis, glossalalias, rhythms, and intonations of an infant who does not yet know how to use language to refer to objects, or of a psychotic who has lost the ability to use language in a properly meaningful way. The semiotic *chora* may also make itself felt in symbolic communication.

[152] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. M. Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, p.25.

Kristeva emphasizes the *chora*'s mobility, which means exhibiting or being capable of spontaneous movement. She wants to see that *chora* as capable of generating (not just receiving) energy – the energy which helps fuel the signifying process. She finds, 'in this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which significance is constituted.'[153] It is first of all a place, one that is not easy to make intelligible because it is not, strictly speaking, representable. To speak about the *chora* at all is paradoxical, given that to do so is to give it a place in the Symbolic.

Kristeva sees the *chora* as a mobile and 'extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases'[154], a dynamic space where differences exist without duality and where the subject is caught up in the continual process of construction and destruction. This rhythmic energy constitutes a subversive force which repeatedly launches its assaults on the traditional structures of the Symbolic. However, Kristeva also associates the *chora* with the Freudian death-drive, through the interaction within the *chora* of the rhythm of the pulsions, and moments of temporary stasis, anticipating the final stasis of death: 'The semiotic *chora*, converting drive discharges into stases, can be thought of both as a delaying of the death drive and as a possible realisation of this drive, which tends to return to a homeostatic state.'[155] The mother's body remains the site where difference is reconciled, but instead of being embraced in a process of where difference is endlessly produced and dissolved, the maternal body is both restored as the original lost object and provides a space where reconciliation of difference may be imaginatively realized or rehearsed. The implication of this for Beckett is that stasis and change, desire and entropy, identity and dispersal, are always intertwined in such a way as to give the body *jouissance*.

One of Beckett's later plays, *Rockaby* (1981), recalls the rhythms of the chora in

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[153] Ibid., p.26.

[154] Ibid., p.25.

[155] Ibid., p.128.

its nonchronological, repetitious, spiraling, cumulative, fluid language. On one level, *Rockaby* tells the story of an old woman approaching and entering death after a long and lonely existence. As Hersh Zaifman has noted, '… we see a woman, rocking away, listening to a tale – a tale that is narrated rather than dramatised'[156]. The narrative summarises its subject's existence as a perpetual search for an other:

> all eyes
> all sides
> high and low
> for another

The desired other, however, is an other 'like' the self, whose need in turn for an other would reflect the need of the self:

> for another
> another like herself
> another creature like herself
> a little like
> going to and fro
> all eyes
> all sides

The desire to perceive the other seems to be the desire for a reflection of the self, or rather, the desire to recognise the desire of the 'self' in the desire of the other. Should this other be found, the need of each, instead of circulating endlessly, would respond to the other, each becoming simultaneously subject and object of desire in a compound circle, as in the final image of *Ohio Impromptu* where the moment of self-recognition consummates the union of the self with itself in the mirror of the other.

The subject in the first sections of the narrative is identified only with the eyes, the only part of her body which is mentioned. Indeed, she seems to have no existence

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[156] Hersh Zeifman, '"The Core of the Eddy": Rockaby and Dramatic Genre', in *Beckett Translating / Translating Beckett*, eds. Alan Warren Friedman, Charles Rossman, and Dina Sherzer. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987, p.142.

beyond her need to see and recognize the other, which condemns her to a ceaseless wandering in search of her object. The desire of the subject of the narrative to see the other is mirrored by the desire of the figure to hear her own life story. Although the figure does not control the voice, the four sections of the narrative and the accompanying motion of the rocker are preceded by the four imploring 'More's uttered by the figure. In *Rockaby*, this desire is not only narrated in the text and suggested in the scenic figure's utterances, but is materialised in the structure and rhythm of the performance. The repeated motion of the search within the text is reflected in the rhythm of the recorded narrative, indeed its form counters its status as narrative, associated traditionally with the linear development of the plot. The text is divided into short rhythmic units, synchronous with the rocking of the chair (and the body). Each section contains a limited number of these units which are continually repeated, with each new unit woven into a cycle of repetitions. Each of the four sections repeats in large measure the previous one(s), but adds a number of new phrases which develop the story or narrative while maintaining the circular, repetitive rhythm. Jane Hale has compared the form of the text to:

> the repetitive narrative songs that seem to be coming to an end, only to recommence at the beginning in an endless game of mirrors.[157]

The motion of repetition becomes the very rhythm of desire, the 'spirals of need' referred to by Beckett in his article on Denis Devlin's *Intercessions*[158] or the repetition of the child's game in Freud's 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. The need of the subject of narrative for the other becomes the need to represent the need, the need to hear the history of her need. While need persists, however, the history can never be completed, but only renewed or repeated. The desire to end is therefore the desire to end the 'compulsion to repeat', the desire to end desiring, since the

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[157] Jane Hale, *The Broken Window: Beckett's Dramatic Perspective*. Purdue University Press, 1987, p.133.

[158] Samuel Beckett, 'Denis Devlin', in *Transition*, no. 27 (April-May, 1938), p. 290.

repetition can only cease when need itself, the animating principle, is laid to rest. The elimination of need, however, entails the elimination of the duality of the concepts of self and other, need and its object. Only when this difference or margin which perpetuates the circulation of desire is resolved into union, if not unity, can need be soothed. And because of the particularly repetitive nature of the text, it tends to dissolve into the pure sound or rhythm of the voice.

<div align="center">*</div>

> Longing the so-said mind long lost to longing. The so-missaid. So far so-missaid. Dint of long longing lost to longing. Long vain longing. And longing still. Faintly longing still. Faintly vainly longing still. For fainter still. For faintest. Faintly vainly longing for the least of longing. Unlessenable least of longing. Unstillable vain least of longing still. [NO 109]

The lack of an approachable, identifiable subject in Beckett's late writing, as implied in the quotation above, creates immediate problems in reading: one is taken into the flux, involuntarily encountering a dissolution of concrete identity where one demands an accountable subject position. It is in style that Beckett maps out the fractured self. The making flesh of the Word serves as an important model for the linguistic destitution in Becket's prose: the direct transmission of a stylistic or rhythm to the reader's body, a visceral transaction with somewhat demonic overtones, replaces the translation of a psychic or spiritual essence into language. Between the body and the utterances that traverse it there is not in truth a relation, but rather a repressed continuity. Literature surges and foams wherever bodies diffuse, vomit themselves, melt into each other, and subside into a heaving syrup of language.

This practice is in part descended from the narratological analyses of Roland Barthes in texts like *Writing Degree Zero* and *The Rustle of Language*, where style is already aligned with the collapse of binary opposition and with a certain experience of space arising from the body. As opposed to the 'horizontal' process whereby words deliver their meaning when the utterance is completed so that meaning moves across them, over time, in a constant process, style belongs to a vertical axis in which

the utterance exceeds its context, representing an intermittent dynamic which is not exhausted by its punctual execution:

> Style … has only a vertical dimension, it plunges into the closed recollection of the person and achieves its opacity from a certain experience of matter; style is never anything but a metaphor, that is, equivalence of the author's literary intention and carnal structure…[159]

Barthes' conception of style is part of a theoretical system in which the dramatisation of a struggle for domination is continually inter-penetrated and undercut with a certain narrative practice, and it is here that its legacy in reading Beckett is at its clearest. Here, subjectivity takes on multiple forms and functions, their singularity unexpectedly dissolving into the frame of the work. This is a subtle mode of writing which, refusing its own constitution as an object, is defined in its dynamic relationship with the body.

'I'm the tympanum': Beckett's Rhythmed Subject

'My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else.' 'I never write a work without first saying it out loud.' 'Drama is following music.'[160] These are a few remarks made by Beckett who almost always refused to talk about the meaning and the background of his work. As they show, his works can be thought of as an attempt to become attuned (joking aside) to 'fundamental sounds'. In fact, by recalling some of his works, we can come up with a variety of sounds, for instance, cruder noises of the body, the sound of breathing, the heart beating, constant buzzing in the skull, the

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[159] Barthes, Roland. *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001, p.33.

[160] Dougald McMillan, Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre*, vol. 1. London: John Calder, 1998, pp. 15-16. See also Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta*, p. 109.

noise of rushing water in the mother's womb, or the noise of the little finger as it glides over paper and the scrape pf the pencil following it, while silence, of course, is very significant in his works. These sounds might be what Beckett means by 'fundamental sounds', though we are never sure. However, a question we are interested in asking here is not 'What does Beckett mean by "fundamental sounds"?', but 'What does Beckett's attempt to become attuned to "fundamental sounds" mean when we think of the nature of his writing and language?' Perhaps we can think of this question in light of rhythm. His effort to become attuned to 'fundamental sounds' could be regarded as an attempt to become attuned to the secret of rhythm at the limits of language.

The character in Beckett's works very often appears as the subject who experiences the limit of language or rather who *is* the limit of language itself. We could say that the subject suffers from some kind of speaking disorder or experiences that failure of speech. In *The Unnamable*, one finds the subject whose speech is the gap between 'the madness of having to speak and not being able to'. The subject 'I', who is obliged to speak of things that he cannot speak of, *is* the gap itself:

> I don't feel a mouth on me, I don't feel the jostle of words in my mouth, […]
> Words falling, you don't know where, you don't know whence, drops of silence
> through the silence, I don't feel it, I don't feel a mouth on me, nor a head, do I
> feel an ear, frankly now, do I feel an ear, well frankly now I don't, so much the
> worse, I don't feel an ear either, this is awful, make an effort, I must feel
> something, yes, I feel something, they say I feel something, I don't know what it
> is, I don't know what I feel, tell me what I feel and I'll tell you who I am, they'll
> tell me who I am, I won't understand, but the thing will be said, they'll have
> said who I am, and I'll have heard, without an ear I'll have heard, and I'll have
> said it, without a mouth I'll have said it, I'll have said it inside me, then in the
> same breath outside me, perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and
> me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in
> two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as
> foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've
> two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm
> the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong
> to either [….] [T 382-83]

The subject 'I' no longer feels a mouth or an ear. It no longer knows what it feels. It enters the space of exile where there are no words, no organs, no identity, no feeling, no thought. It loses itself in being interrupted and divided. But it speaks. Or it cannot stop speaking. It just goes on like a broken record player: 'I don't, […]', 'I feel, […]', 'they'll, […]', 'I won't, […]', 'I'll, […]', 'I'm, […]'. And in this very movement of fruitless, meaningless speech or in the failure of speech, 'I' senses itself as the vibrating tympanum: 'I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum.' In its erring at the edge of language, it paradoxically finds itself in losing itself. 'I' finds itself as the movement of oscillation between the inside and the outside, between the mind and the world, between speechlessness and uncontrollable, mad speech. The subject 'I' is the partition, the divide, the door which repeats opening and closing just like the mouth and the eye in Beckett's other works. The word 'tympanum' (a membranous resonator in a sound-producing organ) goes back to a Greek word 'tympanum' meaning 'a drum' or 'a kettledrum'. This word is akin to the Greek verb 'typtein' meaning 'to beat'. This leads us to think the subject 'I', presented here as the 'tympanum', is the embodiment of rhythm itself (or what we might call 'arch-rhythm'). Here, rhythm can be considered as the vacillation between the appropriation of the subject and its disappropriation.

One might think that the subject 'I' experiences what Lacoue-Labarthe calls 'the *émoi* (which can be heard, with the third ear, as *é-moi*: the caesura of the subject)' in 'L'Écho du sujet'. In the essay, arguing that rhythm is definable only on the basis of 'repetition (the spacing and the division in the Same, the repeated difference-from-itself of the Same)'[161], he depicts rhythm as follows:

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[161] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'L'Écho de sujet' in *Le sujet de la philosophie (Typographies 1)*. Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1979, p.285. 'The Echo of the Subject' in *Typography*, ed. Christopher Fynsk. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989, p.196. This essay, which focuses on Theodor Reik's book *The Haunting Melody*, starts with a question concerning the connection between the autobiographical compulsion and music obsession. Later it shows that 'la hantise du rythme [the obsession with rhythm]' is precisely what connects the two.

[…] it should perhaps be recognised that rhythm is not only a musical category. Nor, simply, is it the figure. Rather, it would be something between beat and figure that never fails to designate mysteriously the 'ethical'; for the word (and perhaps already the concept) already implies – at the very edge of what of the subject can appear, manifest, or figure itself – the type and the stamp or impression, the pre-inscription [le type et la frappe, la pré-inscrption] which, conforming us in advance, determines us by disappropriating us and makes us inaccessible to ourselves. A pre-inscription that sends us back to the chaos that obviously was not schematised by *us* so that we should appear as what we are. In this sense, perhaps, 'every soul is a rhythm knot'. We ('we') are rhythmed.[162]

'L'*émoi*' is the moment of rhythmic interruption, 'the caesura of the subject', which sends the subject back to the chaos and disappropriates it, disrupting the narcissistic assurance and immediate certitude. But at the same time, it is 'the condition of possibility of the subject'. It is structural. It makes the subject possible. It is important to note that rhythm is described as 'the type and the stamp or impression, the pre-inscription [le type et la frappe, la pré-inscrption]' – the imprint – and that as such it is the repetition.[163]

To return to the subject 'I' in *The Unnamable*, we might say that the vibrating subject which says 'I'm the tympanum' is this 'rhythmed' subject, the 'rhythmed knot'. It only attains itself in being divided and torn asunder or in losing itself. It is

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[162] *Ibid*. p.292-3; trans., p.202.

[163] In *Heraclitus Seminar*, speaking of a lecture 'Sprache als Rythmus' ['Language as Rhythm'] and a book *Musik und Rythmus bei den Griechen* by Thrasybulos Georgiades, Heidegger stresses that Georgiades understands rhythm not as 'flow' but as 'imprint [Gepräge]'. According to Heidegger, Georgiades cites a verse of Archilochos, 'Recognise which rhythm holds men', and a passage from Aeschylus' *Prometheus* where Prometheus says of himself, '…in this rhythm I am bound'. Heidegger writes, 'He, who is held immobile in the iron chains of his confinement, is "rhythmed", that is, joined [gefügt]'. Georgiades points out that humans do not make rhythm; rather for the Greeks, the measure is the substrate of language, namely the language that approaches us.' (Maurice Blanchot, too, cites this line by Archilochoes and Prometheus when he speaks of rhythm in *L'Écriture de désastre*); Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink, *Heraklit*. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1970, pp.91-2; *Heraclitus Seminar*, trans. Charles H. Seibert. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993, p.55.

the site of imprint. In fact, one of the significant motifs in *The Unnamable* involves a hidden imprinting device which seems to be at work in the subject 'I'. The power of this device only *appears* as the power in the paradoxical moment of rhythmic interruption when the self becomes inaccessible to the self. Now let us see what kind of power is involved in this device:

> Not to be able to open my mouth without proclaiming them, and our fellowship, that's what they imagine they'll have me reduced to. It's a poor trick that consists in ramming a set of words down your gullet on the principle that you can't bring them up without being branded as belonging to their breed. But I'll fix their gibberish for them. I never understood a word of it in any case – not a word of the stories it spews, like gobbets in a vomit. My inability to absorb, my genius for forgetting, are more than they reckoned with. Dear incomprehension, it's thanks to you I'll be myself, in the end. Nothing will remain of all the lies they have glutted me with. […] On their own ground, with their own arms, I'll scatter them, and their miscreated puppets. Perhaps I'll find traces of myself by the same occasion [….], yes, they've inflicted the notion of time on me too [….] They loaded me down with their trappings and stoned me through the carnival. I'll sham dead now, whom they couldn't bring to life, and my monster's carapace will rot off me. But it's entirely a matter of voices, no other metaphor is appropriate. They've blown me up with their voices, like a balloon, and even as I collapse it's them I hear. Who, them? [T 324-5]

Wandering at the edge of 'their' language, 'I' betrays the secret of the device, of a 'poor trick' that makes the 'I' speak in 'their' language. It consists 'in ramming a set of words down your gullet on the principle that you can't bring them up without being branded as belonging to their breed'. This shows that the essential function of this device is 'branding' – 'imprinting'. Whatever language 'I' speaks, whatever voice 'I' utters, it is always branded as 'theirs'. It is only through this 'branding' or 'imprinting' that 'I' becomes 'I'. In other words, it is the power of branding, cutting, or even marking as a sinner (as the etymology of the word 'brand' indicates) that makes 'I' *be* in the world, that *gives* 'I' time, language, and meaning in the most fundamental sense.[164] This device has a tremendous power which encloses and

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[164] The word 'brand' meant 'torch' and 'sword' in Middle English. The acts of burning and

entraps the subject within time, language, and meaning, without the subject noticing it. In the passage above, we sense a great resistance of 'I' to this imprinting device and hostility towards it: 'I' mumbles, 'I'll fix their gibberish for them', 'On their own ground, with their own arms, I'll scatter them, and their miscreated puppets'. 'Their' power is revealed as this imprinting device, and although 'I' is well aware that it cannot escape from it, 'I' never ceases to escape from it. For 'I' needs to find the traces of its own voice which is not branded as 'theirs'. Here 'I' appears as the subject that is always escaping from the confinement of 'they', from the invisible power of the imprinting device as such. Later in the text, 'I' utters, 'I must go on. So I'll go on. Air, air, I'll seek air, air in time, the air of time, and in space, in my head, that's how I'll go on.' Speaking, seeking a way out.

'The Space of a Door': Living in Vacillation

'No, Mother, the motion alone is not enough, I must hear the feet, however faint they fall.' In *Footfalls*, watching a woman with disheveled grey hair pacing to and fro on the stage, the audience hears this line through another woman's coming from the dark upstage. Like this line, Beckett perhaps had to hear the feet, the steps, and the beat of his writing. He had to have an im-print, a trace or mark of the motion, and the rhythm that maintains his writing at the extreme edge of language. But it should be noted that this mark is at once the absence of mark (and the mark of absence.) It is an imprint which marks while effacing itself. This echoes what Maurice Blanchot says about writing: 'And such is the responsibility of writing – writing which distinguishes itself by deleting from itself all distinguishing marks, which is to say

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cutting are involved here. Interestingly, in one sense of the word, it refers to a mark put on criminals with a hot iron, which cab be easily linked to what has happened to 'I' in this passage. The word 'brand' is associated with such ideas as sin, disgrace, law, territory, ownership, manufacture, classification, death, etc.

perhaps, ultimately, by effacing itself (right away *and* at length: this takes all of time), for it seems to leave indelible of indiscernible traces. [Responsabilité d'une écriture qui se marquer en se démarquant, c'est-à-dire peut-être – à la limite – en s'effaçant (aussitôt comme à la longue – il faut tout le temps pour cela), dans la mesure où elle semble laisser des traces éternelles ou oisives.]'[165] Beckett's language finds itself in the space of rhythm which consists of the ambiguity of imprint ['se marquer'/ 'se démarquer']. Especially in his later works, we see language detach itself from its function of carrying meaning (while, *at the same time*, keeping its own particular logic of signification), and open itself as a movement which marks in erasing itself: language becomes waves, folds, veils, mist, dust, whirlwind… Detachment from signification here does not suggest the undecidability of the signified or that Beckett's words are vague or unclear. This detachment is the state of not being bound by the task of signifying something, or an engagement with the movement of language that exceeds signification. In other words, the detachment points to the duplicity of language: language exists inside the logic of signification *and* yet outside of it.

In Beckett's works, we can recall imprints that mark by disappearing: 'On' in his English text is one of them. The repetition of 'on' produces rhythm, which maintains the relation between the work and the reader at the place where there is no longer any development of story, pronoun stability, or character emotions. *The Unnamable* moves to the rhythm of 'on'. 'I', the condemned speaker, says, 'To go on, I still call that on, to go on and get on has been my only care, if not always in a straight line, at least in obedience to the figure assigned to me, there was never any room in my life for anything else.' [T 320] The subject 'I', the work, the writer, the reader are not only inseparable from the rhythm of 'on' but also initially and essentially linked by it. 'On' is the relation itself. In *Worstward Ho*, the rhythm of 'on' is repeated almost in a manner of chanting. The text 'begins': 'On. Say on. Be

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[165] Maurice Blanchot, *L'Ecriture du* désastre. Paris: Gallimard, 1980, p.58; *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, p.34.

said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.' [NO 89] And it 'ends': 'Said nohow on.' There are other works that are carried by the resonance of 'on'. In Beckett's works 'on' imprints itself both auditorily and visually. To our ears, 'on' resounds as familiar, a sound we have heard before. It might sound like the beating of our heart or the sound of breathing in and out. To our eyes, 'on' looks to be ceaselessly plodding and hopping on a white paper surface. Looking at 'on' as the mirror image of 'no', we could say that 'on' and 'no' are doubles or shadows of each other; the inseparable relation between the two bears resemblance to that of 'pseudo couples' like Vladimir and Estragon, Hamm and Clov, Winnie and Willie, Mercier and Camier. If we regard 'on' and 'no' as a footprint and negation, the French word 'pas' immediately comes to mind. In fact the French title of *Footfalls* is 'Pas'. This 'on' or 'pas' is probably what Blanchot calls 'le piétinement de ce qui n'avance jamais' that he thinks *The Unnamable* makes us hear.[166] We are frequently reminded by Beckett that 'on' indicates not being on the way anywhere but simply being 'on the way', being in the 'between', motion in motionless. Writing goes on and on toward somewhere infinitely distant, yet it stays at the same point. It never makes a progress, therefore it never arrives anywhere. The voice in *Company* says, 'Having covered in your day some twenty-five thousand leagues or roughly thrice the girdle. And never once overstepped a radius of one from home.' [WO **50**] Or we could say that the rhythm in Beckett is what stops and interrupts the movement *and* at the same time keeps it going. Moreover, we can add that the letter 'o' of 'on' looks as if it were a hole made in the page – 'Black hole agape on all. Inletting all. Outletting all.' [*Worstward Ho*, WO **90**] It looks like a sign, a trace of the unknown.

We experience the imprint effacing itself in various other places. For example, the resonance of the phrases 'More' and 'till in the end' in *Rockaby* has this ambiguity of imprint. The play starts with a portrait of an old woman facing front on the stage, dressed in black evening gown with jet beads. She sits immobile in a rocking chair. The light starts with a spotlight on her face, and after a long pause

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[166] Maurice Blanchot, 'Où maintenant? Qui maintenant?' in *Le livre à venir*, p.290.

moves to the rocking chair. The woman utters an opening word, 'More'. And the chair starts rocking mechanically without assistance from her, and the audience hears the recorded voice of this woman:

till in the end

the day came

in the end came

close of a long day

when she said

to herself

whom else

time she stopped

time she stopped

going to and fro

all eyes

all sides

high and low

for another

another like herself

another creature like herself

a little like

going to and fro

all eyes

all sides

high and low

for another

till in the end

close of a long day

to herself

whom else

time she stopped

time she stopped

going to and fro

all eyes

all sides

high and low

for another

another living soul

one other living soul

going to and fro

all eyes like herself

all sides high and low

for another

another like herself

a little like

going to and fro

till in the end

close of a long day

to herself

whom else

time she stopped

going to and fro

time she stopped

time she stopped

This is how the play begins. We get an impression that the swinging rhythm of the rocking chair, almost the rhythm of a cradle, brings the voice into existence and maintains it. The word 'More', uttered by the woman at the play's start, is repeated four times, and the phrase 'Till in the end' (or 'So in the end') of the recorded voice is repeated regularly. This almost works as a frame that gives a structure not only to each section but also to the entire play. The sounds of 'More' and 'Till in the end' engrave themselves in our ears and stay with us, even making us anticipate their

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return. Together with many other phrases, including 'time she stopped', 'going to and fro', 'for another / another like herself', these phrases haunt our ears by repeating their 'come and go' – by appearing in disappearing, marking in effacing. They have the force to carry us into the rhythm that they articulate. This rhythm is revealed as excess itself or lack itself, as hinted by the repetition of 'More' and that of 'Till in the end' deprived of a main clause[167]. There is no stability of a complete sentence and meaning here. Each phrase floats and vacillates to a precarious rhythm. A sentence can no longer close itself and is left half-open to absence. It is like the mouth of an old woman in *Not I*: the mouth suspended on the stage tells us the story of a 'she' who stands in a busy shopping centre motionless and staring into space with 'mouth half open as usual', and stands in court speechless and staring into space with 'mouth half open as usual'. The half-open nature of a sentence also echoes the old eyelids that Malone speaks of which are 'all red and worn that seem hard set to meet' [T 233]. To think of the temporality of the play, we could say that 'More' and 'Till in the end' mark or re-mark the absence of the present or the abysmal interval or gap between 'no longer' and 'not yet'. The figure 'she' has slipped into this enigmatic interval of time where the beginning and the end are suspended. 'She' continued to wander outside looking for 'another like herself'. 'She' continues to go to and fro 'all eyes all sides high and low'. But this no longer ends, for the beginning has not yet come. Ironically it is this sense of the absence of temporal frame that gives a frame, This singular temporality is maintained by the rhythm produced by the repetition of 'More' and 'Till in the end' and by the swinging rhythm of the chair which rocks by itself like a machine. A machine that is half-open to the outside, absence, death, madness. In brief, the singing movement of rocking chair, the repetition of stop and

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[167] In *The Unnamable*, we find the similar motif of a half-open sentence, that is, of forgetting an apodosis: 'If only I could make an effort, an effort of attention, to try and discover what's happening, what's happening to me, what then, I don't know, I've forgotten my apodosis, but I can't, I don't hear any more, I'm sleeping, they call that sleeping, there they are again, we'll have to start killing them again, I hear this horrible noise, coming back takes time, […]' [T 402]. The word 'apodosis' is derived from the Greek word 'apodosis' which means 'return', or 'answering clause'. Its verb 'apodidonai' means 'to give back, to deliver'. In the passage above, 'I' is no longer capable of returning, giving back, answering, which is to say, closing a sentence. A sentence is left half-open.

advancement, is a manifestation of the rhythm in Beckett's work. This is where the ambiguity of imprinting (marking/effacing) is preserved.

Another instance of language marking in erasing itself is Beckett's use of 'it' in several English texts. The following fragment from *Company* depicts it well:

> In another dark or in the same another devising it all for company. This is at sight seems clear. But as the eye dwells it grows obscure. Indeed the longer the eye dwells the obscurer it grows. Till the eye closes and freed from pore the mind inquires, What does this mean? What finally does this mean that at first sight seemed clear? Till it the mind too closes as it were. As the window might close of a dark empty room. The single window giving on outer dark. Then nothing more. No. Unhappily no. Pangs of faint light and stirrings still. Unformulable gropings of the mind. Unstillable.

'It' changes. 'It' turns. 'It' repeats. Almost like a wind, 'it' quickly grazes one sense and then another, or vacillates between different senses: 'it all', the proposition, the eye, the mind. 'It' is the change itself. We can never determine 'it' semantically, for 'it' does not carry any meaning. But 'it' *is* there as a redoubling veil or disappearing sound. In its trembling and turning, 'it' obscures itself, 'it' turns itself away. All 'it' leaves to us is the confusion, the vacillation of the mind, 'stirrings still', 'soubresauts'. This is how 'it' inscribes itself on us in erasing itself, how 'it' leaves us an imprint. An imprint that is 'unstillable'.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Let us go back, at this point, to the opening part of this chapter, to Beckett's 'obligation to express'. If all his life Beckett has been obsessed with physical or 'narrative' immobility, then his language never ceases to move: he watched over its movement in order to prevent its freezing and preserve its 'unstillable' vacillation between sense and non-sense. The rigor and strictness with which he directed his theatre works tell the best part of the story.

It is well-known that Beckett often expressed the need for great precision in the production of his own dramatic pieces. For example, when Beckett himself directed *Endspiel* in Berlin in 1967, he said to he actor who played Clov, 'You should never run slowly, that's very dangerous for the play.'[168] In the case of the premiere production of *Not I* in 1972, according to his biographer Deirdre Bair, 'Beckett instructed Schneider [the director] that he wanted Tandy [the actress who played Mouth] to be strapped against a backdrop so here would be no movement on stage except her mouth. He did not want the actress to move her head or hands, or to take any gesture that might possibly induce her to attempt to contribute something more to the part then he had indicated in the script.'[169] Just by looking at some of the notes that Beckett added to his theatre pieces, we can sense the absolute necessity for the meticulous care he took for his work to *be* a work. For instance, about the actress' costume in *Rockaby*, Beckett writes, 'Black lacy high-necked evening gown. Long sleeves. Jet sequins to glitter when rocking. Incongruous frivolous headdress set askew with extravagant trimmings to catch light when rocking.' About the seat in *Come and Go*, he says, 'narrow benchlike seat, without back, just long enough to accommodate three figures almost touching. As little visible as possible. It should not be clear what they are sitting on.' His note about the three-fold voice in *That Time* is extremely important for the work: 'Moments of one and the same voice A B C relay one another without solution of continuity – apart from two 10'' breaks. Yet the switch from one to another must be clearly perceptible.'

The rigor that we recognise in Beckett indicates vigilance. It is vigilance *against* danger – against the 'neatness of identification' or the oblivion of 'betrayal'. Beckett watches over the movement of language to prevent its freezing and preserve the vacillation between sense and non-sense. In other words, he is vigilant against the hidden power of the imprint which entraps and encloses us, which makes us cling to

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[168] Enoch Brater, *Why Beckett*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1989, p.83.

[169] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, p. 625.

it without noticing it, whether the imprint is something that frightens and haunts our minds, or something that protects us from all sorts of enemies in life. At the same time, vigilance means vigilance *over* the danger. It is watching over and guarding the danger, that is, preserving the movement of danger itself – a secret. Preserving a secret as it is. Guarding the force of the centre in *Quad*, for example. For the movement of danger is *there* as a secret (indeed Beckett calls the centre a 'danger zone'). In this sense, four players who shuffle their feet in a quadrate can be called 'four guardians'; this echoes the twelve men in *Ill Seen Ill Said* who guard the figure 'she' as a secret by 'letting her disappear'. Vigilance over the danger means keeping in mind that it is the danger that watches over us even prior to our watching over the danger. The danger watches over us, just like the floating eye, which belongs to nowhere, constantly watching over an old woman in *Ill Seen Ill Said*. '*The ease of dying*: such would be the danger watching over us [*La facilité de mourir*: tel serait le danger qui veille sur nous],' writes Blanchot, suggesting how our vigilance is made possible by the vigilance *of* danger itself.[170] This sentence itself requires us to experience it with the greatest vigilance possible. For when we face it, it becomes the extreme danger. 'The ease of dying [la facilité de mourir]' becomes danger, for the attraction of death makes one feel 'wanting to die [l'envie de mourir]' and we are apt to submit to its strong influence. Death attracts one to transgress the limit of life and reach for the beyond. The danger here involves the inattentiveness of the person who dies inadvertently, whether he or she dies or continues living with attention. But the rapidity of death making this inattentiveness possible is *at the same time* capable of preventing one from lingering on it. Hence 'the danger that watches over us'. The danger watching over us, 'the ease of dying', can guard us. In other words, the vigilance *of* danger enables us to live with great familiarity and proximity with death without falling into a certain heaviness. The vigilance *of* danger gives us vigilance. It gives us vigilance over *and* against the danger.

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[170] Maurice Blanchot, 'La facilité de mourir' in *L'Amitié*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971, pp. 183-185; 'The Ease of Dying' in *Friendship*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 160-162.

Imitating Maurice Blanchot who says 'the danger that watches over us', we could say that in Beckett's works rhythm watches over us. The opening and closing of the eye, the swinging of the rocker, steps pacing to and fro, breathing in and out, the heart's beating – all of these maintain our being. That is to say, rhythm sustain the subject at the extreme edge of its life. We recall that in *Film* the character played by Buster Keaton takes his pulse before ascending the stairs, after shutting and locking the door, and after ripping all the photographs of attention from his childhood. The pulse that he feels on these occasions could be thought of as the rhythm that keeps his life going. This is the vigilance of rhythm. Rhythm watches from the threshold of life and death.

'In this rhythm I am caught': Encounters of Voice and Body

While oscillation and vacillation are very important movements when we think of rhythm in Beckett's work, the motif of enclosure found in a variety of places, especially in his later works, seems also essential. Very often the experience of rhythm takes place in a dark closed space such as a rotunda, a skull, or a closed room. For instance, in *Malone Dies*, the narrator Malone, who lies motionless on a bed in a closed room, waiting for the moment of his death, writes:

> A few lines to remind me that I too subsist. He has not come back. How long ago is it now? I don't know. Long. And I? Indubitably going, that's all that matters. Whence this assurance? Try and think. I can't. Grandiose suffering. I am swelling. What if I should burst? The ceiling rises and falls, rises and falls, rhythmically, as when I was a foetus. Also to be mentioned a noise of rushing water, phenomenon *mutatis mutandis* perhaps analogous to that of the mirage, in the desert. The window. I shall not see it again. Why? Because, to my grief, I cannot turn my head. Leaden light again, thick, eddying, riddled with little tunnels through to brightness, perhaps I should say air, sucking air. All is ready. Except me. I am being given, if I may venture the expression, birth to into death, such is my impression. The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence.

Favorable presentation I trust. My head will be the last to die. Haul in your hands. I can't. The render rent. My story ended I'll be living yet. Promising lag. That is the end of me. I shall say I no more. [T 182-83]

Feeling rhythm and inscribing it reminds Malone of his subsistence, as if only rhythm could articulate his sense of living. Being enclosed in a room that expands and contracts repeatedly like a womb, Malone subsists like a dying foetus at the edge of his life. 'I am being given, […], birth to into death,' he writes. In this closed space and as this space – the womb/tomb where birth and death are reversed and folded together – rhythm pronounces itself. At the same time, rhythm binds Malone and captures him in an interval – the site of 'the render rent [la déchirante déchirée]'. This is where all possibilities (including the possibility of dying, of grandiose suffering, of saying 'I', even the desert mirage) are put at stake, or 'épuisées' to borrow Gilles Deleuze's word.[171]

Malone's experience of rhythm as enclosure leads us to Blanchot's lines on rhythm:

'*Know what rhythm holds men*.' (Archilochus.) Rhythm or language. Prometheus: '*In this rhythm I am caught*.' Changing configuration. What is rhythm? The danger of rhythm's enigma.[172]

That we should speak in order to make sense of rhythm – which is not sensible – perceptible and meaningful [pour fair sens du rythme et rendre sensible et significant le rythme hors sens]: such is the mystery which traverses us; we will not free ourselves from it by revering it as sacred.[173]

'In this rhythm, I am caught.' I am bound by rhythm, held by it, and seized in it. I am 'imprinted'. This is perhaps the 'moment' when the subject feels, 'I'm the tympanum'. The 'moment' of rhythmic interruption which, at once, keeps everything

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[171] Gilles Deleuze, 'L'Épuisé' in *Quad et autres pieces pout la télévision suivi de L'Épuisé par Gilles*. Paris: Minuit, 1992, pp.55-106.

[172] Maurice Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre*, p.14; *The Writing of the Disaster*, p.5.

[173] Ibid., p.174; trans., p.113.

going. The 'moment' of appropriation *and* disappropriation of the subject in which the subject finds itself in losing itself. It is the moment of excess which does not permit speech. Only immobility speaks at this 'moment' of enclosure. Interestingly, as Blanchot suggests, the enigma of enclosure encloses us. It captures and traverses us by imposing on us the impossible task of speaking so that rhythm which is not sensible can be made sensible, 'rendre sensible et significant le rythme hors sens'. Hence the infinite redoubling of enclosure. The mystery of rhythm from which we will not be delivered.[174] This suffocating space in which the subject is hopelessly trapped is, again, reminiscent of Kristeva's *chora*. Here the subject is flooded with sensations, which are necessarily subdued, nuanced, and composed within the music of the syntax of Beckett's texts.

In *Footfalls*, a play written in 1975, May treads a narrow strip on the stage as though on a phamtom treadmill, or like a sentry, guarding her pain, whilst the voice of her dead mother sounds in the auditorium – they alternate speeches, interspersed with some dialogue. From the theatrical cliché 'treading the boards', Beckett creates a chilling and moving dramatic image of an old age endlessly repeating her grief at the loss of a mother, stepping out the close, narrow limits of her maddened solitude. Beckett stresses in the stage directions that May's steps must have 'a clearly audible rhythmic tread', and the 'woman's voice', in her fourth sentence beats out the steps May makes, her voice 'synchronous with the steps' [CDW 399]. The distinction is blurred between May and the other voice. Beckett strictly avoids saying 'her mother's voice': though May and V talk to each other as daughter and mother, in

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[174] In *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot describes the paradoxical site where the writer is at once excluded and enclosed by the work. It seems that this site exactly corresponds to the experience of 'In this rhythm, I am caught': 'Every writer, every artist is acquainted with the moment at which he is cast out and apparently excluded by the work in progress. The work holds him off, the circle in which he no longer has access to himself has closed, yet he is enclosed therein because the work, unfinished, will not let him go. Strength does not fail him; this is not a moment of sterility or fatigue, unless, as may well be the case, fatigue itself is simply the form this exclusion takes. This ordeal is awesome. What the author sees is a cold immobility from which he cannot turn away, but near which he cannot linger. It is like an enclave, a preserve within space, airless without light, where a part of himself, and more than that, his truth, his solitary truth, suffocates in an incomprehensible separation.' *L'Espace littéraire*, p.59; *The Space of Literature*, pp.53-54.

both of their long speeches they show themselves capable of mimicking such dialogue in monologue. Both May and mother may very well be each other's fictions.

The play's language is gently lyrical with the rhythms of dying falls resolving into simple rhymes. It begins in a rhyming stride:

M: Were you asleep?
V: Deep asleep. [Pause.] I heard you in my deep sleep. [Pause.] There is no sleep so deep I would not hear you there.

The extraordinary nature of the majority of the rhymes is their consonance with the title of the play, *Footfalls*: 'It all' which ends both sections, repeated eleven times in a five-page play; 'nightfall', 'wall', and the half-rhymes 'till', 'still', 'tell' and 'little' are repeated so often as to make the sound the dominant one of the play, rhyming not only with the title but also on the word in the text: 'I mean, Mother, that I must hear my feet, however faint they fall' [CDW 401].

All these points give a secondary sense to V's speech:

V: Will you never have done? [Pause.] Will you never have done…revolving it all?
M: [Halting.] It?
V: It all. [Pause.] In your poor mind. [Pause.]
[M resumes pacing.] [CDW 402]

'It's all in the mind' sounds out through the phrasing, transforming the stage into May's mind, having her rhyming tread and voice seem to echo off the walls of her skull. Fictionalising habits begin to sound like the self-soothing rituals of mad memory.

As Beckett's stage directions indicate, many of the footfall-rhymes occur during a halt in May's pacing, or cause her to halt. The voice assumes the rhymes in the halts of the imagination. The auditor begins to feel and hear the strangest supposition: that the dominant sound in both heard voices is rhyming with the word that *names*

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May's physical action, the sound of her pacing. Stress-lines issue forth from the word that defines her pacing, translating bodily movement into the rhythms fabricated by phoneme repetition and full rhyme. May's footfalls beat out a rhythm that both voices seem to follow ('synchronous with the steps') and also impose, through the mind's translation of the body's action ('footfall, footfall …', etc.), a rhyming pattern. The same air that had shuddered to the audible tread of May's pacing beats with the returning stress-lines and stress-patterns of the sounds of that tread translated into voiced breath. The echo of the rhymes in the voice resounds in its pauses, whilst the voice itself rhymes clearest in the halts of the body: the voiced breath is at once echoing, remembering, and conserving the body's rhythm. The footfalls have become pantings in the breath that in rhyming the heard noise and its rhythm into the ghostly externalities of the voice's acoustics, gathers the stage and what is seen and heard into voice. The inner rhythm of May's history takes up the body into staged mind, just as the body and its halts seem, inversely, to generate the voices and their pauses.

This two-way, simultaneous rhyming transformation of voice-breath and the sound of the body on its way is deepened by the gathering of weight of the story the voices have to tell. The two voices re-enact the beginning of May's habit when very young and, it is hinted, soon after her mother's death. The pacing starts first within a church at nightfall, then within the room where she was born, this retreat strangely confusing her own life with her mother's taken away. This doubling is emphasised further in the subsequent strange and dislocated story May tells of Mrs. Winter and her daughter, an argument at the table where the mother swears she heard Amy respond 'Amen' in the church when the daughter was not there. The tale is a close, internal inversion of the present state of May's mind, the grey ghostly semblance in the church (that could either be mother or daughter), the imagined voice on the stage twisted into the mother's mishearing of Amy's response. May's habit seems to be reproducing her own actions soon before and after her mother's death – she had tended for her dying mother for years, and then her grave (the church). She seems to be adopting the rhythm of her mother's illness from the rhymes upon the pacings of

her own past service and mourning at her mother's bed- and grave-side.[175] Though we are looking at the stage inhabited and generated by the fictional procedures of May and/or mother, the stage is transformed by the intensity of story and rhyme into the physical, external arena for May's grief, wasted and possessed, shuffling pain. The rhymes that bring 'It all' and her footfalls together as echoes of each other spell out in the air of the auditorium the conceptual rhyme between the rhythm of tormented remembering and the habits of the body, a rhyme as much a cause as a symptom of the stage of mind we see. What had seemed the mere performative of narrative, dramatic power is heard anew as the true painful fabrications of displaced memory and its rituals.

How the title-rhymes deepen and are deepened by the substance of the voice's story is strengthened by the confirmation of Beckett's French version *Pas*, where the dominant sound is also created by rhymes on the title, an extraordinary translating achievement. The 'It all' section from *Footfalls* runs in the French:

> V: N'auras-tu jamais fini de ressasser tout ça?
> M s'immobilise de face G.
> M: Ca?
> V: Tout ça. [Un temps.] Dans ta pauvre tête. [Un temps.] Tout ça. [Un temps.] Tout ça.
> [Un temps. M repart.]

The rest of the text is similarly preoccupied with the 'pas' assonance: 'déja' and 'jadis' are repeated, the preposition 'à' after 'jouer' and 'se mit' is emphasised by pause-breaks. There are three extended sections of involved and gravely comic repetitions in the dialogues, one of 'pas là', the other two almost ludicrously alternating 'ça' and 'commença' and 'suffit pas' and 'pas'. 'Pas' is heard discretely within phrases such as 'Cette impassibilité apparente!' and 'pauvre bras'.

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[175] 'It is the revolving, the incessant reliving of a traumatic experience which clearly is the foundation of the insistent pattern of seven steps, turnabout, seven steps, turnabout, seven steps'. See Martin Esslin, 'A Theatre of Stasis: Beckett's Later Plays', in Patrick McCarthy ed., *Critical Essays on Samuel Beckett*, Boston: Hall, 1986, pp.192-198.

What the French confirms is the necessity of reading and seeing *Pas* as bringing simultaneously before the mind's eye and the physical eye the suddenness of contacts recognised. The rhymes bring voice and body together. This dislocated, revolving pain of being possessed by a voice, at once May's own become her mother's and her mother's heard, comes into contact with May's body. The body halts and revolutions and ghostly look may be a haunting of the mind, or created by its words; none the less they are physically *there* on stage. The rhymes bring all four into complicated contact. May's memory inhabits and is inhabited by the mechanics of stage directions. The 'pas' and 'footfall' rhymes identify the voice of the past with the movements of the present. They bring them together. The body is at once a manifestation of the accent and rhythm of the voice of memory, and the creator of it. The mother's presence is recalled out of the dark by May's while being, action, and voice. This is brought into rhyming contact with the other need, to hear the feet fall however faintly; in other words to hear herself alive.[176]

These meetings of memory, voice, and body change the stage into space of deep rhyme and rhythm. The space May paces out, the footfalls that sound in the air and in the words fashion a habitation, a manner of habitual life out of the internal shudders, torments and revolutions of the imagination's struggle with itself. That habitation, though it brings no comfort, brings May's mind into intimate rhyming touch with her past and her flesh. A remembered life is discovered, made out of madness, itself fashioned out of pure theatre.

The 'footfall' and 'pas'-rhymes then, echo in the audience's auditory memory, rhyming with the audible tread of the actress's pacing. Beckett brings this voice-sound link into rhyming relation with May's own consciousness of the mysterious but necessary identity between the voice of memory and her body and life in the present. The 'pas'-rhymes in Beckett work, from *Mercier and Camier* onwards,

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[176] May soothes herself with these multiple recognitions and rhythmical procedures. Beckett told David Warrilow to treat *Ohio Impromptu* 'like a bedtime story and let it be soothing.' [Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.223].

force into rough unity the feelings of isolation and detachment of a prisoner (where the single fictionalising mind is ghosted of all real relation with the past) and of essential human continuity (the mind in remembering step with its body and the body of all past human selves). By so doing they succeed in crossing the aspects of the self in precisely the manner which Krapp most earnestly desires. As Rosette Lamont put it, the two voices in *La Dernière bande* trace a 'double mouvement' in the air: 'course vers un but intellectuel, encore éloigné, de celui qui fut par rapport à celui qui écoute, retour de celui qui est vers celui qui semble être, sa presence rendue vivante, presque tangible par la bande.' What the elder Krapp seeks is 'un point de rencontre dans l'entrecroisement des deux mouvements, course vers l'avenir, recour au passé, ou aux passés. Il se retrouvera dans l'adieu à l'amour, épisode auquel l'intelligence n'a pas de part' ['Krapp, un anti-Proust', 347-348]. Krapp finds a release, a real 'point de rencontre' in a powerful nostalgia for what his intelligence had detached his fictional self from, just as May's selves discover their 'entrecroisement' when the 'pas'-rhymes identify her urge to hear herself alive not as mere theatricalised performative but as the dislocated, narrative voice of memory. The habits of failure rediscover the roots of feeling that had been abandoned in the initial decision to create an abstract drama. Acts of memory in the terrible predicament of Krapp and May attempt to counter the ravages of loss by replaying and retreading the moment of abandonment.

These last sections have sought to establish Beckett's rhymes as signals or creators of memory-encounters in the prose and drama that marry traces of emotion with the purely abstract and fictionalised words and contexts that seem to belie them. The move from a linguistic encounter, between two languages as between rhyme-fellows, to a meeting of selves, minds, and the life of other bodies is actuated by a pause in the imagination that concedes and allows for the persistence of a double consciousness and its two-way echoes. In *All Strange Away*, the narrator, by virtue of his tiny concessions to Emmo's and Emma's emotional life, allows into his text the sighing breath of an intimacy and its rhyming life:

no sound, well say a sound too faint for mortal ear [22]

Memories of past felicity no save one with faint ripple of sorrow of a lying side by side [37]

no sound and so exhaled only for the moment with faint sound, Fancy dead, to which now add for old mind's sake sorrow vented in simple sighing sound black vowel a [43]

no other sounds than these and never were that is than sop to mind faint sighing sound for tremor of sorrow at faint memory of a lying side by side and fancy murmured dead. [43-4]

The narrator's voice, in these tiny concessions, shifts into rhyming mode. He allows an affecting memory to ripple through his detached prose (the detached tones of a narrative technician, arranging his fictional characters), a memory registered in the ranked *s* sounds. The faint ripple of the stress-line along *ai* and *s* culminates on 'side by side', the prose rhyme recall of 'simple sighing sound' and 'sorrow' preparing for and initiating a sorrowful, sighing accent on the very words 'side by side', discovering the emotional connotations of the summative key phrase.

The 'faint memory', the one memory of past felicity the voice lets slip by, inhabits his voice with all the emotional history implicit in Emma's and Emmo's pose and retrospectively alters his technical narrative voice into one that desires to imagine love and its memories. The stress-lane build-up, the manner in which it emotionally accentuates 'side by side', releasing connotations of remembered affections, mimes the narrator's failure to differentiate himself from the real urgencies of momentary sops to mind, faint memories fitfully imagined. The shift from the acoustic to the semantic rhyme may be a mere matter of imagination, but Beckett, by dramatizing the voices imagining the imagination of it, like Malone dreaming of dreaming, like May hearing her mother hear her and her footfalls together, shows how crucial such mere matter is in rediscovering the gentle suddenness of felt memory when all has been abandoned.

The voice may, only for the moment, for old mind's sake, pause then touch and meet its own humanity and externalised memory. But the emotional power of the

rhyme-accents bears witness to the importance of these memory-encounters and the way they alter the detached perspectives of the whole text within which they occur. The rhymes cross 'the simple feeling and its voice' with the self-accompaniment of the foreign tongue of the stranger, the other, the body on its way to create bonds of feeling that last long enough to sound like memory felt and recognised.

Beckett's Pendulum

So far I have tried to show that each of Beckett's works, the later ones in particular, exists as a rhythmic whole. But it should be noted, after I have analysed a number of his later works at their textual, syntactical, visual, and audio-phonetic levels, that the rhythm in Beckett does not appear in the world in the same manner as a thing, like a pen, a stone, or a tree. In *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation*, Deleuze holds that rhythm is the vital force which cannot be reduced to the level of seeing or hearing. Rhythm is the force by virtue of which an original unity of multiple senses appears, for example, in the paintings of Francis Bacon:

> Between a colour, a taste, a touch, a smell, a sound, a weight, there should be an existential communication that constitutes the 'pathic' (nonrepresentative) moment of *the* sensation […] It is therefore the painter's task to *make one see [faire voir]* a kind of original unity of the senses and to cause a multisensible Figure to appear visually. But this operation is possible only if the sensation of any particular domain (here the visual sensation) is directly plugged into a vital force [directement en prise sur une puissance vitale] that exceeds all domains and traverses them. This power [puissance] is Rhythm, which is more profound than vision, hearing, etc. And rhythm appears as music when it invests the auditory level, as painting when it invests the visual level […] It is diastolic-systolic: the world that catches me by closing itself down on me, the self that opens itself to the world, and opens up the world itself [le monde qui me prend moi-même en se fermant sur moi, le moi qui s'ouvre au monde, et l'ouvre lui-même.][177]

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[177] The translation here is based on Peggy Kamuf's translation of the same passage in *The*

Developing his argument with Deleuze's understanding of rhythm, Nancy says, 'rhythm does not *appear*; it is the beat of appearing [le battement de l'apparaître] insofar as appearing consists simultaneously and indissociably in the movement of coming and going of forms or presence in general.'[178] So the rhythm itself, 'la puissance vitale', would be considered as the condition of the opening *and* at once closing of 'there is', 'il y a', as the condition for the possibility of a form's initial appearance. This nature of rhythm might be precisely what Beckett is concerned with in his writing. Especially, the movement of opening and closing of eyes and mouths that recurs in his work seems to be essentially related to this secret nature of rhythm. In *Fizzles*, for example, Beckett writes, 'Quite still then all this time eyes open when discovered then closed then opened and closed again no other movement any kind though of course not still at all when suddenly or so it looks this movement impossible to follow let alone describe' [CSP 223]. The movement of opening and closing is here described as something that is 'impossible to follow let alone describe'. Perhaps it is as this kind of enigmatic movement, which eludes our capacity to see and describe, that the secret of rhythm reveals itself, that its 'beat of appearing' reaches our subconscious, if it does.

Beckett can be considered an artist who attempts to attune himself to the secret of rhythm and expose it or let it *appear* in the space outside signification. In this respect, the short play, *Not I*, in which the mouth appears as the repetition of opening and closing, becomes significant. The play 'begins' with unintelligible words heard in a darkening enclosed space. The audience hears unintelligible words coming from behind the curtain as house lights fade to black. For ten seconds, the unintelligible voice continues, and as the curtains rises, the opening of the Mouth is revealed on stage. It looks as if the 'unfathomable abyss' were unveiled, or a wound were

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Muses, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, p.23. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation*, vol. 1. Paris: Editions de la difference, 1981, p.31.

[178] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Les Muses*. Paris: Galilée, 1994, p.46; *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, p.24.

uncovered. Then for the next fifteen minutes, the audience witnesses the rapid outpouring of words from the Mouth to the Auditor. The intensity of language gradually accumulates until this moment of outpouring strikes the audience. Words are experienced not so much as the carriers of meaning but as a force itself, a force that could expose the fictionality of identity and the precariousness of meaning.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

Three different approaches to the question of subjectivity can be identified in different periods of Beckett's creative life. I will show this by citing one example from each of these periods:

> The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton. […] He sat naked in his rocking-chair of undressed teak, guaranteed not to crack, warp, shrink, corrode, or creak at night. It was his own, it never left him. The corner in which he sat was curtained off from the sun, the poor old sun in the virgin again for the billionth time. [*Murphy*, 1938; M 5]

A speaking subject is still discernible in this passage. He remains omnipotent over the subject of his narrative.

> …all I say will be false and to begin with not said by me, here I'm a mere ventriloquist's dummy, I feel nothing, say nothing, he holds me in his arms and moves my lips with a string, with a fish-hook… [*Texts for Nothing*, 1955; CSP 133]

Here, the speaking subject shows signs of a breakdown. It loses itself as it's torn

between the self and the Other. In the end we have no idea who is speaking to us – all we sense is an oscillation between speechlessness and uncontrollable, mad speech.

> Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. Where none. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still.
>
> All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. [*Worstward Ho*, 1983; NO 89]

I was taken aback when I first read this passage back in the winter of 2002. This is no doubt one of the most hermetic of Beckett's texts. The work is marked by an extreme degree of ellipsis, so much so that in the end, we 'don't know who is speaking any more. The subject disappears completely.' That, according to Beckett himself, is 'the end result of the identity crisis' that the protagonists of previous works have encountered.

I found the text unapproachable; and yet as I read the passage, I felt a strong grip on my mind. I was left speechless at the rapid overflow of words whose energy overwhelmed me. Calming down, I asked the following questions: Is a stable subjective position possible in late Beckett? How does the disturbing power of Beckett's language relate to the theme of subjective positioning? If that disturbing power point to an aesthetic in the late texts as a whole, how are we going to situate this aesthetic within Beckett's development as a writer?

Then I sought to give answers to these questions by examining Beckett's late work in the following four areas:

> **[1]** 'He Shall Not … You Shall Not': First-person Absence and the Histrionics of Pronouns

> **[2]** 'Stock Still Staring Out': Temporal-Spatial Dimensions of Performance

> **[3]** 'Texts for Nothing/Textes pour rien': Textualizing Abjection, Abjecting

Textuality

[4] 'To and Fro in Shadow': Repetition, Maternal Space, and the Rhythmic *Chora*

Beckett's work started where language shows itself as less stable. His first entry point is in the deictic referential capabilities of pronouns and the first-person pronoun in particular. Having said that, I recall a joke that I read a couple of weeks ago, in which a woman pulls at her boyfriend's sleeves and in an imploring tone says: 'Say you love me, say you love me!' The man, apparently a little bit impatient, replies without even looking at her: 'Okay okay, you love me.' The humorous confusion in the joke points out the instability of pronominal deictic markers, which function in a way that is radically different from the usual nominals. While a common noun refers to a fixed or objective notion, there is usually no definable object that a pronoun can refer to in identical fashion. What 'I' signifies, for instance, is the person uttering the present instance of the discourse containing 'I'; and contrary to common nouns, it no longer refers to a previously existing subjective substance, but rather to its own saying, becoming itself the 'referent' that it is supposed to signify. The instability of pronominal deictic markers is the first site where the Beckettian protagonist experienced the failure of language.

As a result, the protagonist of *The Unnamable* rumbles, 'it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that…' [T 372]. He takes issue with the pronoun 'I' and ends up getting entangled in the indeterminacy between the 'I' of enunciation and the 'I' of statement. Consequently the work ends in an aporetics of the 'I', lost in hesitation, indecision, capriciousness, agitation, oscillation, vertigo, as well as the inability to speak or act. Such aporetics creates a space that maintains the latent state of a being not yet fixed to the 'I'.

This, of course, is a state that points to nowhere. Up to now, the Beckettian

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subject is no more than a modern Sisyphus who keeps rolling the linguistic stone of indecision to no avail. There is no solution to the 'I' as a possible or impossible site of subjective positioning. After *The Unnamable*, the plight went on until Beckett finished the piece titled *Company*. Opening with an injunction to 'imagine' a voice coming to 'one in the dark', *Company* immediately plunges us into an alternation between the third-person commentaries directed at the reader, and second-person descriptions of journeys into the past directed at the listener.

> A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.
>
> To one on his back in the dark. This he can tell by the pressure on his hind parts and by how the dark changes when he shuts his eyes and again when he opens them again. [...]
>
> Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not.
>
> Apart from the voice and the faint sound of his breath there is no sound. None at least that he can hear. This he can tell by the faint sound of his breath. [NO 3-4]

This work can be seen as a pronominal action through which the self is identified as 'I'. Through an interplay of pronominal referents, the tropology of the subject develops according to dialogic principles. The narrative articulation of the partial images of self shows a temporal dynamism which eventually leads to the unrepresentable *trace* of one, but plural, subject. We are shown the temporal movement through which the 'self' acquires a sense of totality, thanks to these dialogic reformulations of self-images. The suspended referentiality of *Company* actually reproduces a process of identification, by refusing to name a subject. *This is a transition from the self of denial to the self of performance.*

As I said, Beckett usually started where language shows itself as less stable. Similarly, his theatre concerns itself with the question of how subjective positioning is possible in relation to time and space, two of the less stable coordinates on which

traditional theatre has been stabilized.

While the theatre is generally considered to be a privileged space of presence, of the 'here and now', Beckett's plays have always seemed to be directed towards absence. From the moment when Victor Krapp turns his back on the audience, through Godot's non-arrival, through the unprovided conclusions of *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, and *Play*, Beckett's theatre has always pointed towards absence, towards gaping holes in the dramatic performance.

In the late plays, however, the nature of that absence changes. This change is largely due to Beckett's change in his conception of time and space within the theatre. It could be said that, in the plays from *Godot* (1953–1955) to *Breath* (1969), dramatic time-space equals performance time-space. All that we can be sure of in the lives of Beckett's characters is what we see in front of us in performance. Similar to the narratives of the same period, the characters do not find their selfhood in a coherent past or in a planned-out future: they exist only as they act. Now we are reminded of the Unnamable. In the later plays, however, even that certainty of the present has gone. As we watch his plays, the dramatic time-space, the coherent, organized sequence of thoughts, actions, and events that are expected to provide the basic structure of the self in conventional drama or even in his earlier drama – none of these can be finally determined in his late theatre. Because of this, we encounter characters whose subjectivity can never be fully incarnated, since their place in the actions and the words of the play can never be grasped. As Beckett told Billie Whitelaw, the character May in *Footfalls* is 'not all there'. The comment applies to all the characters in the later works. The subjectivity of these characters is disturbingly evanescent, performed in fragments of action that have no clear temporal or spatial connection with each other. These late plays are still directed towards absence, though that absence is more disturbingly *there* through the interplay between an (half)empty stage and 'vast tracts of time' evoked offstage, between the perceptual and conceptual when other times and places are contrasted with the visceral power of the stage present.

In light of this, we could argue that much Beckett's late theatre is a theatre of

border-crossing. It goes across individual borders of identity and shifts between the space-time perspective of the actor and that of the spectator. His plays seem to imply a recognition of identity as a series of masks, as the representation of 'self' becomes the reproduction of interchangeable images of existence. Through the juxtaposition of scenic and textual forms, spaces, and times, there is a constant evolution in the perception of what is being represented. The conventionally stable categories of time and space, past and present, external and internal, absence and presence, are undermined.

Chapter 3 takes a more holistic approach to Beckett's work as a whole. Throughout his life, Beckett has associated literary production with a weary disgust like the disgust that his characters show for sex and reproduction. He only agreed to include most of his works in the corpus under the sign of bodily expulsion. He made a number of remarks which distinguish relatively clearly between a primary and secondary body of work. He claimed that 'I wrote all my work very fast – between 1946 and 1950', that *The Unnamable* represented a terminus in the creative process, and that the *Texts for Nothing* constituted 'an attempt to get out of the attitude of disintegration, but it failed'. On the other hand, the *Precipitates* which accompany 'Echo's Bones', the six *Residua*, and the *Foirades* all evoke cast-off bodily material, as does the later collection edited by Ruby Cohn, *Disjecta*. All these labels imply a kind of attachment to the main body of work as 'improper' texts in terms of bodily expulsion.

Beckett sections off the later works are 'residual' in such a way as to fragment the 'whole' body from which they are excluded. From here arises the question: if the main body is not a whole, the fragment that excluded from it cannot properly be described as a fragment, since fragmentation necessarily implies a defining plenitude. The threat of disintegration are indicative of those disturbances and dysfunctionalities of human physicality, which Julia Kristeva identified as *abjection*.

Kristeva defines *abjection* as the movement by which the body and psyche dispute part of itself in its fear of non-separation from the mother. This is because the body must, in Kristevan terms, be 'what the French call *propre*' – both clean and

one's own. Horror arises when the borders between subject and object collapse, when the edges break down and the body's contents flow out, threatening repulsive engulfment.

Beckett's bilingualism also poses a threat to conventional notions of what constitutes a proper body of work. It has for some time been realized that Beckett's work inscribes a deeply felt instability within traditional ideas of 'original' work and 'translation'. Quite often, Beckett wrote the work in one language, started translation of it in another language, and then go back to revise the original in light of the translation. Here, the reversal of conventionally opposed values is the same as that in abjection. It subverts the common logical belief that source text must precede translation, that translation must be drawn from original's preexisting essence.

In this light, the status of the two texts becomes problematic. One text cannot simply be said to be a 'version' of its counterpart in the other language. It should be seen to be a 'version' or product of something else. In other words, the contingency of the two texts' composition produces an unexplained agency in which they are complicated, but which they do not contain. Like Beckett's characters' preoccupation with bodily residues, his retroactive writing process is marked by frequent recourse to its own previously discarded drafts, its abject material. In this manner, the self-contained units of 'original' and 'translation' fracture into two parallel, simultaneous, unstable, mutually dependent bodies of work. The text is subject to abjection's spasmodic constitution and dissolution, calling into question its unitary identity. Since no reference to Beckett can be considered as a whole reference, always invoking the 'other' text, Beckett's corpus derives an unsuspected autonomy and plenitude precisely from its *failure* to achieve wholeness, the ironically celebrated failure of abjection.

The thesis closes with a final chapter on the return to the maternal space. It concentrates on the interactions amongst the rhythmic repetition of Beckett texts, its evocation of the Kristevan *chora*, as well as the underlying death drive. As I have said, the Beckettian protagonist lives at the limit of language, or he is the limit of language himself. He lives where language fails, and the *failure* sends him into an

oscillation, into a rhythm that we can call *aporia*, or following Gilles Deleuze, 'repetition'. This rhythm at the limit of language is shown in the prose work as the oscillation between assertion and denial, validation and invalidation, and in theatre as heartbeat, breathing, the swinging of a rocking chair as in *Rockaby*, the sounds of steps as in *Footfalls*, going to and fro as in *Come and go*, the opening of mouths and eyes as in *That Time* and *Not I…* As a result, each work of Beckett's exists as a pulsing, a succession of beats, or as a rhythmic, disruptive site at the edge of language.

Going one step further to a sub-linguistic level, we could situate this rhythmic, disruptive site at limit of the Lacanian Symbolic realm, where the disruptive, digressing Semiotic, forever lurking, can break in any time and disrupt the more orderly process of Symbolic signification. Now discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject, enveloping him in a heaving syrup of the unsignifiable that expands and contracts repeatedly like a womb. The subject subsists like a dying foetus at the edge of his life, who is 'being given, […], birth into death,' to borrow Malone's words. In this closed space and *as* this space – the womb/tomb where birth and death are reversed and folded together -- the failure of language pronounces itself as a closure where all possibilities (including the possibility of dying, of suffering, of saying 'I') are put at stake. The subject is hence at once protected and threatened by this closure.

Conclusion

To conclude, Samuel Beckett's late aesthetics of subjectivation is first of all an aesthetic of the experience of language and its relation to subjective positioning. With this vain conclusion in mind I flipped through Beckett's early critical essay, and was immediately put on alert by three statements that he made back in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The first is from the probably most-quoted passage of the entire Beckett oeuvre, that 'expression' manifesto in his 'Three Dialogues' with Georges

Duthuit when he talked about:

> The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. [PTD 103]

The second statement is found in Beckett's remarks on James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* back in 1929:

> Here form *is* content, content *is* form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read – or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself. [D 27]

If, as in the first statement, an expression is obligatory while being agentless, sourceless, and contentless, then the act of expression becomes the sole truth of that expression itself. I see this as a precocious piece of criticism, for Beckett apparently considered that to be what he thought good art is about and yet it was not until his later years that he managed to produce artworks like that.

A brief look at his late works reveals that nothing remains of Beckett's language. Nothing substantial, nothing even meaningful. Nevertheless 'something' that is in the movement of language affects us. We read, see, and listen to Beckett's work, as if through some unknown parts of our body, we sense that we see almost invisible changes of light and dark and hear distant cries and murmurs. While not at all certain what we perceive, we feel that in Beckett's language 'something' vacillates like 'a door that opens and shuts' as in one of his early poems:

> My peace is there in the receding mist
> when I may cease from treading these long shifting thresholds
> and live the space of a door
> that opens and shuts [CP 59]

The Beckettian subject longs for a discrete moment when he can finally coincide

with himself, arrive at himself completely by way of this door, and reach the close of his restless journey. But the image of the door also suggests his wish to maintain the essential ambiguity of language. This has been my particular concern throughout the thesis. We might be tempted to name the 'something' that vacillates in his language the void (or silence or death), and then say simply that Beckett is a writer who struggled to write about the void and was trapped in it. However the moment we name that 'something' the void, the silence, or even death, it eludes us completely. It slips away. It resists being named, grasped, or determined. It is the unnamable. Perhaps all we can do in reading late Beckett is try to retrace some of the marks that the movement of language has left on the text or on us, in us, or again turn our attention towards an indecisive stirring of language.

In light of this, the latter statement about the conflation of form and content becomes significant for our understanding of Beckett's late works, for in that way, nothing remains of Beckett's work except the act of reading/writing/speaking. Nothing remains, that is, except the experience of language. His late work is not about any subject or spoken by any subject, it is that subject himself. This is significant because in many cases, while language in Beckett has remained the object of discussion within various philosophical and theoretical frameworks, an understanding of the experience of language from within, or how that experience is related to subjective positioning, has not been deepened; and it is essentially around this question that my thesis has evolved.

The third statement is found in Beckett's treatise on Marcel Proust when he says:

> … the identification with Albertine is retrospective […] and proceeds to her acquaintance by a series of subtractions. […] Thus is established the *pictorial* multiplicity of Albertine that will duly evolve into a *plastic* and moral multiplicity, no longer a mere shifting superficies and an effect of the observer's angle rather than the expression of an inward and active variety, but a multiplicity in depth, a turmoil of objective and immanent contradictions over which the subject has no control. [PTD 31-32]

We can see that it was not until his later years that Beckett has fully achieved the

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results which he praised in Proust. If subjectivity in Beckett exists only *as* the experience of language, then it comes as a retrospective effect rather than a concrete preexistence. This is exactly the merit that he praised in Proust in the above passage.

Going back to the questions that I asked of myself, we could conclude that subjectivity in late Beckett exists only as the experience of language, as the marks that the movement of language has left on the text or on us, in us, the reader, as we turn our attention towards the indecisive stirrings of language. Beckett's late work as whole witnesses the maturation of the writer's aesthetics. A dialogue is latent between Beckett's early critical insights and his late artistic creation. Beckett revealed himself to be a precocious critic whose early ideas about art came to shed much light on his late works. And the same ideas seem more applicable to his late texts than to the writers he studied back in his formative years.

<center>*</center>

Throughout the thesis I have illustrated that subjectivity in Beckett is never a solid a referent to be represented. Rather, subjectivity exists in Beckett as a process of *subjectivation*, a process to be 'experienced' by the subject, a site where the force of language reveals itself and taps into our unconscious desires. In late Beckett, there is an aesthetic which has been largely overlooked and which needs be reevaluated so that these works can speak for themselves.

From the side of theory, there have been interpretations of Beckett's work as the collapse of epistemology and its resurrection, whilst from the side of literature there are stories about his work as emancipation in imprisonment, i.e. how it fails, and fails better each time. My study has not sought to make these teleological claims. For any earnestness of this sort would be the most abject submission to the ethic of production, and miss the crucial point, which is that Beckett fails utterly as a writer, a fact that is not speculatively redeemed by the way failure finds a voice in his writings. That his writings communicate powerfully, propelled by unparalleled resources of insinuation, attests merely to the virulence of futility, and not to any subterranean productivity of the negative.

Beckett's work produces *nothing*. His characters, when there are any, implicate themselves into the dissolution of narrativity. His work loses itself (ungraspably) within itself, rather than succumbing to an intelligible derailing. Yet as I read his works, and see them performed, my bones itch, and in the end my mind melts as if thawed by an unexpected heat. I am left speechless at Beckett's rapid overflow of words whose energy, once released, flooded the surrounding dark and enter my every pore. Somehow, that released life belongs with me but not to me.

Then I realise that it is not important what Beckett tells us, for his works are not to be 'read' but 'experienced' so that we feel the power of language again. Beckett's *failure* as a writer, his entrapment within indetermination, be it pathologically catatonic or aesthetically aporetic, only provides us with a site where the founding force of language is encountered in the midst of destabilising experience.

Therefore, to describe Samuel Beckett as a writer is not to lend him a personal integrity as one who writes, but to scatter the ashes of his name into the river of fluent textuality which nag all personalities into pieces, as they bear their luxuriant froth of words downstream towards chaos and dearth.

And the river of Beckett's work flows through us.

Looking back at this point, we don't have to bother ourselves with the question of what Beckett's works tell us after all. There is a sense in which Beckett's works – as works – are *not* especially 'difficult'. They are, indeed, no more problematic than the words we use to tranquillize ourselves against love and dying (against the passion to die). One might avoid being merely interested in these texts, yet it is still possible that the agitation which remained would be dissolved into those little lazinesses and indecencies with which we meagrely spice our domesticity. It is for this reason that I feel I understand Beckett's obsessiveness, his repetition, his reluctance to leave us with what has already been so clearly said. It is for this reason, too, that any book making it easier to understand Beckett is written *contra* him. The gurus of writing will of course say that we should be quite without regard for 'Beckett', as if the failure of authorialism were properly replaced by a textualist triumph. After all, who would not rather be faced with a life or a production, when the alternative to either is wreckage?

As humans we are in one way or another drawn towards two ends, and would like to keep them as distinct as possible; blessing *telos* and cursing *terminus*. In this respect a certain zenith is reached in the Kantian practical postulate of immortality,

where the perfection of teleological process requires the infinite recession of extinction. One end supplants the other. We are all kantians now (I use the small case advisedly) and it has come to seem almost natural that our history be comprehended as teleological. And Beckett, as writer and Nobel laureate, is always thought to have said 'something' of our world of its maladies, of our evolving epistemology. Yet is not his thinking without a frightening simplicity? Just as it has said 'something', some truth about our world of its maladies, has it not said equally much about its author and *his* maladies? We make the two ends meet as we take Beckett's writing as it was originally meant to be.

Malaise. Silence. That the inability to write should itself become, threatened by an inert compulsion to write, utterance and thus text: this most nocturnal of thoughts is the restless spectre that the writer can neither still, nor embrace. The sensation evoked by its visitation is the same as the one that afflicts the victim of a hopeless profound dream, consummated in phrases which – remembered during the hours of waking – is degraded into an inanity. The withered remains of those expansive impossibilities, the mysterious companions of darkness, silence, and solitude, are rediscovered after an interval of sleep, wrought – after the daylight has sucked away the last shadows – into mere paradoxes.

To become degraded to the level of a writer, a good one at that, is to be perpetually captivated, and then betrayed, by the figments of method, a resource for creation and critique, an inevitability. Writing becomes a summit from which the flood-plains of textuality could be perpetually re-inundated, a hieroglyph of utter fertility. But the word 'method' is rather too philosophical, for what is at issue here is a map for traversing unknown terrains, and not for domesticating them; a chart for discoveries that accentuate the enigma of the world.

écoute-les
s'ajouter
les mots
aux mots
sans mot

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les pas
aux pas
un à
un [CP 71; RUL MS 2901]

folly -
folly for to -
for to -
what is the word -
folly from this -
all this -
folly from all this -
given -
folly given all this -
seeing -
folly seeing all this -
this -
what is the word –   ['What Is the Word']

*

What is the word! The greatness of Beckett is to have led writing to the failure of writing. Until he died he had remained a writer of silence, rather than someone who had salvaged humanity from the insanity of words. 'Writing becomes not easier,' talking to John Gruen during an interview in 1969 he remarked, 'but more difficult for me. Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.'[179] This is not to say that words come to an end, but only that discourse ceases to dominate them. The motor is not discursive competence but the vacant eye of insanity. In all forms of love, of suffering, of madness, the writer searches himself: unspeakable torture where he has the need of all faith, where he becomes among everyone the great invalid, the great accursed one.

If there ever is a conclusion it is zero. Silence. Words continue as something else, as something in any case, or at most; the edge of something (of all things).

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[179] John Gruen, 'Samuel Beckett Talks About Beckett', in *Vogue* (December 1969), p.210.

*

From birth we are brainwashed into conformity with the cage, taught to accumulate, to shore ourselves up, to fear madness and death. Trapped in a constricting triangle of language routines we tread a narrow circuit in the maze

*

With this Irishman i scamper in and out of the maze in a way they cannot understand,

at half-past one on a Sunday morning

deep in the crypt of dark

in madness

i crossed the line of life into the limbo panting

between what is called Hell where Satan has been dethroned

and what is called Heaven where the police is in control

*

There too has been a revolution in the limbo

Language hangs from a gibbet and rots

wreathed in the howls of anarchy

out there beyond the dark

the cold wind of zero rages without interdiction

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