

SHADOW AND BABBLE

A STUDY OF IMAGERY AND NARRATIVE VOICE
IN THE PROSE FICTION OF SAMUEL BECKETT,
FROM MURPHY TO THE UNNAMABLE

by

Nicholas D. R. Shepherd

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Supervisor: Dr P. H. Knox-Shaw

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...this being that is called me and is not one...shadow and babble...

Texts for Nothing, # XI

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I be still the same...?

Paradise Lost, Bk. I

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ABSTRACT

The following study is concerned with a detailed examination of Samuel Beckett's prose fiction, from his earliest important writing up until the completion of the last book of his Trilogy. Although these works, widely recognized as being of seminal importance in the literary history of our time, have attracted a great deal of critical attention, I hope to contribute to this vast colloquy not merely by raising specific points of interpretation that appear to me to be both valid and hitherto unremarked (as well as challenging some popular misconceptions and critical heresies), but in the tenor of my approach to the texts, which stresses the need for a synthetic apprehension of their poetic texture and their narrative form, and insists that a thematic study of their imagery cannot be fruitfully conducted independently of a careful examination of their dramatic and rhythmical structure. In my Preface I articulate the need for such an approach more fully, and elucidate the main terms and concepts to which I shall make reference. The cultural and philosophical context of Beckett's primary theme - which we may designate loosely as "the nature of the self" - I adumbrate in my first chapter, which goes on to consider this concern and its treatment in his early works, "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" and More Pricks than Kicks, in his first two novels, Murphy and Watt, and in the four nouvelles that inaugurate his adoption of French as the tongue in which almost all his major work has been composed and of the monologue as his dominant and characteristic fictional form. The next three chapters deal consecutively with the three volumes of the trilogy that is generally and with justice held to be his chef d'oeuvre, Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable. My essay on Molloy takes as its guiding theme the enigmatic relation between the two narratives of the book, a relation characterized by complex patterns of resonance and dissonance, of para-

lled and antithesis, manifested rhetorically, stylistically and thematically, while my treatment of the second volume is concerned primarily to examine the interrelation between the two modes of Malone's discourse - his "factual" account of his situation and his "story-telling". The last chapter of my dissertation seeks to relate The Unnamable to the volumes that precede it and, in a detailed account of the book's imagery and structure, to examine the efforts of its "worldless" narrator to create a fiction that will serve to define his being. I conclude with some comments on the importance of seeing Beckett's *oeuvre* as a prolonged and consistent treatment of the aesthetic and metaphysical problems that have preoccupied him since his earliest writing, and on the trends that characterize the writing that follows the Trilogy.

PREFACE

In an article in the "Encounter" of February 1968 on the avant-garde writing of the sixties, David Lodge reported a debate which took place at Birmingham University, under the auspices of the English Department, on the subject of Beckett's piece "Ping". The question on which discussion turned was whether this work signified anything at all or whether it was not rather a purely abstract pattern of words. Consensus on this point was not reached, opinion remaining divided between a minority who "were inclined to think that 'Ping' was indeed a language game, a verbal construct cunningly devised to yield an infinite number of interpretations - and therefore, in effect, resistant to interpretation" and the majority of the debaters, who "were disposed to find 'Ping' specifically meaningful, to see it as the rendering of a certain kind of experience" (reprinted in Graver and Federman's Critical Heritage, p.297). This division of opinion we might take as epitomizing a cleavage of critical approach in the plethora of studies that threaten to make Beckett the most written about author of this century: there are critics who approach his works predominantly in terms of their thematic content or ideological concerns, and those who concentrate upon their structure or form. Without denying that certain commentators have straddled this hypothetical divide with commendable skill (Harvey, Kenner, Fletcher, and Janvier are some that spring to mind), its existence is clearly illustrated by considering the extreme positions. The far right wing, the old guard of the analogical critics, is held by the likes of Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, who write of the difficulty, with regard to Beckett's mature work, of "finding the content in a form which is artistically satisfying but which conveys no clearly apparent 'message'." They go on to argue that "in fact, the 'message' is

always the same and is conveyed through constantly repeated images....The reader is apt to say, 'This work is powerful, convincing, and moving - but what does it mean?' Once, however, Beckett's readers are familiar with what he is always saying, their puzzlement is largely removed. They can settle down to appreciating the form - the way in which he is always saying things" (Condemned to Life, pp. 121-22). (Beckett's own theoretical repudiation of such aesthetic dualism is caustically clear in his early defence of Joyce's "Work in Progress": "The rapid skimming and absorption of the scant cream of sense is made possible by what I may call a continuous process of copious intellectual salivation. The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quaternary conditioned reflex of dribbling comprehension" ["Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce" p.26].) At the other end of the spectrum we have the "objective" structuralists, who rarely raise the question of "meaning" at all except perhaps in terms of the refusal or the failure to mean anything, but proceed with a formal or structural analysis of the text which makes little or no reference to anything outside it besides the latest theoretical refinements of their analytic terminology. Dina Scherzer's study, La Structure de la Trilogie, tends towards this "unengaged" type of criticism.

I hope, in the following study of Beckett's prose fiction, from his earliest important writing up to The Unnamable, to avoid the extremes of these two critical tendencies, in the conviction that literary criticism is properly neither a two-fold process of deciphering a "message" and then appreciating its form (something that is not strictly possible anyway, for how are we to understand a "message" except through the "form" in which it is communicated), nor an exercise which takes the text as an abstract arrangement of verbal patterns, but essentially a heightening of the faculties of apperception and appreciation that we normally bring to bear in the process of reading literature. And this complex imaginative activity, referred to by Beckett in the essay cited above (in a for-

mulation that relates "form" to "sense" in a way that anticipates the concepts of "deep" and "surface structure" of transformational grammar*) as the "general aesthetic vigilance without which we cannot hope to snare the sense which is forever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself" (p.27), necessarily involves a linear but accumulative consideration of the meaning-bearing structures of a book, ranging in scope from the literal import of the semantic and syntactic units of the writing into the wider and more problematic realms of the author's intentionality, as they are manifested in and articulated through an overarching temporal "structure" that is experienced by the reader as he makes his way from beginning to end. What seems to be required then is an approach that is constantly mindful of the double nature of literary discourse: like music, it is extended in time, giving a shape and a pattern to the time its performance occupies, and, like the plastic arts, it deals with "images" that the mind may seize and return to as though they were objects excerpted from the temporal flux. Any attempt to talk about a work's "meaning" must consequently deal with both these interdependent aspects of the aesthetic whole.

The Hamiltons are partially right in one respect: Beckett's work does contain images that reappear time after time, in book after book, and that consequently, through a process of accretive association, become something like repositories of "meaning", imbued with symbolic connotations that extend their significance beyond their immediate context, and which (particularly as they are often drawn from or allude to philosophical works) make it possible to speak of metaphysical or religious themes or concerns, sometimes linked (though usually only by implication) to an explicit reference to (or discussion of) such concerns by the narrator. Such images occur not only as overtly metaphorical objects, figures and situations, but also as objects, figures and situations that

* These terms were first coined in 1958, by C. F. Hockett, although the conceptual distinction seems to have been made a few years earlier; see Lyons, pp.26-27.

exist as literal elements of the narrative "worlds" posited by these narrators. And since the choice of these "objective" images is not governed by the demands of a factual or historical mimesis (even when the narrator is attempting an autobiographical narration, it is evident that memory has "selected" certain facts for recall and forgotten others, and that from this reduced and tenuous "given" the narrator must still choose, in Molloy's words, "between the things not worth mentioning and those even less so" p.43), we may claim that in electing to mention or describe certain elements rather than others from the vast thesaurus of the universe, the narrators are in effect providing an indirect portraiture of their own minds and "world-views", a claim that is lent weight by the fact that definite patterns of selection become evident, as narrator after narrator focuses his attention on the same, often perfectly ordinary, objects and situations, frequently in a manner that clearly invests such objects with a symbolic allure that on occasion verges on the obsessional. It is thus not too extravagant to discuss the capacity of Beckett's imagery to mean in terms of psychological themes and even archetypes.

However, in suggesting that such images are the sole bearers of a unified, definite, static and unambiguous "message", the Hamiltons inaccurately charge Beckett with the kind of allegorizing that he himself derided as banal semiotic book-keeping - "that glorious double-entry, with every credit in the said account a debit in the meant, and inversely" (in a review of The Amaranthers by Jack B. Yeats entitled "An Imaginative Work!", reprinted in Disjecta, p.90). For one thing, the images are not "constantly repeated", but recur more generally only as isomorphic or congruent variations of a motival form or shape, producing a cluster of images that may relate only tenuously to a single and definite ruling idea. And for another, such archetypal motifs may vary widely in connotative and affective association. That is to say, the tone, or what we might perhaps better call the "modality" of a particular image may vary both within a single

work and within the whole canon, from one work to another. An image may for instance in one context evince longing and in another dread; it may be presented with quasi-literal conviction at one time, and with such extreme scepticism at another that it is swept away with ridicule and disgust even before it is fully formulated; or it may be now sincere, and now ironical in effect, by occurring in a sarcastic passage perhaps, or by being ironically juxtaposed with another image. So the whole question of how such images relate to each other and how they are regarded by the speaker that posits them cannot be left out of account.

This brings us to the question of the discourse in which such images are presented, which we may qualify for the moment as narrative discourse - discourse that has as its immediate, its "official", objective the telling of a story. The oral origins of narration are evident in our terminology - one tells a story, even if, as in mime or dance, for instance, one makes no recourse to language at all - and in recent years the theoreticians of prose fiction have made frequent use of the metaphor of "voice" in discussing the highly variable role the narrator of the narrative may play in the total aesthetic structure of the work. "All writing," says Freud, "was in its origin the voice of an absent person" (Civilization and Its Discontents, p.28), and although to a large extent our sense of being spoken to by the absent writer, along with our sensitivity to the sensuous qualities of words and syntactic "shapes" and rhythms (which must serve, in written discourse, to replace the vocal qualification of meaning that is exercised by the speaker's intonation, volume and pace of delivery), has been dulled, since the Gutenberg revolution, in a daily inundation of printed matter, most if not all literature of any importance demands a re-awakening of this sense and this sensitivity. This is obviously true of poetry, and it is true too of those narrative species in which the act of narration takes the form of some kind of personal address of the reader by the narrator.

Wayne Booth has done some valuable work in this field not only in dissect-

ing different "kinds" of narrators (dramatized or undramatized, omniscient or subjective, reliable or unreliable, self-conscious or unself-conscious) but in emphasizing that a discussion of the narrator's "voice" cannot be limited to the direct remarks that are explicitly addressed by the narrator to his audience, most demonstrably when the narrator's discourse posits a "narratee" that is addressed in the second person, but must examine a global impression of the narrating mind that is formed in many other tacit or implicit ways, forming an *ethos*, to use an old rhetorical expression in its original sense, of which Booth rightly comments: "it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects" (Rhetoric of Fiction, p.71). Booth admits the difficulty in articulating and communicating this impression of the narrating presence - "It is frustrating to deal critically with these effects, because they can in no way be demonstrated to the reader who has not experienced them. No amount of quotation, no amount of plot summary, can possibly show how fully the implied author's character dominates our reaction to the whole" (p. 215) - but it is not necessarily as bleak a critical enterprise as he makes out; apposite quotation and commentary may well, as his own critical practice demonstrates, evoke a sense of recognition in a fellow reader, crystallizing into articulate consciousness an "effect" that may otherwise have remained diffuse, obscure or indeed subliminal.

Moreover, a study of "narrative voice" need not be limited to a discussion of the "ethos" or rhetorical personality of the narrator, but should include an examination of what we may term "narrative technique". My interest, in other words, is not solely with how the dramatized narrators of Beckett's canon present themselves, but how they present their narratives, and with how self-portraiture and narration interact with each other. My investigation of this area of Beckett's narrative discourse has been greatly facilitated by reference to the work of Gérard Genette. Adopting a linguistic model for his analysis (but never

claiming or forgetting that this is anything other than a convenient analogy), Genette likens narrative discourse to a verbal construction (in the grammatical sense), and proceeds to identify three main areas of analysis: "time", "mode", and "person" or "voice" (see "Discours du récit", p.75). Drawing on, emending and expanding in a spirit of scientific collaboration the ideas of other French structuralists such as Barthes, Todorov, Bremond and Pouillon, as well as the work of English and German writers, notably Booth, Brooks and Warren, Friedman, Auerbach, Spitzer and Hamburger (with some revealing attention to Plato and Aristotle), what Genette comes up with, apart from some fascinating insights into his basic text - Proust's A la Recherche du temps perdu - is an annotated framework or grid of logical possibilities governing the various and highly variable ways in which the two primary constituents of any narrative act - the "histoire" or "story-to-be-told", the narrative "signified", and the "discours", the manner in which this story is related, the narrative "signifier" - may be related to each other. His analysis results in a useful terminology with which to discuss the question of narrative technique, and to relate the problematic, "scriptible" (in Barthes's sense of the word; see his S/Z, p.10), texts of modern novelistic fiction to their more familiar generic antecedents.

My approach to the question of "narrative voice" is covered mainly, but not exclusively, by Genette's third primary element referred to above, that of *personne* or *voix*, which latter term he justifies with reference to its pure grammatical sense as defined by Vendryès: "aspect de l'action verbale considérée dans ses rapports avec le sujet". In an "adoption/adaptation" of this sense in which he makes it clear that, for his purposes, "ce sujet [n'est pas] seulement celui qui accomplit ou subit l'action, mais aussi celui (le même ou un autre) qui la rapporte, et éventuellement tous ceux qui participent, fût-ce passivement, à cette activité narrative" (p.226), Genette adumbrates his concept of "the narrative instance", which is "un ensemble complexe dans lequel l'analyse,

ou simplement la description, ne peut distinguer qu'en déchirant un tissu de relations étroites entre l'acte narratif, ses protagonistes, ses déterminations spatio-temporelle, son rapport aux autres situations narratives impliquées dans le même récit, etc." (p.227) - a totality of the elements that constitute the fictional moment of the text's composition or narration (firmly to be distinguished from the actual moment of writing by the "real" author) that Genette proposes to examine according to "les traces qu'elle a laissées - qu'elle est censée avoir laissées - dans le discours narratif qu'elle est censée avoir produit" (p.227). And in concluding his chapter on the "narrative instance" Genette compiles a list of the possible "functions" a narrator may perform (along the lines of Roman Jakobson's analysis of the functions of language; see his "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics"), on the basis of his treatment of, and revealed attitudes towards, the five basic constituent elements of the narrative act: the story itself (the "histoire", that is); the text in which it is related; the narrative situation (with its "protagonistes", the narrator and the "narrataire"); himself qua narrator; and the "ideological" commentary he may or may not deliver on the subject of his story or on things in general.

These are some of the major concepts I shall refer to in discussing the "babble" of Beckett's fiction, but it is in no way my intention to "apply" Genette to these works. Not only would such a tyrannical relation between theoretical and practical criticism be distasteful to me, but it would lack a firm logical foundation, for this reason: Genette takes as his area of study "le récit", loosely defined as "discours narratif", but in Beckett's oeuvre we encounter a progressive and progressively radical elimination of an essential constituent of this discourse - the "histoire" or "story-to-be-told". So, while the monologues of the Trilogy, which are the main focus of my exegesis, are undoubtedly fictional discourse of some kind, in the face of this gradual erosion of narrative "content" they are not in any definite or conclusive sense examples of narra-

tive discourse at all. In fact the eclipse of narration *per se*, and the consequent expansion of the various other "extra-narrative" (*ibid.*, p.262) narratorial* functions, deemed inessential (but largely unavoidable) by Genette, in the sequence or series that Beckett's prose works form, is one of the recurrent themes of the "structural" approach of my two-pronged study, which proposes a dualism not of form and meaning, but of what may perhaps be best described in terms of two modalities: that of the image, which appeals predominantly to the mind's eye, and that of the voice, which appeals to our auditory imagination. And in following the chronological order of the works' composition, I hope at the same time to adumbrate what linguists might call a diachronic account of Beckett's development as a writer of fiction.

Note: Page references to Beckett's works are to the editions listed in the bibliography. References to the Trilogy are to the three single volumes of the Calder and Boyars edition; these may be converted to the pagination of the single volume edition simply by adding the figure 172 to any given page number in the case of Malone Dies, and 286 in that of The Unnamable. The pagination of Molloy is the same in both editions.

* I hope I shall be forgiven the coining of this neologism on the grounds that it is both useful and readily comprehensible. "Narrative", as an adjective, has already enough on its plate, pertaining both to "narration" and to "narrative" (as a noun), while "narratory" has the sense of "characterized by, inclined to, narration; of a narrative nature" (O.E.D.). The word I suggest fills the semantic lacuna which may be simply defined as "of or pertaining to a narrator."

I. OF MONADS AND MONOLOGUES : BELACQUA, MURPHY, WATT, AND I

The only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude....The only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent. The artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn in to the core of the eddy.

So asserts the twenty-five-year-old Beckett in his study of Proust's masterpiece, A la Recherche du temps perdu, (Proust, pp.64-66). One is often apt, in the undoubted brilliance of his exegesis, to forget to ask just how free such trenchantly, almost polemically, expressed tenets are as translations of the views expressed in the original text, to ask, in other words, to what extent Beckett is giving voice to his own aesthetic beliefs, rather than explicating those of Proust's narrator. Certainly "Marcel" does reject "the grotesque fallacy of realistic art - 'the miserable statement of line and surface'" (Proust, p.76), turning his derisive back on a literature that pretends to represent the world. But if, as I should like to do here, we were to erect the aesthetic axioms quoted above as a legend upon the pit-head of Beckett's own artistic quarrying, they would suggest a rather different kind of "depth" from that which they signify in the context of the Proustian aesthetic. For, while Proust shuns (again in Beckett's words) "the literature that 'describes'...[that is] content to transcribe the surface, the façade, behind which the Idea is prisoner" (pp.78-79) in favour of the evocation of a subjectively (and subliminally) internalized world, the world at first thought lost, that springs unbidden, marvellously rich in the hues and flavours of affective sensation, from the scent of the madeleine, in Beckett's work we are confronted with a far more radical rejection of "the world", and an art that seeks to concern itself not with Baudel-

aire's "adequate union of subject and object" (ibid., p.76), a union unsundered in the heady impressionism of Marcel's *mémoire involontaire*, but with the subject alone. And here Beckett's remarks about "the sense of depth" seem to apply much more aptly to his own artistic endeavours, and correspond far more closely to Kant's radically ascetic conception of Romanticism than to anything in the work of Proust. In his *Aesthetik*, Kant writes thus: "in the epoch of Romantic art the Spirit knows it cannot find its truth by immersing itself in the flesh of reality; on the contrary, it assures itself of its truth by retracing its steps from the external back into its own internality, leaving the outer world as an inadequate form of existence.... The true content of Romantic art is absolute inwardness" (quoted in Heller, p.159). In terms of this position, Beckett's art is far more "romantic" than that of the author whose work he is examining, and might indeed be seen as representing the last gasps or spasms of the Romantic Spirit, writhing at the end of its material tether - which for the literary artist is language itself - prior to achieving its logical end, the aesthetic void.

Be that as it may - it is not my intention here to discuss Kant's thesis; let us return to our theme of Beckettian "depth", which in its rejection of "the world" as "an inadequate form of existence" and its retreat into "absolute inwardness", may be related more easily to various forms of religious asceticism than to what we normally refer to as Romanticism. Certain strains of Christianity, particularly of the early Church,* and especially the Manichean heresy, various other gnostic religions, and Buddhism, amongst others, are united in their view of the world as an arena of desire and suffering, an involvement with which is antithetic to a realization of the "true self", however this may be construed. And much of Beckett's imagery does indeed invoke such religious contexts, as the minds of his narrators

* Some idea of the virulence this attitude took towards the "flesh" is given in R. Bultmann's *Primitive Christianity*, in which is quoted this translation of an early text: "[the body] is the dark prison, the living death, the sense-endowed corpse, the grave thou barest about with thee...the thievish companion who hateth thee in loving thee, and envieth thee in hating thee" (quoted in Laing, p.66).

grope in Godless obscurity for something within them that will serve as a "soul" - an essence or form that exists outside the toils of the contingent and the phenomenal, proof against the ruinous extension in time to which the conscious ego is subject. Certain theological symbols in particular - evoking the wholeness and perfection traditionally associated with the Judaeo-Christian conception of God - permeate his work as images of the ideal self, the self that is free and sovereign, divorced from the demands of society and from the trials of life in the flesh.

It is however not merely religious thinkers that have advocated such a disinvestment of the individual's essence from the world, where the bounded integrity of the self is constantly breached, both from the outside, by the imposition of suffering, and from the inside, by the need for various gratifications only to be attained from the not-self, the object of appetency ranging from what is required to slake a raging thirst, to various forms of satisfaction that only the involvement of another mind can offer, of which perhaps the most pernicious is the need for a witness, an approving recognition from the Other of what one is, a validation of the self's intrinsic worth (a need that religious thought seeks to satisfy with the concept of God's love). Many philosophers have proposed such a withdrawal as a matter of simple good sense, propounding (again in Beckett's words) the "wisdom of all the sages, from Brahma to Leopardi, the wisdom that consists not in the satisfaction but in the ablation of desire" (Proust, p.18), a position of stoical abnegation that the seventeenth-century rationalists provided with a metaphysical justification in their conception of the divorce of Matter from Spirit, withdrawing the line of demarcation between inner and outer, self and not-self, from the boundaries of sensory consciousness, so that even one's own body, over which the neo-Cartesian Occasionalists like Geulincx denied that the mind had any control, is part of the not-self or world. The ethical corollaries of this retreat of the "I" may be epitomised by Descartes' third provisory maxim: "to endeavour always to conquer myself rather than fortune, and change my desires rather than the order of the world, and in general,

accustom myself to the persuasion that, except our own thoughts, there is nothing absolutely in our power" (A Discourse on Method, p.21). Beckett not only draws on the imagery of various Cartesian thinkers, but investigates the existential consequences of the schism of unextended from thinking substances dramatically, living, through the minds of his narrators, in the darkness of the sensory aporetics into which Descartes descended briefly. The Trilogy might indeed be construed as *reductio ad absurdum* of this dualism that has penetrated so pervasively into the very breath of Western thinking, in a variant of that argument which proves, however, the absurdity but not necessarily the falsity of its axioms, leaving man in the kind of tragic impasse of self-contradiction that Hegel sketched in his portrait of *das unglückliche Bewusstsein*, and that the existentialist writers, notably Kierkegaard, Kafka, Camus and Sartre, have made the focus of their exploration of the "human condition".

Turning aside then from the "outer world", Beckett's characters and narrators embark, with varying degrees of conceptual deliberation, upon a programme of self-immolation which would make of the mind an alternative or substitute world, divorced from the contingencies of the material realm of being. What remains of the mind that is totally withdrawn from the world? In his mature writing Beckett confronts this question not with the phenomenologists' theoretical *époché*, but through a subjective examination of the decay of the body: encroaching death gradually destroys the sensory interface of mind with world, and memory of such contact starts to flicker out too in the advanced stages of senility. In the asymptotic approach to a voided consciousness, a point is reached where only language remains as an ambiguous indication that something else might have existed; words and their associated, quasi-visual thought images, the "shadow and babble" ("Texts for Nothing", XI, No's Knife, p.127) of a referential system of signification that has no longer anything to refer to, are the only modalities of experience left to the Unnamable. At this point, where the disinvestment of the will from the material plane recommended by

the philosophers and the gnostics alike has become a *de facto* state of affairs, willy-nilly, the a-seity of the self might seem assured. But Descartes' "persuasion" that "our own thoughts" are the only things "absolutely in our power", with its underlying conception of a unified, integral and autonomous ego proves ill-founded, for not only are those thoughts manifested in a language that is founded upon and bound to a perceptual reality*, but tend to insinuate themselves unbidden into the discourse that the "I" actively utters, arising from some zone over which the ego has no control. And so the struggle to define the limits of self, the true desmeane of the soul, must be carried on in a mind-become-world that is inhabited by what Freud has termed "alien guests" (quoted in Wolheim's On Art and the Mind, p.36), which, invading the innermost sanctum of the self's being, threaten to usurp its autonomy over itself.

Such, in crude schematic outline, is the course of the "descent" realized in the art of introversion that Beckett propounds as the only direction in which to proceed, an art of self-discovery in which lies man's sole possibility of any kind of "spiritual development", an art that, embracing ignorance and doubt, seeks to discard the adventitious and strip away spurious certitude, that chafes corrosively at the boundaries of our most literal ways of speaking of our non-physical being, fretting to have done with the "symbols of time and space" which are, as Coleridge put it defending Wordsworth's Immortality Ode (Biographia Literaria, II, p.120), our only means of attempting to wrest from ineffability the "modes of inmost being" that we feel, obscurely, to constitute the essence of what and who we really are.

The first extended passage in Beckett's fiction in which the mind is explicitly treated as a domain or habitable region is to be found in the following extract

* A point which Arnheim strongly underlines in his Visual Thinking: "...concepts describing 'nonperceptual' facts derive from perceptual ones. The notion of the depth of thought is derived from physical depth; what is more, depth is not merely a convenient metaphor to describe the mental phenomenon but the only possible way of even conceiving of that notion. Mental depth is not thinkable without an awareness of physical depth....To put it more sharply: human thinking cannot go beyond the patterns suppliable by the human senses" (pp.232-33).

from the unpublished "Dream of Fair to Middling Women", quoted in Lawrence Harvey's valuable study, pp.324-25. The unheroic hero, Belacqua, has settled in an unfamiliar city:

The labour of resting in a strange place is properly extenuating. The first week and more went to throwing up a ring of earthworks; this to break not so much the flow of people and things to him as the ebb of him to people and things. It was his instinct to make himself captive, and that instinct, as never before or since, served him well and prepared a great period of beatitude stretching from mid-October to Xmas... For two months and more he lay stretched in the cup, sheltered from the winds and sheltered from the waters, knowing that his own velleities of radiation would never scale the high rim that he had contrived all around and about, that they would trickle back and replenish his rumination as marriage the earth and virginity paradise, that he could release the boomerangs of his fantasy on all sides unanxiously, that one by one they would return with the trophy of an echo. He lay lapped in a beatitude of indolence that was smoother than oil and softer than a pumpkin, dead to the dark pangs of the sons of Adam, asking nothing of the insubordinate mind. He moved with the shades of the dead and the dead-born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born, in a Limbo purged of desire. They moved gravely, men and women and children, neither sad nor joyful. They were dark, and they gave a dawn light to the darker place where they moved. They were a silent rabble, a press of much that was and was not and was to be and was never to be, a pulsing and shifting as of a heart beating in sand, and they cast a dark light.

If that is what is meant by going back into one's heart, could anything be better, in this world or the next? The mind, dim and hushed like a sick-room, like a ~~chappelle~~ ardente, thronged with shades; the

mind at last its own asylum, disinterested, indifferent, its miserable erethisms and discriminations and futile sallies suppressed; the mind suddenly relieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body, the glare of understanding switched off. The lids of the hard aching mind close, there is suddenly gloom in the mind; not sleep, not yet, nor dream, with its sweats and terrors, but a waking ultra-cerebral obscurity, thronged with grey angels; there is nothing of him left but the umbra of grave and womb where it is fitting that the spirits of his dead and his unborn should come abroad.

He understood then, when he came out of the tunnel, that that was the real business, the Simon Pure of this frail life that has already been described as being all temptation and knighthood.... Torture by thought and trial by living, because it was false thought and false living, stayed outside the tunnel. But in the umbra, the tunnel, when the mind went wombtomb, then it was real thought and real living....Live cerebration that drew no wages and emptied no slops. In the tunnel he was a grave paroxysm of gratuitous thoughts, free and unprofessional, non-salaried, living as only spirits are free to live....He was in the gloom, the thicket, he was wholly a gloom of ghostly comfort, a Limbo from which the mistral of desire had been withdrawn.

In this rather lovely, highly ornate passage, in which the short-circuiting deflation of the narrator's irony, characteristic of so much of the early prose, is kept to an undertone, the concept of the mind as a place is given fuller poetic treatment than in the ten loosely connected short stories into which the principal character and much of the material of the "Dream" was re-cast by its author, published in 1934 as More Pricks than Kicks. We notice predominantly a far more sensuously evoked claustrophilia, a love of the enclosed place, with its attractions of

safety, shelter and self-contained quietude. The extract expounds the narcissistic strategy by which Belacqua manages to obviate the anguished *nervosité* of a hyper-sensitive, Proustian sensibility by withdrawing into a mental microcosm. The strangeness of a new environment, before perceptual Habit has established its latest pact with the world and dimmed the "cruelties and enchantments of reality" (Proust, p.22), threatens in its vividness to disrupt the integrity of the self by distracting the mind's attention from what is felt to be its proper subject - itself. So Belacqua's "instinct to make himself captive" is to be seen not so much as the expression of an impoverishing, life-denying spirit of negation as the self-preserving instinct of an ontologically fragile consciousness that longs for the boundedness of self-enclosure, for shelter from the stormy blast of sensation which renders him a contingent victim of time and space. The images of containers or receptacles - the cup, the sick-room, the womb, the tomb, the tunnel - are emphasized not as prisons but as sanctuaries in which "real thought and real living" may become possible. The desired state, an exemption from the world, is thus expressed in terms of a blessed absence of light and noise - the "hush" and "gloom" in which the "glare of understanding" is "switched off." And in the resultant peace consciousness is liberated from all quotidian considerations and consequences, and thought becomes an autotelic activity, "gratuitous...free and unprofessional." In this state, the "beatitude of indolence," there is a total abnegation of all ethical and moral values that relate the self to the world. Indeed, for Belacqua, as reported by the anonymous narrator in a sometimes rather snide style indirect libre, it seems that a state of aesthetic remove from one's experience of the world is a *sine qua non* of "real living". Any mode of being that has as its foundation an interaction of self and world is denigrated as "false living" because it necessarily involves an atrocious sapping of the reality of the self. Given the potential "ebb" of self to "people and things", the self is in danger of being absorbed by the world and consequently of losing its ess-

ence, existing as it does only by virtue of the primary distinction between itself and the not-self.

The dominant metaphor in expressing the experience of this "beatitude of indolence" is Limbo, that zone of the hereafter to which solicitous eschatologists consign the innocent damned. However, although strong Dantean overtones persist, Belacqua's Limbo is purged not only of desire, but of God and the rest of humanity. The shades that move here in a grave and ceremonious procession, without emotion or goal, "the dead and dead-born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born" are qualified as "the spirits of his dead and his unborn", suggesting a plenum of past and potential selves, a gathering together in one "place" and one "time" outside normal space and time of "the countless subjects that constitute the individual" (Proust, p.19), all the successive egos of "the perpetual exfoliation of the personality" (*ibid.*, p.25) brought together in a manifest entelechy with all those that will be and that might have been.

The metaphoric structure of the passage echoes this theme in the welter of images which cluster around a central form or motif, that of a container or enceinte, establishing the sense of a rich variety in monotony, each image reduplicating the function of the others, and differing from them as do the shades of a single colour, giving an imbricated multiple exposure to their common tenor.

This notion of a multi-faceted plenum is given expression also in the syntax of the passage, which moves with a ceremonial leisure through the slightly varied iterations and gentle advances of qualification of a single subject. The second sentence of the second paragraph is a good example here, with its three-fold anaphorical development and its gentle, lapping rhythm. In addition ellipsis is kept to a minimum, as in the tautological fullness of the phrasing in "sheltered from the winds and sheltered from the waters". Thus both metaphoric and syntactic structures reinforce the conceptual sense of the passage and add to its expressive density,

making it a kind of poetic litany that enacts through its style the experience it reports.

There is little of this kind of writing in More Pricks than Kicks. This work, Beckett's first published fiction of any length, is far leaner and far more acerbic. Gone is the exuberant momentum of youthful magniloquence, gone the ponderous accumulation of periphrastic clauses. The narrator of this collection, shifting his stance and his style with the wariness of a prize-fighter, remains for the most part at a good sneering distance from his characters, and declines any such direct approach to the characterisation of cerebral experience such as that we have just examined. Where the writing does rise to a similarly effusive level it is in the directly quoted speech of the characters, or in a style indirect libre from which the narrator takes pains to distance himself, as when he requests the reader "to take notice that this sweet style is Belacqua's" (p.41). Nevertheless, while he refrains from a poetic evocation of the nature and advantages of "the inner world" as an abode, the inclination to enter its sanctuary is kept clearly before us in the person of the central character. The Belacqua of More Pricks, who scoffs "at the idea of a sequitur from his body to his mind" (p.28), wants "very much to be back in the caul, on [his] back in the dark for ever," in which situation, he tells his interlocutor, he would be subjected to "no shaving, or haggling or cold or hugger-mugger, no...no night-sweats," (p.28). But nowhere in the ten episodes does he have much success in this intended retreat from the world, and nowhere does the narrator attempt to express the subjective quality of such an experience. Instead we are analytically informed of the "last phase of his solipsism, before he toed the line and began to relish the world" (p.33) and in the last story, "Yellow", he is described as "an indolent bourgeois poltroon, very talented up to a point, but not fitted for private life in the best and brightest sense, in the sense to which he referred when he bragged of how he furnished his mind and lived there, because it was the last ditch when all was said and done" (p.147). In the next major work however we find a hero

who is able more successfully to "go back into his heart", and a more direct attempt on the part of the narrator to follow him there, to say what kind of place the mind is.

Murphy, according to his own conception of himself, exists simultaneously in two worlds. Straddling a Cartesian schism, his intuitive leaning is to annul that part of himself that occupies the "big world" and immerse himself entirely in the "little world" of his mind. What makes this necessary is that Murphy's two natures desire different things. The issue which focuses the conflicting desires of his "unredeemed split self" (p.106) is that traditional source of disharmony, Eros. "The part of him that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shrivelled up at the thought of her" (p.8). According to Neary, Murphy's former mentor, the reason why Murphy cannot bring himself to love with the annihilating single-mindedness that Neary himself demonstrates so pathetically, is that his "conarium has shrunk to nothing" (p.8). But this (from Murphy's point of view) highly desirable state of affairs is obviously not the case, for only in special circumstances and for limited periods of time can Murphy nullify the claims of his body and "come alive in his mind" (p.6), attaining the rapture of a trance-like state of cerebral self-sufficiency. For Murphy, on these occasions, bound naked in his teak rocking-chair, "slowly the world died down, the big world where Quid pro quo was cried as wares and the light never waned the same way twice; in favour of the little, as described in section six, where he could love himself" (p.6).

The said section six, in which "a justification of the expression 'Murphy's mind' has to be attempted" (p.63), is sub-titled, *Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat*. The allusion to Spinoza's concept of the love God has for himself is assuredly ironic, yet it is more than simply a jest, for what Murphy savours in his mental world implies nothing less than an aspiration towards at least some of the properties of divinity. Firstly, Murphy imagines and believes that his mind is entirely self-bounded, that is, contains itself: "Murphy's mind pictured itself as a

large hollow sphere, hermetically sealed to the universe without" (p.63).^{*} This renders it sovereign over itself and free from the toils of all that is not-self. Our hero's hubris (his fate in the novel, and its presentation, make him a comical tragic hero) does not aspire as far as self-creation - he would not think to take this responsibility upon himself - but in his state of total self-immolation he is effectively begotten, not made. There is none of the sense of guilt in Murphy that will darken the later works, the obscure guilt of being, of having committed the sin of being born. There is in fact no guilt at all, to Murphy's mind, in Murphy's mind, and equally no virtue. As in the "Dream" extract quoted above, conscience is entirely absent. Perhaps this is also a feature of the divine; theological opinion seems divided. Certainly Murphy does not pass judgement on himself; his mind "did not function and could not be supposed to function according to a principle of worth. It was made up of light fading into dark, of above and beneath, but not of good or bad" (p.64). And in respect of three other attributes, each one corresponding to one of the three "zones" that constitute his monad, Murphy acts as God. In the first he displays omnipotence. This zone contains "forms with parallel, a radiant extract of the dog's life, the elements of physical experience available for a new arrangement. Here the pleasure was reprisal, the pleasure of reversing the physical experience... Here the whole physical fiasco became a howling success" (p.65).

In the second zone, "the half-light," Murphy experiences states of contemplative peace, free from all want or desire, content to be a purely passive consciousness, blissfully registering the beauty of some highly visual fantasy. Only one of these visions is described in detail. This is "the Belacqua fantasy...perhaps the most highly systematized of the whole collection", in which Murphy shares "Belacqua's rock and his embryonal repose, looking down at dawn across the reeds to the trembling of the austral sea and the sun obliquing to the north, as it rose" (p.48).

^{*} Reminiscent of the famous scholastic definition of God: Deus est sphaera cuius centrum ubique, circumferentia nusquam.

Like Dante's character who is condemned, for a life of indolence and a death-bed repentance, to spend a second life-time in Ante-purgatory before he may embark upon his arduous spirital purification, Murphy's only "activity" in this state is to witness his whole life as a dream. In this we see again the notion of a gathering together of all the temporally-fractured facets of the self in a state of contemplation resting calmly on the premise that the dreamer has a history that is not only complete but completely known, and which stamps him with an indelibly fixed identity. In this state, where he is "immune from expiation until he should have dreamed it all through again, with the downright dreaming of an infant, from the spermarium to the crematorium" (p.48), Murphy's life is at the same time his own and yet such that it may be viewed in toto with complete detachment; he may, in other words, see himself as though he were not himself, without ceasing to be himself. Behold another feature of divinity, this time a definition from our own century - Sartre's *pour-soi-en-soi*, "the In-itself which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the *Ens causa sui* which religions call God" (Being and Nothingness, p.65, quoted in Hesla, p.188).

We are not given any specific information about the other visions of the second zone, but they are all qualified as states in which the ablation of desire has been effected. Yet even here Murphy's will is not totally at rest, for "the choice of bliss introduced an element of effort" (p.66). It is only in the third zone, "the dark", that Murphy may attain the peace of utter "will-lessness". In the first zone Murphy is free to select and recombine elements of the physical world as he pleases; in the second, which Hesla calls with partial accuracy, "an intellectual pastry shop" (p.175), he is free to choose which beatitude of his "collection" he would like to enjoy. In the third, most highly favoured, zone however, is the freedom which is unconstrained by any choosing, for the dark contains "neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change" (pp.65-66). Here

the only vestige of consciousness is "the sensation of being a missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion" (p.66). It is the freedom of chaos, and very close to the "freedom" of oblivion. For Murphy it is a safe chaos in that he sees his mind as a structured space, stable in time, which his consciousness can never leave and in which it is always able, when the time comes, to feel the tug of the life-line, the effect of some kind of meta-consciousness to pull him back to one of the other realms. Murphy, as he fondly imagines himself to be, is like a contented prisoner in a wonderful three-storied gaol. The enduring tripartite structure of the connected but discrete zones, enables him to enjoy, again according to his theories about himself, omnipotence, bliss and total freedom, as and when he feels like, and without the requisites for any one of these three states interfering with those of the others.

Now despite the attractive ingenuity and clarity of this highly visual conception Murphy has of his mind, it is not finally a good or appropriate image, in that his experience in chapter eleven exposes it as "uninhabitable", as an illusory paradise of self-sufficiency. Our hero's moment of anagnorisis comes after his appalling chess defeat at the hands of the aptly-named Mr Endon. Before the disastrous events of Murphy's first night duty in the wards of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, he is inclined to believe that he will soon be able to immure himself totally and permanently in the world of his three zones, that he will soon succeed in burying his head in the beatific sands of the little world as conclusively as Mr Endon has apparently done. Murphy sees his position as being, for the moment, an intermediate point between the antithetic attitudes towards the mind that are crystallized in the conflict between the patients and the staff of the institution in which he has so recently found employ. He sees with disgust on the one hand "the complacent scientific conceptualism that made contact with outer reality the index of mental well-being" (p.101) and on the other, with admiration and longing, the passivity of "the higher schizoids" (p.102), which he takes as a clear indication that they are enjoying the

blissful advantages of a mental realm entirely disconnected from "outer reality", in "the little world where [he] presupposed them, one and all, to be having a glorious time" (p.102). But, while his inclination towards a mental life independent of physical existence is clearly established, he finds himself as yet unable to actualize his ideal, for he is not yet able to cut himself off completely from the pleasures of the material world ("witness his deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger and so on" p.102) and thus redeem his split self by renouncing one of its components. His trances in the rocking-chair "could sway the issue in the desired direction, but not clinch it" (p.102), and he is unable to consummate the "slap-up psychosis" (p.104) for which he longs. He believes nevertheless that in time and with effort ("he laboured more diligently than ever before at his own little dungeon in Spain" p.102) he can attain the state which he desires so much.

What Murphy does not realize is that he needs something else too: a witness. The omniscient and rather snide narrator informs us directly of this unconscious need: "He would not have admitted that he needed a brotherhood. He did" (p.100). Murphy has taken his success in handling the patients as "a signpost at last on the way he had followed so long and so blindly" (p.104). He does not acknowledge however that he needs more than a signpost; he needs the kind of acceptance and encouragement that only the recognition of fellowship can provide. But this need is grounded in the "sane" view that other minds do exist and are knowable, and is fundamentally incompatible with the solipsistic insanity which Murphy thinks he desires.

Making his rounds on his first spell of night duty at the asylum, Murphy opens the judas shutter of Mr Endon's cell to find its occupant staring back at him, "wearing an expression of winsome fiat" (p.135), across a chess board, set ready for play, on his bed. Murphy's appraisal of the scene is that "Mr Endon had recognized the feel of his friend's eye upon him and made his preparations accordingly." The truth of the matter, however, as the narrator informs us, is that "Mr Endon would have been less than Mr Endon if he had known what it was to have a friend; and Mur-

phy more than Murphy if he had not hoped against his better judgement that his feeling for Mr Endon was in some small degree reciprocated....while for Murphy Mr Endon was no less than bliss, Murphy for Mr Endon was no more than chess," (p.135). The game of chess that follows is a perfect emblem of this one-way relationship: Mr Endon wins the game after Murphy resigns in despair of ever affecting his opponent's imperturbable development, which effectively denies that there is any contest at stake. The madman's game is completely detached from that of the aspirant madman's in its aesthetic immunity from the desire for victory. For Murphy such detachment from his paragon of alienation is impossible, and it is with profound discomposure that he comes to realize that he is no more to Mr Endon than "a speck in his unseen" (p.140); as he stares, their faces almost touching, into Mr Endon's large and extraordinary eyes, all Murphy sees there is his own image, reflected in the glistening corneas of this aristocratic "microcosmopolitan", as though he were being refused entry, turned away from the gates of his imagined heaven, from the portals of madness, by the very rationality of his desire and effort to become insane. And it is just after this blow to his hopes that Murphy has a little taste of real dementia. Having wandered in a state of shock from the building, stripping off his clothing as he does so, Murphy lies down, naked, "in a tuft of soaking tuffets" (p.141) and tries to recompose his sense of himself by imagining first Celia, then his mother, then his father, but fails each time. Instead he sees "the clenched fists and rigid upturned face of the Child in a Giovanni Bellini Circumcision, waiting to feel the knife. He saw eyeballs being scraped, first any eyeballs, then Mr Endon's" (p.141). These nerve-grating images are followed by a succession of visual impressions which will not coalesce into any coherent form: "He could not get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human. Scraps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes, lines and colours evoking nothing, rose and climbed out of sight before him, as though reeled upward off a spool level with his throat," (p.141), and it is his nightmarish intuition that "the deeper coils" will hold images more distressing yet.

Here the chaos of the imagination that Murphy experiences does not bring him freedom, the blessed will-lessness that he imagines is attainably his; it is not a safe chaos, but a complete failure of conscious control that reveals the operation of an area or agent of his mind that is not admitted a place in his conception of it: an unconscious source of delirium and horror.

Murphy is thus forced to realize both that a "slap-up psychosis" cannot be his through an act of volition and that it is not what it was cracked up to be, anyway. His last spell in his chair is undertaken for what it is - an interlude of therapeutic meditation, not an introduction to permanent mental self-immolation. Hurrying back to his chamber, he ties himself to the chair and starts to rock in order to calm himself sufficiently to be able to "dress and go, before the day staff were about...back to Brewery Road, to Celia, serenade, nocturne, albada" (p.141), to return that is, to the most pleasant aspects of his ineffaceable corporeality. So the fond image of how Murphy's mind pictures itself to be is revealed as an inadequate image in that it does not accommodate certain aspects of his mental experience. And it is not the conceptual model of a state that he can attain either, but rather a complex and highly pictorial mantra. Murphy, then, is a novel about a character whose theoretical image of his own nature breaks down in the harsh light of his experience.

At the same time it is a comic novel. In my discussion so far I have concentrated on the thematic "content" or ideological concerns of the work insofar as these are expressed through the images of the mind that are entertained by the hero. But, of course, though these are weighty matters in themselves, the tonality of the tale utterly precludes a reading in which Murphy's nature and aspirations are registered as psychologically rich or emotionally engaging. The reason for this is quite clear: it is not so much that Murphy is a repellent or shallow character, but that his story is related by a sensibility that constantly belittles the portentousness of its hero's fate and makes it amusing rather than tragic or moving. Because of the

ironic distance that the narrator maintains we are able to have a good old Bergsonian laugh at the artificial rigidity of Murphy's ideas about his psyche; the narrator's unconcerned poise keeps the reader at an emotional remove from Murphy, whose consciousness is depicted with hardly a hint of sympathy or kindness. The narrator reports the ideational contents of this putative consciousness, but never allows the hero to speak for himself. Murphy's account of his own mind, as treated in chapter six, has been, like Celia's account of her relationship with Murphy to her grandfather, "expurgated, accelerated, improved and reduced" (p.11) by the narrator. Except for the "Belacqua bliss," Murphy's experience of his mental world is not expressed in a way that makes it imaginatively available to the reader through a poetic manifestation; to speak of Murphy's being "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom" (p.66) or "a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line" (p.66) is metaphysically and mathematically appealing, but experientially inaccessible; we cannot get close to what it feels like to be this "mote", this "point". It is a stylish way of talking, but, lacking affective "depth" or sensuous vividness, such characterization makes Murphy, despite the narrator's assertion to the contrary, as much a puppet as the other characters, constrained like them to take his place in the neat structure of the plot, no more exempt from the narrator's polished and cutting witticisms than the collection of knaves and fools that make up the cast of minor characters. Murphy is an elegant, arrogant, delightful book, and in its later treatment of Celia, evokes pathos with considerable restraint and poetic understatement, but in the imagery of Murphy's mental world its brilliance and lucidity are like the diagrammatic clarity of a philosophical cartoon, and the appeal of the work lies largely in the virtuoso performance of the narrator, a rather neglected topic a brief discussion of which will allow me to introduce and illustrate the elements of Genette's analysis of the five basic "functions" of the novelistic narrator.

The primary function of the narrator is, naturally, to tell the story, to perform, that is, the fonction narrative. If we accept, at least for theoretical purposes, the French structuralists' dualism of *histoire* and *discours* (see Brooke-Rose, p.19, for a concise discussion of these terms) it is clear that the same story might be told in an infinite number of different ways, each highlighting differences in attitude on the part of the narrator towards his characters, his audience or public, the story itself, and the world at large. Of all Beckettian narrators he who tells the tale of Murphy, while far from being run-of-the-mill, is the most traditional. Here is the anonymous, undramatized, external, omniscient narrator, familiar from the mainstream of novelistic narration, relating his tale with the classical assurance of one who knows all the facts, both "objective" and "subjective", as though he were some kind of recording angel. At the same time this omniscient perspective does not pretend to any kind of objectivity, and the bias with which the narrator presents his "facts" and the way in which he emphasizes what is important among them coalesce to create the impression of a distinct narratorial sensibility.

Particularly revealing is the attitude the narrator displays towards his characters, which in this case is one of disdainful and cutting superiority, as though he himself were exempt from the human condition, which, in a sense, *qua* narrator, he is. His characters tend towards caricatures, fixed and labelled by one or two distinguishing characteristics. The limit cases are those of Cooper and Ticklepenny, Miss Counihan, Miss Carridge, and Miss Dew. They are, in Forster's term, "flat" characters, having no depth or mystery, and, driven by particular and unchanging impulses, display no possibility for emotional or spiritual development. The more important characters, Neary, the foolish mentor, and Wylie, the cunning arriviste, are important mainly because they articulate in a brilliant, highly elliptical and very witty short-hand the philosophical ground against which the hero figures, depicting the intellectual world from which Murphy has ostensibly withdrawn but which yet informs his perception of the world and of himself. But they too are ciphers in

the book's schematic depiction of the worthlessness of learning. On the one hand we have the duped idealist, whose insight serves only to illuminate his hopeless bondage to his irrational and obsessional desires. The knowledge of this romantic professor, who is given to ridiculous and overblown gestures to express his cartoon passions, does him no good at all, and his theories of Apmonia, Isonomy and Attunement provide him with no exit from the Tantalean treadmill of his desire. His learning is impotent, and, like the successive objects of his desire, mutates perpetually: once a Yogi, then a Pythagorean, he later adopts a phenomenological framework in which to wriggle, all but quoting William James: "Murphy, all life is figure and ground....the single, brilliant, organized, compact blotch in the tumult of heterogeneous stimulation" (pp.6-7). On the other hand is Wylie, who represents another facet of the spiritual impotence of intelligence. A rank egotist, his dazzling conversational wit serves only to disguise his self-gratifying machinations. He twists Neary round his little finger, blackmails the hapless Cooper into his service, and exploits Miss Counihan erotically and financially. We have already touched on the narrator's attitude towards the hero, who is, like Neary and Wylie, of interest chiefly because of his intellectual significance, although his character is lent a certain degree of sympathetic weight by his integrity: he at least takes his ideas seriously and attempts to act in accordance with his philosophical tenets. Ultimately, however, Celia, the Irish prostitute, is the only character who is "rounded" in an emotional sense or who displays the inner dynamism of a "development", and her stoic and clear-sighted acceptance of her lot at the book's end seems to win from the cynical narrator the begrudging respect of silence, her sense of loss being poignantly evoked, not stated, in the dismal details of the book's concluding scene. On the whole however, the story-teller's view of the human race might be summed up in his characterization of the chandler's wife as his "semi-private convenience" and of the chandler's first-born as his "eldest waste product" (p.47).

The chain of events in which this cast of knaves and fools is caught up is similarly stylized. The emblem of human interaction, that stamps every relationship of the book, is that of frustrated desire, epitomised in the vicious circle of unrequited love in which Neary features as link at the opening of the story: "Of such was Neary's love for Miss Dwyer, who loved a Flight-Lieutenant Elliman, who loved a Miss Farren of Ringsakiddy, who loved a Father Fitt of Ballinclashet, who in all sincerity was bound to acknowledge a certain vocation for a Mrs West of Passage, who loved Neary" (p.7). Celia wants Murphy, because she loves him. She loses him. Part of Murphy wants Celia, but he does not want that part of himself. The other part wants itself and wants recognition from Mr Endon, the only character who does not really want anything. Murphy loses both parts of himself in the explosion that kills him. Neary wants Counihan, the object of a fresh round of romantic torment for him. He does not win her. Then he wants Murphy, as a companion, but loses him. Then he desires Celia, but does not stand a chance with her, and neither does Wylie, who also falls for her, but who makes do with Miss Counihan, who suffers his attentions but really wants Murphy, and is, needless to say, disappointed. Such is the stuff of the *histoire*. The manner in which the narrator organises and presents this raw material, directing his reader's attention to the constituent parts of the temporal extension of the plot, is what Genette calls the *fonction de régie*. Dividing his material into chapters which emphasize the basic units of the plot and focus on its most important or dramatic scenes, excerpted from the continuum of the time to be represented with a sure hand, and a good eye for suspense-creating ellipsis (see, for example, the end of chapter five), the narrator follows a basically straightforward temporal sequence of events, but executes some fancy foot-work as he traces the fate of his various characters, intercalating chapter by chapter the different strands of the action in a pattern that settles before long into a dialectic focusing alternately on Murphy and the other main characters who are, each for his own particular reason, in search of him. These strands are related to each other and to

the movements of the stars, ironically underlining the astrological theme of the book, with a precision that emphasizes the narrator's total knowledge of "the facts", and satirizes the realist convention which, in such specification of dates and times, presents fiction in the guise of history. The opening of the seventh chapter illustrates this meticulous and stylish temporal articulation very well:

Celia's triumph over Murphy, following her confidence to her grandfather, was gained about the middle of September, Thursday the 12th to be pedantic, a little before the Ember Days, the sun being still in the Virgin. Wylie rescued Neary, consoled and advised him, a week later, as the sun with a sigh of relief passed over into the Balance. The encounter, on which so much unhinges, between Murphy and Ticklepenny, took place on Friday, October the 11th (though Murphy did not know that), the moon being full again, but not nearly so near the earth as when last in opposition.

Let us now take Time that old fornicator, bald though he be behind, by such few sad short hairs as he has, back to Monday, October the 7th, the first day of his restitution to the bewitching Miss Greenwich.

The narrator's treatment of setting also falls within a conventional mode of novelistic realism in that he places his characters in an actual geographical locale (London and Dublin of the mid-thirties), replete with detailed topographical descriptions. And once more the attitudes and judgements of the narrator's sensibility seep through his presentation of the "facts" of the story. His view of London stresses the bleak, the humdrum and the ugly aspects of the metropolis, consonant with his implicit opinions of the quality of life of its citizens, and emphasizes the dehumanizing impact of the trends of contemporary urban architecture. The opening scene of the novel has Murphy in his West Brompton mew where, "for what might

have been six months he had eaten, drunk, slept, and put his clothes on and off, in a medium-sized cage of north-western aspect commanding an unbroken view of medium-sized cages of south-eastern aspect" (p.5). The room to which he and Celia move is situated in "Brewery Road between Pentonville Prison and the Metropolitan Cattle Market" (p.40). The most frequent city landmarks are hospitals and gin-palaces. Murphy, desperate to sit down during one of his job-hunting forays, can find "nowhere. There had once been a small public garden south of the Royal Free Hospital, but now part of it lay buried under one of those malignant proliferations of urban tissue known as service flats and the rest was reserved for the bacteria" (p.47).

Genette stresses more than once that these categories of narratorial function blend into one another, and that a single statement in the narrative may perform more than one at the same time. Such a critical treatment of a real, contemporary, setting shades into the *fonction idéologique*, where the narrator expresses his views about the "real world", opinions which range from the weary vision of life in general presented by the opening sentence ("The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new"), to (cynical) moral advice, such as "Miss Counihan could think ill of her partners, past, present and prospective, without prejudice to herself. This is a faculty that no young man or woman, stepping down into the sexpit, should be without" (p.143), to the most mundane kind of information, such as how to get a little extra tea from a restaurant without paying for it, which stratagem the narrator exhorts his reader to "Try...sometime, gentle skimmer" (p.51).

This direct address of the reader is an overtly voiced example of the *fonction de communication*, that aspect of the narrator's performance that establishes and maintains a rapport with his reader. Such direct address is not made very often in Murphy, and where it is, it is generally, as here, in a tone of raillery that satirizes the "dear reader" form of direct address. But beneath the surface of such insulting rhetoric, which at its most vituperative moment apostrophizes the reader as a "monster of humanity and enlightenment" and admonishes him to "admire Bom feeling

dimly for once what you feel acutely so often, Pilate's hands rustling in his mind" (p.97), a joshing or challenging kind of scholarly kinship is implicitly invoked in all the ironic and learned allusions in the text (to, inter alia, the Bible, Descartes, Spinoza, and William James), not to mention the lexical rarities that have most of us reaching for a good dictionary every few pages.

Genette's fifth narratorial function is closely related to the *fonction de communication*, dealing with the story-teller's orientation towards his story and justifying his authority to tell it. This, the *fonction d'attestation*, gives rise to no explicit comment in Murphy, as the narrator's omniscience, his right to be sure of the accuracy of his narration, is never in question. In Beckett's next major published work however, this aspect of narrative voice is brought very prominently to the fore by the book's very structure, and in general the four "extra-narrative" functions, the organisational, the communicative, the testimonial and the ideological, tend in the monologues which follow Watt to eclipse the primary task of the narrator, and to fill the vacuum left by the erosion of the story as a coherent and significant form.

Watt, completed in the rural exile and isolation of a small village in unoccupied France during the closing years of the Second World War, sees the disappearance of youth's glib wit, and of the external narrator whose laconic voice relates the adventures and misadventures of mortals from the heights of an Olympian irony, with an absolute knowledge of the "facts", both objective and subjective, of his narrative. In Watt we witness the transformation of this omniscient authority into a subjective and fallible witness who relates a story that he has been told by someone who allegedly experienced it himself - the convention in which the author of a fictional tale declines a God-like knowledge of "what happened" in favour of a more realistic epistemological stance towards his material, and which Kierkegaard referred to in Either/Or as "the old trick of the novelist" (quoted in Kern, p.88).

Both these forms of narrative voice are well-represented in the canons of novelistic tradition. What is original and disturbing in the narrative form of Watt is that within a single work both these conventions are invoked, so that the voice we trust initially as belonging to a narrator who can tell us "what happened" with complete accuracy and reliability is gradually replaced by one whose claim to authority and even to mere sanity becomes tenuous in the extreme, causing a disconcerting modal shift in the degree of narrative certitude, and forcing us to reconsider the information that we have previously accepted unquestioningly.

The narrator of Part One of the book is far less obtrusive as a distinctive sensibility than is that of Murphy, far less given to judgemental commentary or witticisms. Porter Abbot sees in this narratorial reticence an attempt to produce an "authorless" narrative voice, identifying in an analysis of the opening passage a "mean style" from which "Beckett has concentrated...on extracting...all moral and emotional bias" (p.62). But it is really only the first scene of the book - the scene in which Hunchy Hackett and the Nixons see Watt alight from the 'bus and attempt to interpret his behaviour - that displays any notable degree of "pure", Hemingway-type "showing", and even here the mimetic illusion is broken by various narratorial comments, such as the foot-note to the second page of the text, a "meta-textual" announcement with strong "ideological" (and ironic) overtones,* or the put-down of Hackett's emphatic declaration to the policeman - "Officer, he cried, as God is my witness, he had his hand upon it. / God is a witness that cannot be sworn"(p.6)** - reminiscent of the memorable ex cathedra narratorial comment that concludes the first story of More Pricks than Kicks. Admittedly there is very little in the way of elucidatory comment here about the characters or the action, leaving

* "Much valuable space has been saved, in this work, that would otherwise have been lost, by avoidance of the plethoric reflexive pronoun after say."

** It is unlikely that such a good line would be given to a Beckettian officer of the law, though the absence of quotation marks does not rule out this possibility entirely.

the burden of the narration to a direct visual record of the scene and the characters' oratio recta dialogue, but this I think should be seen rather as the initial withholding of information characteristic of the "introît enigmatique" that Genette identifies as "un topos de début romanesque" (p.208), than as the inauguration of an "authorless" narrative style, because the narrator soon becomes more talkative, making explicit "ideological" comments like, "It is so difficult for railway porters to keep sweet and clean, with the work they have to do" (p.22), adding ironical epithets to his narration, as in, "Can't you look where you're going? [the porter] said. / Watt did not cry out at this extravagant suggestion..." (p.22; my emphasis), passing judgement on his characters, like, "Here then was a sensible man at last" (p.25), and leaving aside the temporal concatenation of the action to fill in background information, such as the little digressions on Watt's smile (pp.23 & 25), or to make prophetic remarks like "And it will be a long time now before Watt smiles again..." (p.25).

The mind that expresses itself thus as it relates the story of Watt's progress to the house of Mr Knott is apparently omniscient, having direct knowledge of the thoughts, dispositions, attitudes and histories of his characters, as the opening paragraph clearly shows. Part Two commences in similar vein, but as the focus of the narration shifts from a generalized, iterative account of the conditions of Watt's employment in Mr Knott's establishment to what Watt understands about same, three pages into the section, we find a paragraph which explicitly admits that there may be parts of the story that the narrator does not know: "But even where there was no light for Watt [on the subject of Mr Knott], there may be light for others. Or there was perhaps some light for Watt, on Mr Knott, on Watt...that he left unspoken. That is by no means impossible" (p.66). So suddenly we find ourselves in the hands of a narrator who is merely Watt's "mouthpiece", and who cannot know what Watt himself does not know, or what Watt has not told him. And six pages further on the epistemological foundations of the narrator's knowledge are further shaken in the first

passage to describe the circumstances of the story's original narration, by its hero, to his "mouthpiece":

But what was this pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning? And to what did it tend? These are delicate questions. For when Watt at last spoke of this time, it was a time long past, and of which his recollections were, in a sense, perhaps less clear than he would have wished, though too clear for his liking, in another. Add to this the notorious difficulty of recapturing, at will, modes of feeling peculiar to a certain time, and a certain place, and perhaps also to a certain state of the health, when the time is past, and the place left, and the body struggling with quite a new situation. Add to this the obscurity of Watt's communications, the rapidity of his utterance and the eccentricities of his syntax....Add to this the material conditions in which these communications were made. Add to this the scant aptitude to receive of him to whom they were proposed. Add to this the scant aptitude to give of him to whom they were committed. And some idea will perhaps be obtained of the difficulties experienced in formulating, not only such matters as those here in question, but the entire body of Watt's experience, from the moment of his entering Mr Knott's establishment to the moment of his leaving it. (p.72)

Four pages later, in a discussion of Watt's difficulty in speaking of "the incident of the Galls father and son," the narrator refers to himself for the first time in the first person, in an unobtrusive parenthesis: "though it seems probable that they recurred no more, at the period of Watt's revelation, to me, but were as though they had never been" (p.76). It is only much further on that he does this again, right near the end of the section that treats of the first half of Watt's

period of employment, in a statement that makes the diegetic framework of all that has been related so far explicit at last:

And if Watt had not known this, that Erskine's key was not a simple key, then I should never have known it either, nor the world. For all that I know on the subject of Mr Knott, and of all that touched Mr Knott, and on the subject of Watt, and of all that touched Watt, came from Watt, and from Watt alone. And if I do not appear to know very much on the subject of Mr Knott and of Watt, and on the subject of all that touched them, it is because Watt did not know a great deal on these subjects, or did not care to tell. But he assured me at the time, when he began to spin his yarn, that he would tell all, and then again, some years later, when he had spun his yarn, that he had told all. And as I believed him then and then again, so I continued to believe him, long after the yarn was spun, and Watt gone. (123-24)

It is in the first twenty odd pages of Part Three that the narrator becomes fully "dramatized" (in Booth's sense of the term; see his Rhetoric of Fiction, pp.151-52), as he leaves aside the primary narrative altogether to present the scene in which it was told to him by Watt. Here the narrator not only becomes an eye-witness to what he reports, but a character as well, in a secondary diegetic narrative that tells us something of what Watt is to go through after leaving Mr Knott's house - a character whose plight, whose social alienation and eccentricities are strikingly similar to those of the broken hero. Both are the inmates of what is apparently some kind of mental home, in the grounds of which they walk and talk, when the weather conditions are suitable, breaking off their discourse from time to time to hunt and kill birds or to play with rats, sometimes feeding them with their own offspring: "seizing a plump young rat, resting in our bosoms after its repast,

we would feed it to its mother, or its father, or its brother, or its sister, or to some less fortunate relative," (p.153). And the narrator, who has by now identified himself as Sam, adds, "It was on these occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we come closest to God." This then is our narrator, this is the author of the generally calm, tirelessly patient, self-effacingly unobtrusive voice whose apparently fastidious faithfulness in reporting what he has been told by his informant is interrupted only by such parenthetical commentary as we have referred to above, or to occasional semantic discussions like the following:

And is it not strange most strange that one says of a thing that it is full, when it is not full at all, but not of a thing that it is empty, if it is not empty? And the reason for that is this, that when one fills, one seldom fills quite full, for that would not be convenient, whereas when one empties one empties completely, holding the vessel upside down, and rinsing it out with boiling water if necessary, with a kind of fury. (p.92)

This example is a telling illustration of Sam's sensibility, where logical finicality combined with an ingenious linguistic commonsense become tinged with a manic inclination to a scouring thoroughness. And this is the ethos of the narration dealing with Watt's stay in Mr Knott's house as a whole: a deranged pedantry concerned with an exhaustive consideration of permutations of possible causations, together with a complete lack of inquiry into what we feel to be major mysteries, such as, Why did Watt go to Knott's house in the first place? Who organizes the succession of servants, and why? And after reading Sam's two-page speculation into the possible causes of the congruent holes in the fences that separate Watt's garden from Sam's, we cannot but wonder how much of the hair-splitting discussion apparently quoted from Watt's account of his own cerebral processes is not better attributed to Watt's

mouthpiece, Sam. The style is precisely the same, and it is very different from that of the examples of Watt's speech that Sam quotes directly in Part Three. Here, when the various inversions have been unscrambled, is a style the syntactic brevity and simplicity of which suggest a great weariness, and of which the short and highly rhythmical cadences suggest an almost religious concern with essences, in strong contrast to the lengthy, exhaustive, legalistic periods which deal in rigorous epistemological scrupulosity with hypothetical aetiologies of manifest phenomena. The following passage, with the sentences restored to a normal order, is a good example of Watt's post-Knott style:

Abandoned my little to find him. My little to learn him forgot. To love him my little reviled. This body homeless. This mind ignoring. These emptied hands. This emptied heart. To him I brought. To the temple. To the teacher. To the source. Of nought. (p.164)

That the whole of Arthur's twenty-nine-page account of Mr Luit's academic chicanery could be extracted from this kind of talk with enough veracity to warrant the oratio recta presentation it so exhaustively receives is patently implausible. If we are to maintain the notion of narratorial consistency in these conditions, to maintain that is, an impression of Sam as the narrator, we must construe him as being not merely a subjective and eminently fallible narrator, but a highly inventive one as well.

In the last part of the book there is another disconcerting shift of narrative approach, as Sam disappears from the story both as character and narrator, and there is a return to the faintly ironical narratorial omniscience of Part One, able to report without equivocation information to which Watt himself has no access, such as the unspoken thoughts (see, for example, pp.228-30) or habits (e.g. pp.235-36) of other characters. Thus a frame of "objective", omniscient narration is set about

Sam's account of what Watt has told him about Knott and his abode, the formal symmetry of which is heightened in the way that the gradual intrusion of the narrator's presence as a commentator in Part One is now reversed as summaries, informative analepses and evaluative descriptions interrupt less and less the direct statement and simple temporal sequentiality of the action and the dialogue.

In addition to this framework, there is a further kind of embedding or layering of diegetic levels at work, firstly in the figure of an editor who has, presumably, discovered and is presenting to us Sam's notebook and the manuscript that contains the objective narration of Parts One and Four, whose scrupulous fidelity to his material is ostensibly attested to in various elucidatory foot-notes and such parentheses as "(Hiatus in MS.)" (p.238) and "(MS. illegible)" (p.240), and then in the figure of the implied author, the conscious literary fabulator of the Addenda, who is too "fatigued and disgusted" to incorporate "this precious and illuminating material" (p.247) into the body of his work. Edith Kern likens this intricate narrative structuring to "Kierkegaard's technique of placing one author inside another in the manner of a Chinese puzzle box," (p.184), and then goes on to draw the following connection between this structuring and the author's metaphysics:

As is to be expected, the novel's formal structure reflects and, indeed, is expressive of the universe as Beckett envisions it: a Kierkegaardian universe peopled with isolated existents, unable to know each other, except as possibilities. As in Kierkegaard's work, manuscript is enclosed within manuscript, so in Watt, account is ~~enclosed~~ within account, the teller always being told. The old trick of the novelist is changed, however, in that Beckett does not use it to create a semblance of truth but rather to pile unreliable narrator upon unreliable narrator. His double and even triple negatives add up to one important cer-

tainty, however: that of the elusiveness of Being and the failure to which any attempt at revealing it is doomed. (p.186)

Certainly the theme of "isolated existents" is of undeniable importance, but the book seems to delve with more urgency, to my mind, into the opacities of an individual vis-à-vis himself. I have mentioned how Sam's style permeates what is supposedly Watt's narrative discourse. We also find him slipping, unmistakably into the idiolect of Arsene, whose masterfully eloquent, masterfully incoherent monologue is quoted verbatim by the omniscient narrator of Part One. Compare, for example, this extract from Sam's account with the first five pages of Arsene's valedictory:

But to Mr Knott, and with Mr Knott, and from Mr Knott, were a coming and a being and a going exempt from langour, exempt from fever, for Mr Knott was harbour, Mr Knott was haven, calmly entered, freely ridden, gladly left. Driven, riven, given, by the storms without, the storms within? The storms without! The storms within! Men like Vincent and Walter and Arsene and Watt! Haw! No. (p.133)

Similarly, the other major set-piece monologue, that of Arthur in Part Three, slips frequently and at great length into the tireless articulation of permutations that characterizes so much of Sam's writing. The overall effect of such stylistic overlapping is to threaten the boundaries that maintain our impression of different, separate speakers, and, in a comedy of maladroit ventriloquism, to stress the ultimate singleness of origin of all the book's voices. The effect of the "antinovelistic" shifts of narrative perspective and person is thus not only to expose, by flouting its consistency, the convention by which the author adopts different voices, but, caught between the necessity for such literary artifice and the desire to be rid of

it, to underline the impression of an ultimately inescapable narrative solipsism. In this light the formal symmetries of the text may be regarded simply as moves in a game of literary solitaire.

I have spoken of an ultimate singleness of origin, but this is not realized in, nor by, any single speaker, except possibly that of the "author" of the Addenda, and the prevailing image created within the tottering convention of the book's fictional "reality" is of a sundered dyad of identity, a "pseudocouple", as the Unnamable has it with reference to Mercier and Camier. In this reading Sam and Watt together form two aspects of a schizophrenic figure, the components of whose dual nature no longer recognize their co-identity, existing in relation to each other as subject (Sam) to object (Watt), as though dramatizing an extreme case of the division that Schopenhauer sees in every act of self-consciousness: "Even in self-consciousness the I is not absolutely simple, but consists of a knower, the intellect, and a known, the will. The former is not known, and the latter does not knowthe I is not thoroughly intimate with itself, as it were transparent, but is opaque and therefore remains a riddle to itself" (quoted in Rosen, p.213). Extrapolating this psychological allegory, we may speculate that a catastrophic confrontation with "the source of nought" - say, the ultimately inexplicable nature of things in a Godless universe - has produced a psychic shock that drives one aspect of the individual into the finally aphasic suffering of the Watt-Christ, and the other into the worldless garrulity and hopeless pseudo-logical pedantry of Sam. The increasing failure of communion between these two facets of a fractured self reaches its climax in the account which Sam gives of their final meeting, an occasion on which the narrator is for a moment tempted to recognize his identity with the broken zetetic before him:

Then he turned, with the intention very likely of going back the way he had come, and I saw his face, and the rest of his front. His face was

bloody, his hand also, and thorns were in his scalp. (His resemblance, at that moment, to the Christ believed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, was so striking that I remarked it.) And at the same instant suddenly I felt as though I were standing before a great mirror, in which my garden was reflected, and my fence, and I, and the very birds tossing in the wind, so that I looked at my hands, and felt my face, and glossy skull, with an anxiety as real as unfounded. (For if anyone, at that time, could be truly said not to resemble the Christ supposed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, I flatter myself it was I.)
(p.157)

However seriously we care to take this hint at the identity of Watt and Sam, it is clear that the narrative enacts a cleavage between the entity who experiences and the entity that reports that experience, which makes the relation between narrator and character treacherously tenuous. Because of this split between experiencing and narrating parties, it is never at first-hand that we as readers come to share in Watt's quandaries; we do not encounter the complexities of a first-person narrator in attempting to speak of his own experience, as is the case of the French monologues that follow this work, and we are not given any attempt at a direct description of the hero's consciousness as he struggles to make sense of his perceptual and semantic obscurities. Instead we are informed of his failed efforts in this regard by a third party, and thus we remain on the outside of these mysteries. For example, the word "pot" does not lose its meaning for us; we understand that for Watt it ceases to signify anything because Sam tells us so, but neither narrator nor reader is able to share this experience of a word's failure to mean.* Similarly, for us as for Sam,

* I can make little sense of Porter Abbot's assertion, apropos Watt's sense of the semantic inadequacy of "pot", that "at the same time the narrator is explaining all this, the reader also experiences the insufficiency of words because of the form in which the explanation is put" (p.61; original emphasis).

the "affair of the Galls father and son" does not lose its literal meaning and become "a mere example of light commenting bodies, and stillness motion, and silence sound, and comment comment" (p.70), an "incident of great formal brilliance and indeterminate purport" (p.71); it remains for us what it was when Sam first described it to us, a rather bizarre but ultimately clear account of an event that occurs in a large country house, involving two piano tuners and a ruined piano. We are informed of Watt's ignorance, of his confusion, but it does not become our ignorance and our confusion. In the later works Beckett espouses a more direct transcription of the ignorance and confusion at the heart of human experience, and to do this he must discard the remove involved in narration from the outside. It is true that the figure of Mr Knott does take us deeper into Watt's bemusement, for here his experience is not an ebbing away of an initial comprehension, but an initial and enduring ineffability. But in Watt's account of Mr Knott, especially in the matter of his protean physical appearance, we enter the realm of the fantastical, and our confusion is of an allegorical order rather than, like Watt's, a matter of perceptual incoherence. All the allusions to Knott as the Godhead (inter alia, pp. 145, 146 & 202), and the fragments of Berkleyan ontology, (pp.202-203), make Knott less a character than an allegorical embodiment of a theoretical state: an ataraxic consciousness almost completely independent of physical needs, and equally free from what Beckett in his introduction to the script of his Film calls "the inescapability of self-perception". Relieved of the burden of witnessing himself, his *esse* maintained by the perception of his servants, his nature is at the same time, because of its perceptual elusiveness, proof against the petrifying gaze of the Other. The mysteriously ordained domestic arrangements of his household are designed to satisfy the only two needs with which (in Watt's eyes) he is afflicted: the need not to need and the need to be witnessed in his not needing. This leaves Knott in a subjective state of almost divine aseity. Free from the tyranny of desire, he is at ease to enjoy both the "inner world", content for "long periods of time" to adopt his only charac-

teristic attitude, "which consisted in the simultaneous obturation of the facial cavities, the thumbs in the mouth, the forefingers in the ears, the little fingers in the nostrils, the third fingers in the eyes, and the second fingers, free in a crisis to promote intellection, laid along the temples" (p.212), and the outer, wandering about his house and garden as a pure spectator, his disinterested perception untinged by an owner's sense of responsibility or even familiarity.

This enigmatic figure therefore plays a role analogous to that of Murphy's erroneous image of his own mind; that of an ideal state of apatheia towards which the hero is inclined but into which he can never fully enter. Nothing that Sam reports gainsays the impression that within the narrow but sufficient ambit of his house and grounds Mr Knott is "calm and free and glad" while the best that Watt can manage in emulation is to think that "perhaps he felt calm and free and glad, or if not calm and free and glad, at least calm and free, or free and glad, or glad and calm, or if not calm and free, or free and glad, or glad and calm, at least calm, or free, or glad, without knowing it" (p.133). Nevertheless, for a while, Watt is able partially to share Mr Knott's freedom from the contingencies of the phenomenal world, as this unscrambled passage makes clear: "So lived, for tim. Not sad, nod gay. Not awak, not aslep. Not aliv, not aded. Not bod, not sprit. Not wat, not knot. Til day cam, to go," (p.165). For some time, we gather, during his second period of service in Mr Knott's establishment, Watt's intellectual need to be able to grasp what has happened to him or simply about him, in words and thoughts, falls into abeyance under Mr Knott's influence: "Watt learned towards the end of his stay in Mr Knott's house to accept that nothing had happened, that a nothing had happenend, learned to bear it and even, in a shy way, to like it" (p.71). But it is likely that it is just at this point, as Watt comes to share his master's incurious acceptance of the absence of meaning from phenomena, that he becomes useless as a witness to his master, and must be replaced. And very soon after Watt is expelled from his potential paradise by the arrival of his successor, Micks, we find him once again com-

mitting the indiscretion that brings its own punishment, again desiring to know, to be able to explain, what has occurred in his presence, falling once again into "this old error, this error of the old days when, lacerated with curiosity, in the midst of substance shadowy he stumbled," (p.226).

Watt's problem is that his mind is not sufficiently detached simply to accept the incidents that he cannot explain as "what they perhaps were, the simple games that time plays with space, now with these toys, and now with those," (p.71). His need is to align his inner world, the world of his mind, through the agency of language, to the appearance of the outer world, not, we note, in pursuit of knowledge ("his character was not so peculiar as all that" p.71) but of peace. He needs, in other words, to evolve from "the meticulous phantoms that beset him, a hypothesis proper to disperse them, as often as this was found necessary....For to explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt," (pp.74-75). More specifically, what Watt requires to be exorcised is an involuntary psychic re-enactment of those events that "resisted all [his] efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula," (pp.75-76). The incident of the Galls, "the first and type of many" (p.72) that Watt will suffer chez Knott, continues to "happen" to Watt "in his mind, he supposed...though it seemed to be outside him, before him, about him, and so on, inexorably unrolling its phases, beginning with the first (the knock that was not a knock) and ending with the last (the door closing that was not a door closing), and omitting none, uninvoked, at the most unexpected moments and the most inopportune" (p.73). And so the scene "revisits" Watt "in such a way that he [is] forced to submit to it all over again, to hear the same sounds, see the same lights, touch the same surfaces, and so on, as when they had first involved him in their unintelligible intricacies" (p.73). Prior to his arrival at Knott's house, and even sometimes (as in the case of the dog to which the master's leftovers are to be fed) during his stay there, Watt is successful in turning "little by little, a disturbance into words," in making "a pillow of old words, for his head," (p.115). But more and more in the mysterious

atmosphere of Knott's abode our hero's words begin to fail him, and his world to become unspeakable, until, as we have seen, shortly before the end, Watt begins to share his master's acceptance of the ineffable and the inexplicable. After his expulsion however, Watt is once more prey to his old and debilitating craving, but now with the fatal difference that his old methods of allaying his anxiety no longer work. And thus Watt becomes the broken Christ-clown of the last encounter with Sam, stumbling backwards through the tangled thickets of his experience and his discourse.

In Watt there is nothing like the direct characterization of a mind's self-image that we find in Murphy. Instead of the eloquent and ironic lucidity of the earlier work, there are countless expressions of epistemological humility in regard to such matters. Watt's visions take place "in his mind, he supposed, though he did not know exactly that that meant" (p.73); the knocking that inaugurates the Gall sequence repeats itself "presumably in his mind, whatever that might mean" (p.74); and when Sam attempts to speak of his "purely mental faculties", his explanatory opposition ends in no more than a series of question marks (p.167). Both the rigorous ephecticism of Sam's style and the enforced distance of an external but non-omniscient narration, pointing alike towards the essential ineffability of the Other's experience, render such a direct approach out of the question. Nevertheless the basic dualistic model of "inner" mental world and "outer" physical world is implicitly endorsed in a number of instances, and the notion that the former might serve as the exclusive abode of the consciousness, while never being recommended as an explicit programme as it is in Murphy, is suggested in Sam's description of the "mansions" which both he and Watt inhabit, and which function as sensory deprivation chambers. Here, in "windowlessness...in bloodheat...in hush" dwell Watt and Sam, "each in his separate soundless unlit warmth" (p.150). Within the womb-like sequestration of these monads, strongly reminiscent of the padded cells in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat that so delighted Murphy, surpassing "by far all he had ever been

able to imagine in the way of indoor bowers of bliss" (Murphy, p.103), the mind may become a boundless non-physical "place", so that in comparison, the garden of ten or fifteen acres "seemed little, after our mansions" (p.151).

What has changed, radically, since Murphy, is the aesthetic quality of life in the inner world. The beatific visions, the variety of glorious spectacles, these are extinguished; instead the mind is now "the dark place" (p.225). It is, moreover, no longer a silent place, no longer a refuge from the clamour of the "outer" world, but is filled with "the soundless tumult of inner lamentation" (p.215), having become the issueless echo-chamber of an "inner" voice. The only reference to this organ in Murphy is in the case of Mr Endon (who serves in a number of ways, not least in his catastrophic effect upon the hero, as a prototype of Mr Knott), whose inner voice "did not harangue him, [but] was unobtrusive and melodious, a gentle continuo in the whole consort of his hallucinations" (p.105). Mr Knott's inner voice seems likewise to occasion him no trouble or distress, and the "wild, dim chatter" (p.208) that Watt overhears him giving vent to is likened to an entirely natural and rather pleasant sound, which naturally bears no burden of meaning - the pattering of rain on bamboo. The hero's inner voices are however a different matter entirely.

Watt's problem is not that he talks to himself (as we all do when cerebrating in a certain way). Such a discourse is the medium of his rational efforts to defuse the mysteries that haunt him, and in it "thinking" and "saying" (to oneself, naturally, as indicated by the foot-note that warns us of the intention to save space by avoiding "the plethoric reflexive pronoun after say", p.6) are virtually interchangeable terms, both referring to the "ancient labour" of converting a state of psychic excitation into "a pillow of old words, for the head" (p.115). The trouble is that Watt's mind is the locus not only of this conscious effort, but also of an involuntary "hearing". At certain times Watt becomes aware of "voices" that must originate in the inner world, as they do not come from the outer, but remains in ignorance as to their exact source and sometimes even their meaning. Thus of the

voices that drown Mr Spiro's disquisition in the train, "singing, crying, stating, murmuring...to mention only these four kinds for there were others," Watt "sometimes understood all, and sometimes understood much, and sometimes understood little, and sometimes understood nothing" (p.27). And it is not merely a question of comprehending the meaning of the words that impinge upon his consciousness in this fashion; on occasion it is the intentionality of the voice he does not grasp, unable to judge for instance whether it is speaking sincerely or ironically: "Watt, reflecting on this, heard a voice say, Mr Knott, having once known a man who was bitten by a dog, in the leg....Watt never knew quite what to make of this particular little voice, whether it was joking, or whether it was serious" (p.88). The disturbing implication of these obtrusive inner voices is that his self, displaying a radical lack of integrity and wholeness, is not only opaque or inscrutable to itself, but bears within it some psychic agency or entity that may be teasing or mocking Watt's reason-ridden consciousness. In the darker works to come, the affective intentionality of the inner voice will range from kindly advice and moral exhortation to malicious deception, tyranny and even sadism.

There is one other aspect of the presentation of life in the "inner world" in Watt that I want to discuss before passing to the French monologues. This aspect too, that of the use of setting as a means of portraying "modes of inmost being", reveals Watt as a transitional work between the more conventional Murphy and the weird "novels" that are to follow. In Murphy, the setting of the story is basically realist in function - not merely in that the scenes and locales presented generally have historical originals, but that they provide a stable, concrete and "objective" backdrop against which the characters move - with a slight degree, most notably in the last chapter, of a symbolic correspondence or harmony between specific details of the scene and the mental or emotional state of the central character portrayed in it. In Watt too we find that an apparently neutral setting acquires symbolic overtones, but of a more allegorical nature than in the emotionally evocative final

chapter of the earlier work. The most telling example of this kind of connotative use of setting emerges from a comparison of the two gardens of the story, that of Mr Knott and that of the institution in which Watt relates his story to Sam. The former is not the subject of a set-piece description, but from the remarks about it made *passim* in Parts Two and Three it appears as a place of tranquil order and beauty, an harmonious interaction of natural growth and human cultivation. We are told of the pleasure garden, complete with "rustic seat" (p.116), of the flower garden (in which Mr Knott says "Tweet! Tweet!" to a little bird, p.146), and of the vegetable garden. These "hortulan beauties" (p.222) moreover, are presented only in weather of fitting fineness, such as the morning "white and soft" (p.147) on which Arthur arrives, or the night "of unusual splendour" (p.221) on which Watt departs, or the "beautiful summer's day" (p.167) on which Arthur addresses Mr Graves. In contrast, the grounds in which Watt and Sam walk and talk is a desolate wasteland surrounded by a high fence of barbed wire, a "garden" devoid of both aesthetic and practical value:

In it great pale aspens grew, and yews ever dark, with tropical luxuriance, and other trees, in lesser numbers. They rose from the wild pathless grass, so that we walked much in shade, heavy, trembling, fierce, tempestuous.

In winter there were the thin shadows writhing, under our feet, in the wild withered grass.

Of flowers there was no trace, save of the flowers that plant themselves, or never die, or die only after many seasons, strangled by the rank grass. The chief of these was the pissabed.

Of vegetables there was no sign....

Of seats, on which to sit down, and rest, there was not the slightest vestige. Shrubs and bushes, properly so called, were absent from the scene. But thickets rose at every turn, brakes of impenetrable

density, and towering masses of brambles, of beehive form. (pp.151-53)

In this tangled and inhospitable wilderness, Watt and Sam meet only when there is "a high wind and a bright sun mixed" (p.151). These feverish, manic weather conditions, and this uncultivated, inhospitable and even dangerous "garden" (the old bridge across the dark waters of a stream, "flowing now slow, now with torrential rapidity," is in such a state of dilapidation that Watt on one occasion nearly falls through it, perhaps to be "carried away in the subfluent flood" were it not for Sam's timely intervention, p.152), together heighten our sense of Watt's post-lapsarian derangement, and underline its contrast with the paradisiac ataraxy of Mr Knott.

Amid the dribs and drabs of the Addenda is to be found a different, more purely metaphorical, attempt to speak of "modes of inmost being" in "the symbols of space and time", to express the essence of inner reality in terms of the outer, suitably deformed to suit the occasion. This is the "soul-landscape" (p.249-50) in which Watt is presented in a setting which does not form part of the "world" of the narrative at all. What emerges from this scene, a limitless waste of devastating emptiness and barren uniformity, a featureless, colourless plain stretching away endlessly beneath a featureless, colourless sky is an apparent attempt to lay bare the atemporal essence of Watt's being. In this awful landscape we find Watt, motionless, wondering ludicrously how best to describe his surroundings. Two remarks which precede this "soul-landscape" - "the foetal soul is full grown" (p.249) and "never been properly born" (p.249) - together with certain details of the scene - the warm temperature, the silence, the rising and falling of ground and sky - superimpose upon this image of an empty world that of an enormous womb, in which Watt is rooted like a miniscule placenta, with no hope of delivery. An epistemological clown incarcerated alone in the hugely ill-fitting "great cunt of existence" (to coin one of Malone's phrases) - such is the nature of Watt's being.

In the Trilogy the soul-landscape is exploited with more metaphoric subtlety and poetic suggestiveness, yielding strange psychic topographies where the "symbols of space and time" are bizarrely distorted, a line of approach towards the "modes of inmost being" that is particularly evocative in the monologues of Molloy and Moran. And during the course of the Trilogy the stable and concrete existence of the "realist" landscape - that which acts as the literal setting or world of the narrative - becomes progressively more tenuous and bizarre, as it changes from a mimetic representation of the "real world", objectively postulated by an omniscient narrator, and thus existing independently from the minds of any of the characters, into what lies at two removes from this "reality", being in the first place subjectively, not to say idiosyncratically, perceived, and then doubtfully remembered or fitfully imagined by an eminently fallible character/narrator. Eventually, in The Unnamable, there is a fusion (or confusion) of the plainly metaphorical "soul-landscape" and the setting of the narrative, so that the denizens of the primary diegetic level come to inhabit an increasingly "unreal" fictional world.

Beckett's own comment on Watt as being "only a game, a means of staying sane, a way to keep my hand in" (Harvey, p. 222) is too dismissive of the work, it seems to me, though it is true that of all his full-length fictions it wears the least well; the tricks of narrative dislocation, once the element of surprise is exhausted, cease to fascinate, and the enigmas of Watt's experience in the service of Mr Knott prove too contrivedly insoluble to remain enduringly interesting. Ultimately it is the book's humour that makes it worth coming back to, and its place in Beckett's development as a writer of prose fiction - revealing hints of the direction he is later to explore so fruitfully - that makes it important. The most poetic (and the funniest) passages in the book occur in the rambling monologues that interrupt the prevailing narrative voice, and here the writing is imbued, at least for most of the time, with an energy and an élan that completely overshadow the exhaustive and rather mechanical pedantry of the discourse in which such passages are set. In the

following works the figure of the zetetic tramp is allowed to speak for himself, and it seems as if this dramatic approach had a hugely liberating effect on Beckett's creativity, as though in speaking in a voice that is plainly that of a character, releasing him from the embarrassing epistemological stance of the omniscient narrator, rid him of certain inhibitions, connected with the problem of saying something meaningful about life in his own voice, and allowed him, paradoxically, to find a voice distinctively his own. Nietzsche writes in Beyond Good and Evil (quoted in Coulton, p.36) of the spirit that requires a mask in order to reveal itself - even to itself; the masks that Beckett is to choose will allow him unrestrained access to that side of himself that does not know, that is open to the darkness of man's metaphysical ignorance.

Beckett's next work, his first attempt at a full-length fiction in French, the discarded "Voyage de Mercier et Camier autour des bosquets de Bondy" (published in English in 1974 as Mercier and Camier), takes a faltering step in this direction, the narrative point of view hovering uneasily between objective and subjective perspectives of his subject - for instance, although the narrator justifies his knowledge of the story he is telling in what might serve as a classical example of the fonction d'attestation of the eye-witness narrator, stating in the opening sentence that "The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was with them all the time" (p.7), the consistency of this narratorial stance is broken not only by the logical impossibility of the narrator's being in two places at the same time (when Mercier and Camier are not together), but by various remarks that allude to the narrator as being the inventor of the tale he tells, such as when, towards the end, he discusses his indecision about where and how to end his story in a direct address to the reader, which ends in a confession of his ignorance both as a witness and as a fabulator: "No knowing. No knowing such things any more" (p.107).

However, as in Watt, such violations of narratorial consistency are self-conscious contrivances ("What stink of artifice" the narrator himself remarks at one

point, p.9), and make the book more a reaction against the principles of traditional novelistic narration rather than a breaking of new ground. Only in the four short stories or novellas which follow "Mercier et Camier" does Beckett adopt the approach he was later to recommend to a fellow writer, stuck with a poem that would not get written - "Ah, Montague, what you need is monologue - monologue! That's the thing!" (quoted in Bair, p.351) - an approach which sees the satiric and ludic attention to the formal possibilities of an external and omniscient narration abandoned in favour of an unashamedly subjective narratorial perspective.

The first of the four, "Premier Amour" (first, that is, in the order of their printing in the Calder collection entitled Four Novellas, if not of their composition), was translated by its author only in the early seventies, some twenty years after its companion-pieces, and is something of an odd man out. Although written at the same time as the others (1945-46), it was only published some sixteen years after them, apparently with some reluctance on Beckett's part. It is an astringent little work, reeking of a tart misanthropy and a manicheistic disgust towards sexuality, procreation and human life in general. This passage, from the opening two pages, sets the tone:

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....The living wash in vain, in vain perfume themselves, they stink. (pp.9-10)

Throughout this tale of romance, manifesting itself thematically, stylistically and rhetorically, is what we might call an aesthetic principle of inversion. The hero takes the air, "when take the air [he] must" (p.9) in graveyards instead of

parks, is amused at epitaphs, counts himself lucky to encounter a "genuine interment" (p.10), holds that "love brings out the worst in man and no error" (p.19), and is so horrified at the birth-cries of his child that he leaves his warm and comfortable shelter for all the discomforts of a winter vagabondage. His sharply idiosyncratic views stand the usual norms of human value (paternal love, respect for life, company, health, happiness, etc.) neatly on their heads. The primary response to such macabre and grotesque axiological reversals is not sadness or indignation, but laughter, drawing its force partly from the sudden appearance of the unexpected, but also, no doubt, from some deeper psychological source. Freud has argued cogently with regard to the kind of malicious witticism at which this narrator excels, that the joke provides access for a release of psychic energy previously used to sustain a respectful attitude towards some awesome or dignified authority (see his Wit, pp.153-61). The target of such "tendency wit" in this story may be loosely designated as the concept of God as a benevolent and wise being, and of human life as being, fundamentally, a good thing. Vivian Mercier, in his article, "Samuel Beckett and the Sheela-na-gig", argues along similar lines to the effect that the kind of grotesque humour that Beckett's writing shares with an old Celtic tradition (pre-dating the Irish bull at any rate) serves to "belittle life" (p.301).

Assuredly it is the humour of the piece that lends it its sharp charm, and the wit of the narrator that gives the macabre its iconoclastic appeal. The wit of reversal is another case of the principle of inversion. The narrator's proposed epitaph is a good example: "Hereunder lies the above who up below / So hourly died that he lived on till now" (p.10). In similar vein he speaks of a burial as an "inhumation", and a living body as a "corpse not yet up to scratch" (p.13). Such witticisms and other, less humorous remarks, create the impression of a sensibility which regards human nature and its concerns through the eyes of an embittered outsider, and the rhetorical tenor of the narration fiercely underlines this alienated quality. Instead of befriending the reader and gradually gaining his trust in the traditional

manner of the self-conscious, dramatized narrator, well exemplified by the narrators of Tristram Shandy or Tom Jones, where it becomes the explicit subject of more than one narratorial digression, the narrator of "First Love" insults his audience blatantly, and hurls back in its face any assumption that he, as a narrator, is under any obligation to furnish his story with convincing details and plausible motivations. This rhetoric of antagonism is particularly amusing when, as in the following example, it is juxtaposed with a parodistic tone of autobiographical intimacy: "And the next day (what is more) I abandoned the bench, less I must confess on her account than on its, for the site no longer answered my requirements, modest though they were, now that the air was beginning to strike chill, and for other reasons better not wasted on cunts like you..." (pp.17-18). This vicious annulment of the implicit contract between the autobiographic narrator and his public we may illustrate with several other delightful examples of the narrator's abusive direct address of his reader: "Leave me my graveyards and keep - you - to your public parks and beauty spots" (p.10); "Were you to inquire, as undoubtedly you itch..." (p.16); "That proves nothing, but there is nothing I wish to prove" (p.16).

There are two positive poles in this virulent sea of negativity, one emotional (the hero's dead father is a benevolent figure) and one metaphysical (the solace of real solitude) which, combined in the narrator's imagination, give rise to a rare and faint note of nostalgic lyricism:

I saw the mountain, impassible, cavernous, secret, where from morning to night I'd hear nothing but the wind, the curlews, the chink like distant silver of the stone-cutters' hammers. I'd come out in the daytime to the heather and the gorse, all warmth and scent, and watch at night the distant city lights, if I chose, and the other lights, the lighthouses and lightships my father had named for me when I was small, and whose names I could find again, in my memory, if I chose, that I knew. (p.29)

This then is our first narrator, acerbic, capricious and hostile, interspersing his threadbare narrative with idiosyncratic reflections on life, love, people, and, occasionally, his own performance as a narrator. His is a vigorous and perverse narratorial presence, as he beckons to his reader with direct address, while berating him for his curiosity, creating an ethos (in the original, rhetorical sense of the term) truculently at odds with the expected modesty and decorum of one who presents his own life and opinions to the public as subjects of intrinsic interest.

The tenor of the other three stories is on the whole much calmer, more resigned, less strident, and their rhetoric less self-conscious, less turned towards the audience. At the same time the "realistic" and moral force of the story itself is greatly diluted. The narrator of "The Expelled" concludes with a comment on the pointlessness of his narration ("I don't know why I told this story. I could just as well have told another" (p.48)), while that of "The End" undercuts the mimetic veracity of his narrative by referring to "the story I might have told, a story in the likeness of my life" (p.95). It is probably on the basis of such deprecations that J. E. Dearlove decides that "the stories themselves are unimportant and can be substituted easily one for another. Their individual truths and meanings are accidental and insignificant" (p.55). It seems to me, however, that to take such auto-critical statements at face value is as naïve as to be genuinely, personally, insulted by the abuse of the "First Love" narrator. As I hope to show more convincingly when I deal with the imagery of the stories, they do manifest structures of meaning, of which, granted, the narrators themselves may not be fully aware. While there is here, as in almost all of Beckett's first-person narratives, a serious questioning of the representational potency of the story itself, to lump the four nouvelles together as being interchangeable in the interests of a theoretically lucid "extra-narrative" interpretation is to ignore the nuanced quiddity of each work and to impoverish our reading. Besides, to disregard the individual ethos of each piece is to defuse the

mystery of the partial coincidences that exist so intriguingly between them. My view, en revanche, is that the "individual truths and meanings" of each story are significant, and, moreover, that there are significant variations in the narrating sensibilities which we cannot afford to ignore in a sensitive apprehension of the texts. My approach then shall be firstly to explore the "presence" of each narrator, as this is realized in three main areas - his attitudes, overt or implied, towards (i) his narrative subject (the experience of the "narrated I"), (ii) his narrataire (he or they to whom the story is ostensibly told), and (iii) towards his own activity as a narrator - and secondly to attempt a synthesis in which certain metaphysical or psychological themes and concerns are presented and developed in the images or symbolic motifs wielded, consciously or unconsciously, by these "second selves".

In "First Love" the relationship between the narrating self and the narrated self is not in itself a very interesting aspect of the text; as in conventional autobiographical reminiscence there is no tension or ambiguity in the link between these two narrative entities, the temporal distance between which provides the canvas required to portray the significant intellectual, moral or emotional development that is often the focus of the work. There are occasional references to the present moment, the moment of composition, sufficient to establish that the narrator has changed in the years intervening between the incidents that he relates and their testy setting down. "For years I thought they [the cries of his new-born] would cease. Now I don't think so any more" (p.30). The assertion of this distance, and of the change in perspective that has occurred during it, leaves unquestioned the continuity of the self through the historical vicissitudes it has suffered, and, what is more, implies that the historically earlier state is clearly available to the present autobiographer. "The state I was in then!...The state I am in now!" (p.20) exclaims the narrator, little edified at either prospect, but unconcerned about his ability to make a valid comparison between them. It is in this respect, as much as in the virulence of tone, that "First Love" is a little out of place among the other nov-

ellas, where the conventions of autobiographical narration start to come apart in the ongoing dehiscence of Beckett's comedy of incompetence.

Whereas "First Love" is held together by its subject - a neo-Aristotelian unity of action, a comfortably distinct chapter in the *éducation sentimentale* of its author, the other novellas deal with events that do not display the same firmness of phrasing - which we might designate as "encounter, union and severance" - nor the "me now / me then" counterpoint. There is a rough unity about "The End" - it has a clean start (the expulsion from an asylum) and a kind of desinence, even if a botched one (the "end", the death of the hero, occurs only in a vision) - but on the whole the events of these stories are like the initial incident which befalls the hapless figure of "The Expelled": "In what had just happened to me there was nothing in the least memorable. It was neither the cradle nor the grave of anything whatever. Or rather it resembled so many other cradles, so many other graves that I'm lost" (p.35). If one's experience cannot be seen as other than a mere succession of inconsequential, unrelated events like these, then one's life is nothing more than a haphazard succession of little births and deaths; there is no continuity of purpose or significance to bind together the experience of the individual, who may consequently be seen as being really "a succession of individuals", as Beckett puts it in his Proust essay (p.19). In this perspective no event or state may be said to be more significant or important than any other (there being simply no means of making the comparison, even if there is a principle of discrimination) and so the only possible principle of linking events in a narrative sequence is that of temporal contiguity. Thus we find the narrators of "The Expelled", "The Calmative", and "The End" clinging to a very primitive temporal structure - "this happened, then that happened" - unlike the narrator of "First Love", who is able, "rightly or wrongly" (p.9) to link two notable events in his life: his "marriage" and the death of his father. The higher degree of mnemonic and narrative control exercised by this story-teller over the events of his life enables him to cover a much larger period of his history,

easily summarizing long periods of time in single sentences ("Gradually I settled down, in this house" p.27) in order to reach the more climactic moments of his story. He is also able to exercise the narratorial fonction *de régie*, reining in his tendency to extraneous digression and redirecting his reader's attention with such comments as "But to pass on to less melancholy matters..." (pp.11 & 13), and to disrupt the strict temporal order of his narration with such proleptic characterization as "the woman with whom I was soon to be united" (p.18). This degree of technical control is evidently related to the narrator's implied sense of purpose in telling his story, which unlike the others, has something like a point or a moral to it, which lies, if nowhere else, in illustrating how the "wisdom" of the "narrating I" has developed out of the views of the "narrated I", a development, no matter how vestigial, which can only take place in an articulation of significance - in its most basic form merely a causal linkage of events - which, as Lionel Trilling points out, makes an inherent connection between the narrative act and a didactic purpose: "It is the nature of narration to explain; it cannot help telling how things are and even how they came to be that way" (Sincerity and Authenticity, p.135). At the time when he tells the story, the narrator has come to accept that the echoing cries of his child will never cease to plague him, and having now a more persistent sense of the suffering of the innocent, has given up looking for relief from the clamour of pain and guilt, relinquishing his efforts to find peace through a solipsistic exclusion of the not-self in favour of a more elastic kind of apatheia: "And it matters nothing to me now, to be disturbed, and what would I do with myself if I wasn't? Yes, I've changed by [sic]* system, it's the winning one at last..." (p.16).

* (p.8) Probably a misprint for "my system". Such errors are a frequent nuisance in reading Beckett's works, even in the better editions like the Calder and Boyars, and are sometimes worse than merely irritating. The abominable Picador Trilogy (bound in such a manner that the volume converts into a loose-leafed folder after a couple of pagings), for instance, has inter alia, "hypocritical imperatives" instead of "hypothetical imperatives" (p.80), which not only alters the sense but

The narrator of "The Expelled" keeps for the most part much closer to the surface of events, almost as if he were afraid of losing his place. Within the first six pages there is one notable digression - on the nature of memory, which serves both to suggest the motivation of the narrator in telling his story and to extend the risible passage of pedantic explication that separates, by a full page, the opening sentence from its narrative punch-line: "There were not many steps....The fall was therefore not serious" - and three external analepses (by which terms Genette designates "flashbacks" or recalls that refer to events that have occurred prior to the beginning of the story), one an hilarious parody of psychological self-examination ("This carriage is due, in my opinion, in part at least, to a certain leaning from which I have never been able to free myself completely..." p.38), and one a nostalgic *régard en arrière* at the comforts of the room from which he has just been so unceremoniously ejected. After this, narratorial commentary is reduced to brief utterances which do not divert the march of events in which the hero is borne along. The emotions of the narrated self, recollected "with the celebrated advantages of tranquillity" (p.46), do not disturb or move the narrator, and he refers hardly at all to the narrative instance, which, like the narrataire to whom the story is addressed, remains obscure. On the whole, this narrator is far less active as organiser, opinionater and judge than he of "First Love", and our chief impression is that he, having no specific point to make, and in fact no ostensible reason for recounting this particular extract from his life than any other, is writing under some impulsion, inner or outer, that is quite removed from the normal communicative thrust of autobiographical writing - to rescue from the waste of time and to place before the public the benefits of the subject's singular and noteworthy exper-

wipes out the allusion to Kant's concept; and in a couple of cases the meaning of a statement is neatly reversed by the erroneous introduction or omission of a negative particle: "It's not for the whole there seems to be no spell," (p.27); "Oh they weren't notions like yours, they were notions like mine, all spasm, sweat and trembling, with an atom of common sense or lucidity," (p.63), which should read, "...without an atom of..." This list of errata is far from exhaustive.

ience of life. I mentioned that the commentary on the nature of the memory in the opening paragraph hinted at the narrator's unstated *raison de narrer*; what he says there suggests that his purpose in recollecting this gaggle of incidents is precisely, and paradoxically, to free himself from his past:

Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things, of those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them, for if you don't there is the danger of finding them, in your mind, little by little. That is to say, you must think of them for a while, a good while, every day several times a day, until they sink forever in the mud. That's an order. (p.33)

Thus arises the image of a mind that seeks to attain the temporal aseity of an absolute, unrelieved present by removing the possibility of a painful invasion of involuntary recall, by dint of a deliberate and repetitive recapitulation which renders memory lifeless by turning it into "a story". The meditations of Sartre's Roquentin provide an illuminating gloss on the mechanics of how memories become worn out through repetition, as the words of a ritualized discourse replace the affective and sensory vividness of one's recall:

Pour cent histoires mortes, il demeure tout de même une ou deux histoires vivantes. Celles-là je les évoque avec précaution, quelquefois, pas trop souvent, de peur de les user. J'en pêche une, je revois le décor, les personnages, les attitudes. Tout à coup, je m'arrête: j'ai senti une usure, j'ai vu pointer un mot sous le trame des sensations. Ce mot-là, je devine qu'il va bientôt prendre la place de plusieurs images que j'aime. Aussitôt je m'arrête, je pense vite à autre chose; je ne veux pas fatiguer mes souvenirs. En vain; la prochaine fois que je les

évoquerai, une bonne partie s'en sera figée. (Editions Gallimard, p.54)

Thus it is that our hazy impression of the narrator and what he is about seems to echo the myth of Belacqua, in so far as he is engaged in a purgatorial process of reliving his past in order to emancipate himself from it. The concluding sentence of the novella, spoken in an unwonted tone of *ex cathedra* authority, "Living souls, you will see how alike they are" (p.48), underlines this context of post-mortal recall. And of course, it is hardly necessary to point out the aesthetic correlations of such a process, in which the object of expression is catharsis (in the sense of expelling waste or harmful material), and the primary goal of the artist is not to communicate but to purge himself of the painful accretions of his experience.

The rhetorical cadre of "The End" is much the same, and is left in a similar vagueness, but here the mechanism of recalling and representing the past is subject to an intenerating scepticism and there is subtle evidence in the narrator's tenuous grasp on his material of an active fabrication at work, which places the emphasis more on the effort of telling of a consistent story than of remembering a true one, and the novella terminates in a wistful admission of deceit and autobiographical failure: "The memory came faint and cold of the story I might have told, a story in the likeness of my life, I mean without the courage to end or the strength to go on" (p.95). Thus the narrator musters his courage to conclude his story with a confession, like Moran's, that his confession has not been true. What story can express or even imitate ("a story in the likeness of my life") experience which, from the inside, lacks the formal properties of the most rudimentary story: a beginning, an end, and all that joins the one to the other in a purposeful concatenation of cause and effect. As Trilling observes in the passage from which we quoted above, the beginning of a story "is not merely the first of a series of events; it is the event that originates those that follow. And the end is not merely the ultimate event, the cessation of happening; it is a significance, or at least the promise, dark or

bright, of significance" (op. cit., p.135). So for this narrator, to write the story of his life, or merely a story from his life, requires a fabrication which mars any resemblance between the mimetic subject and the means of its representation.

"The End" opens well enough, quietly, matter-of-factly, with a neutral assurance of narrative tone. Disruptions and dilations of the "story time" are kept very much in the background. For the most part, short narrative periods chop up the experience of the narrated self into small and easily assimilable blocks. Then, four and a half pages in the account, the narrator suddenly cuts short his apparent reminiscences with "That's all a pack of lies, I feel" (p.75). The matter is not immediately taken up beyond this comment, a negative manifestation of Genette's fonction d'attestation, but a page later we find the narrator stopping suddenly in mid-sentence to correct an error: "I subsequently solved this problem, always fundamental in time of adversity, by wearing a kepi and saluting in military fashion, no, that must be wrong, I had my hat at the end." From here on the expressions of ignorance begin to proliferate, together with such lame justifications of narrative detail as "my myth will have it so" (p.93), a remark which highlights the transformation of memory into memorial which we spoke of in relation to "The Expelled". Thus there is a growing awareness of the tenuous cognitive relationship between the narrator and the hero, the Je narrant and the Je narré, which is further weakened by the narrator's idiosyncratic view of the self, involving a disjunction between the perception and the reality of even the most private experience. This view of things is never explicitly announced, but it surely lies behind such odd comments as these: "I felt weak. Perhaps I was" (p.80); "But to my amazement I got up on the ass..." (p.82); "Strictly speaking I wasn't there. Strictly speaking I believe I've never been anywhere" (p.89); "To know I had a being, however faint and false, outside of me, had once the power to stir my heart" (p.92). The Trilogy will bring us back to this notion of a true, inner being, forever disjunct from the temporal consciousness, that, "strictly speaking", has "never been anywhere."

In harmony with this sapping awareness that what he is telling is not a true reflection of his life, the narrator, conscious of the feeble plausibility of his tale, maintains a quiet undertone of deference towards his unspecified audience, an attitude marked by such remarks as: "if I may so describe it" (p.91), "if I may say so" (p.91), or "that may seem impossible" (p.92), rising rarely to moments of greater vehemence: "it must be the same old song as ever, but Christ you wouldn't think so" (p.93). These locutions help to establish a tone of conversational intimacy, which is further suggested in a despairing appeal by the narrator to his "interlocutor" to intuit his meaning ("so I played the part, you know, the part of - how shall I say, I don't know" p.91), and in certain hurried and emphatic declarations, as if the story-teller were afraid that some error or omission on his part were about to be scornfully pointed out to him: "The excrements were me too, I know, I know, but all the same" (p.93). These, and the mid-sentence disruptions that become frequent, give the story more of a spoken than a written quality. As illustrated by many of the examples of narratorial manner I have cited above, this narrator, like that of "The Expelled", is more of a clown than a wit, stumbling into ludicrous self-contradictions or non-sequiturs that he becomes aware of too late to avoid - a comedy that relies upon the improvisational, oral quality of the discourse.

This comic aspect of the text, playing upon the rigidities of narrative rhetoric, does not cast its ambience uniformly upon the tale, and there are times when the narrator reveals himself as a canny verbal craftsman, and the language of "The End" achieves a strangely beautiful poetic tonality, moving us to something other than laughter, either through its pungent concrete appeal ("I felt them hard upon me, the icy, tumultuous streets, the terrifying faces, the noises that slash, pierce, claw, bruise" p.93) or through its weary reluctance to move us at all, the mode of understatement that Beckett uses so masterfully and which he admired in Denis Devlin's poetry as "the extraordinary evocation of the unsaid by the said" (in a review republished in Disjecta, p.94). We may illustrate this quality very

clearly by contrasting the rant against "the living" in "First Love", quoted above, and the poignant litotes of "The End": "Ah people" (p.84). This exhausted lyricism is sometimes given a fuller, more sensuous expression, as in this lovely example: "We followed the quiet, dustwhite inland roads with their hedges of hawthorn and fuschia and their footpaths fringed with wild grass and daisies. Night fell" (p.82). "The End" achieves its remarkable closure, an extraordinary blend of plagal harmonies, in a combination of these evocative and "realistic" strains.

In "The Calmative" the "present state" of the narrator and his motivation for telling the story are unusually explicit. The situation is one of corporeal death and mental subsistence in which the vestiges of sensory perception are unbearable:

I'm too frightened this evening to listen to myself rot, waiting for the great red lapses of the heart, the tearings at the caecal walls, and for the slow killings to finish in my skull, the assaults on unshakeable pillars, the fornications with corpses. So I'll tell myself a story, I'll try and tell myself another story, to try and calm myself... (p.51)

To a large extent he succeeds in doing this, for while he does not realize the same degree of absorption in the events of his narrative as the narrator of "The End" seems to, and recalls "this evening", the deictical *point de repère* of his narrative instance, from time to time, the air of the novella is charged with a strange, dream-like calm. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to suggest that this tonality is pervasive or consistent, for even if we except the atrocious anxiety of the diegetic situation announced in the opening paragraph, there still remain sudden shifts of narratorial sensibility from an aesthetic equanimity into deep existential disquiet and confusion. These tonal changes are related to, and to some extent arise from, a weird interplay of diegetic levels, so that it is difficult to maintain as we read the sense of a clean divorce between the (fictional) reality of the narra-

tive instance - the narrator rotting in his grave - and the fiction of the story he tells himself. The fact would seem to be that the story which the narrator tells of his nocturnal outing maintains a fascinating and precarious balance between three incommensurable modes of narrative discourse: it is in some respects the account of a dream, in others, as claimed in the introductory paragraph, the product of the speaker's active, conscious imagination, an impromptu fantasy told to take his mind off things, and in yet others seems a report of what has actually been experienced, a reminiscence.

It is oneiric in its account of the involuntary and unreal locomotion that the narrator finds himself executing: "The glances I darted towards the windows, stealthily, showed me a great cylinder sweeping past as though on rollers on the asphalt" (p.58); "But suddenly I was descending a wide street, vaguely familiar, but in which I could never have set foot, in my lifetime" (p.61); "I thought of ringing at the door and asking for shelter and protection till morning. But suddenly I was on my way again" (pp.67-68). Moreover, there are instances of the kind of dream-knowledge which has no direct perceptual provenance or which is prophetic: "I felt the houses packed with people, lurking behind curtains" (p.55); "And if you gave me a kiss, he said finally. I knew there were kisses in the air" (p.65). There is also an oneiric sense of the precarious reality of the witnessed scene: "All might be changed from one moment to the next and be transformed like magic before my eyes" (p.55). There is even an instance of that liberating sense of irresponsibility which occurs when we are half aware that we are dreaming: "I quickened my step with the result I swept forward as if on rollers. This is not me, I said, let us make the most of it" (p.62). In addition, the strangely deserted urban surroundings have a dream-like quality ("The trams were running, the buses too, but few, slow, empty, noiseless, as if under water" p.55), a quality which is taken up in the superficially inconsequential but somehow meaningful incongruity of his several encounters with the denizens of this nocturnal town.

Despite these dream elements, however, which perhaps give out the strongest harmonics of the chord, the story is not simply that of a dream. It is not just that the narrator specifically denies this possibility ("Or have I been dreaming, am I dreaming? No no, none of that, for dream is nothing, a joke and significant what is worse" p.66), but that there are traces of indecision in the text which imply a conscious invention: "I couldn't get up at the first attempt, nor let us say at the second..." (p.52; my emphasis); "And if I have reached this point (in my story) without anything having changed... the fact remains that I have reached it, and that's something....It's no excuse for rushing matters. No, it must cease gently, as gently cease on the stairs the steps of the loved one..." (p.65). But if the narrator were simply making it all up, why, for instance, cannot his imagination reveal to him the face of the girl that he meets on the parapet? Why not simply launch straight into a description? And how account for the other mysteries of the tale, the uncertain hour for example, which the narrator, if he were the author of his tale, could simply decree and no doubt about it?

The question that illuminates best the problematic ontology of "the setting forth, the struggle and perhaps the return" (p.54) is the shifting degree of corporality or embodiedness of the hero. The initial struggle to get up and the pains in the legs imply that the narrated self is possessed of a living body in all its encumbering substantiality, but before long we find him noticing "a strange thing, yet another": the pains have gone (p.62). He still casts a shadow (apropos which he remarks significantly that "this degree of opacity appeared to me conclusive" p.62), but is unable to impress a sense of his presence upon the man he overtakes: "I might as well not have existed....Given my need of help I can't think why I did not bar his path. I couldn't have, that's all, I couldn't have touched him" (pp.62-63). Then, waking from a doze on the kerb-side, the man he finds sitting next to him "shrank back unaffectedly" and asks "Where did you spring from?" (p.63). And after this encounter the narrator notices that his pains have returned "but with something

untoward which prevented my wrapping them round me" (p.66), and he is touched that the throng amongst whom he swoons and falls to the ground were "careful not to walk on me" adding that such evidence of bodily existence was "what I had come out for" (p.68).

This ontological quavering, with its echoes of traditional ghost stories, where the disembodied spirit can see and hear, but not eat, may sometimes be seen, but does not cast a shadow, and who is sometimes powerless to impress his presence in any way upon the mortals, superimposes the trappings of a folk tale on a narrative that is already straddled between the account of a dream, an improvised work of the imagination, and a collection of fragmentary reminiscences. The figure that crystallizes at the interface of these three orders of discourse, like a holographic image, cannot be contained in any single one of them. It is only by shifting our gaze back to the narrative instance that these contradictions may be reconciled. Here is presented the image of a mind which is unable to maintain a consistent and categorical affirmation of the narrated self it posits in a story that mingles the memory of a dream with the dream of a memory, a mind driven by an atrocious present to seek refuge in a past that will not coalesce into a coherent narrative.

It would require a full monograph on each story to explicate fully the nuances of tone, but I hope I have intimated how each novella is a complex and subtle structure in which the shifting attitudes of the narrator towards his writing, his written self, and his implied audience, are indispensable elements.

Before we turn to the imagery of these stories, we need to raise the question of the relations between them. Are they spoken by the same person? Most commentators have answered yes, like Fletcher, who argues that (i) Beckett himself has said that they can be taken as different phases of one existence, and (ii) there is "internal evidence" for such a view (The Novels of Samuel Beckett, p.102). There are certainly many common features to the stories. The settings are vaguely similar, and certain objects or situations reappear in more than one story: all of the protagonists make

oddly pointed remarks about their headgear, and in two stories the hat is attached to the buttonhole of a coat; three of the figures nourish, as far as they are able, a potted bulb, hyacinth or crocus, in their rooms; three of them attempt to take their bearings from the stars; two of them possess a phial of sedative; and two have inherited money from their fathers. And all of them, put out of somewhere, find themselves wandering in search of a shelter. There are also some strong resemblances of tone, even down to identical phrasing (the speakers of "The Calmative" and "The End" both ask "For why focus it?", and three of the narrators introduce their opinions with the formula "Personally I..."). And all of them are loners, outcasts, would-be hermits, who are only with great difficulty able to make themselves understood, and who regard emotional bonds as encumbrances. However, each narrator is sealed in his own narration, with no reference to, or apparent awareness of, the others. Thus, while there are certainly correspondences, or family resemblances between the stories, the narrators themselves are never conscious of them. For instance, the cow-pad, on which the character of "First Love" inscribes an expression of his love, turns up in "The End", but with no hint of recognition. Under such circumstances of apparent amnesia may we speak of identity? And if we do, what are we to make of the links between this unnamed figure and Watt (another milk-drinking clown with an absurd gait and a fondness for rats), and Molloy (who also has his hat attached to his coat with string), not to mention the "I" of the Texts for Nothing, who also remembers Joe Breem or Breen, and speaks of the blue tie with stars on it which is given to the narrator of "The End"? If we are able to speak of different "phases of one existence" it seems to me that such an identity can only be posited at a level distinct from any one of its manifestations, and that we may only speak of a "single protagonist", as Fletcher does, at the level of an implied author, whose being is suggested but not stated through these fragmented and opaque portraits. And the artificer behind this bewitching partial coincidence wears like Janus a mask of inscrutable ambiguity: one face suggests the comical incompetence of an author who

cannot keep his narrators distinct from each other, and, beset with a woeful poverty of imagination is driven to permuting the fictional elements of an almost closed set; the other insinuates that well-made fiction is deceitful, as is our own sense of identity, which is after all only a fiction we tell ourselves to give form and significance to our existence.

The imagery of the nouvelles intimates an archetypal or symbolic level of significance, suggesting a thematic unity that links the stories more cohesively than does the attempt to piece together a coherent biography of the "I". Only in "First Love" is this imagery consciously employed by a narrator, who is aware of wielding metaphors. This narrator, like Murphy, has a deliberate procedure to excise the pain of being in the world, and the terms in which he speaks of this procedure involves a certain conception of the nature of the self. The ideal state is one of silence, total non-disturbance. The two-fold programme, "the dulling of the self and of that residue of execrable frippery known as the non-self and even the world, for short" (p.15), presupposes a dualistic vision of things in which the body is an element of "the world" rather than of the self. Solitude and shelter are thus prerequisites, but they are not enough, for "being oneself" is still painful: "One is no longer oneself, on such occasions [at the mercy of an erection], and it is painful to be no longer oneself, even more painful if possible than when one is" (p.15). One must become "less oneself" not by becoming an Other in a human relationship, which is effectively exile from one's true self, but by becoming less, by becoming like nothing. The metaphors through which the narrator expresses this project imply a conception or "image" of the mind as a quasi-extended place, within which the conscious ego seeks to settle itself more comfortably: "What mattered to me in my dispeopled kingdom...was supineness in the mind" (p.15): a repose of the I within the mind which is juxtaposed against the troublesome state of "erection", the heroic mode of selfhood, in a pun which relates a very intrusive form of "disturbance", the pre-occupation with another in the banishment that is love, to its physical counterpart,

desire. What is required is real solitude, in which the afflicted narrator is "free to think of something else than her, of the old trusty things, and so little by little, as down steps towards a deep, of nothing" (p.23). But the narrator comes to realize that this programme is irredeemably flawed when he encounters a disturbance less easily appeased than is love: the suffering of the innocent. "What that infant must have been going through!" (p.30). By the end the cries have become internal: they cannot be annulled by flying the scene of the suffering. And the narrator must accept that the Other can never be excluded, the self never entirely itself, inviolable, and his only hope of ever stilling the clamour, lies in the total obliteration of death: "not to mention not long now, not long till curtain down, on disturbers and disturbed" (p.16).

In the other stories where the narrators are less given to talking about the "self", there are fewer overt metaphoric images. Instead, objects and situations from quotidian life are charged with a significance beyond their mere "realistic" presence in the narrative, and thus betray or reveal psychological and philosophical attitudes which may lie unarticulated beneath the threshold of the speaker's consciousness, in a manner at once more evocative and more emotionally precise than the announcements of "First Love". Rooms, hats, potted plants and stars are given, through their consonant multiple exposure in the four stories, an open-ended but fairly clear symbolic value. The dominant feature of each psychic landscape is the longing for shelter. Insofar as the mind is imagined as a kind of place, in which the conscious ego has its being, it is felt to be within something. The skull however is no real shelter, for it admits through its apertures the sights and sounds that disrupt the integrity of mental space. Thus the narrators feel the obscure need to enclose themselves more adequately, to seal themselves more efficiently within themselves. The womb is almost ideal: it is warm, dark, safe and relatively quiet, and the appetites of the body, which exists in a state of homeostatic equilibrium with its environmental matrix, are automatically and constantly satisfied, so that

desire - the experience of the interval between a need and its satisfaction - is unknown. Birth, then, is seen as an expulsion from a *haven*, rather than a release into the world. The motif of expulsion, through its repetition in similar but distinct situations, acquires the aura of archetypal significance. Let me illustrate the accumulative effect of this evocative resonance by picking out the partially submerged images in the story in which they are the densest: "The Expelled".

The story opens as the hero is quite literally thrown out of the house that has sheltered him. Looking back on what he has lost, he contrasts the snugness of the room with the desolation of the street in which he finds himself: "I went out so little! Now and then I would go to the window, part the curtains and look out. But then I hastened back to the depths of the room, where the bed was. I felt ill at ease with all this air about me, lost before the confusion of innumerable prospects" (p.37). "The depths of the room", where psychic and physical space is bounded in a kind of womb substitute, is where a man can be more at ease with himself, where his soul may pursue "the quest of itself" (p.35) in the most felicitous conditions. The obsessional intensity of this desire to be in "the depths" of a room is suggested when, on entering a prospective dwelling-place a bare few hours after having been "expelled", the narrator remarks, "It was a strange feeling, I remember, a house all about me again, after so long" (p.45). The interior of the cab exercises a similar claustrophiliac attraction on the narrator, and he describes it in eager detail: "It's a big black box, rocking and swaying on its springs, the windows are small, you curl up in a corner, it smells musty. I felt my hat grazing the roof" (p.41). (And, presumably, the coffin-like undertones of the "big, black box" smelling of decay are not unpleasant to the hero either.) After they have taken a meal together, the cabman invites his client to join him up on the driver's seat, an offer that is declined because "for some time already I had been dreaming of the inside of the cab" (p.44).

Perhaps the highlight of the narrator's day comes when he has the chance to

light an oil lamp on the cab: "He gave me his box of matches, I swung open on its hinges the little convex glass, lit and closed at once, so that the wick might burn steady and bright, snug in its little house, sheltered from the wind. I had this joy" (p.45). Whether he realizes it or not, the lamp as he describes it becomes a sort of dualistic mandala: the spirit is "snug within in its little house." The emotive adjective, "snug", is the key word here. It occurs also on the preceding page, when the narrator learns with empathetic interest that "there are still some cabmen who spend their day warm and snug inside their cabs on the rank, waiting for a customer to come and rouse them" (p.44). During the night, the narrator gets up from his pile of straw to re-enter the cab. Once ensconced, despite the cold, he cannot get himself to leave the vehicle to fetch the blanket he has forgotten. Dawn comes, and the narrator is driven once more from his shelter, this time by the fear of greater disturbance - the threat of a debilitating and encumbering intimacy with the cabman. (Even the presence of the horse disturbs him: it suffers too much.) The second expulsion is as painful as the first, and as he forces himself head first through the narrow window in an absurd parody of birth, he initiates another cycle of the "wandering to find home" (Murphy, p.6) that is man's post-natal life.

"The End" displays a very similar complex of images, and opens in a very similar way. The hero, put out of a charitable institution that will keep him no longer, finds himself longing to be "under cover again, in an empty place, close and warm, with artificial light, an oil lamp for choice, with a pink shade for preference" (p.76). Eventually he makes his den in a boat which he fits with a lid, as if it were a coffin. "I was very snug in my box, I must say" he remarks (p.92), adding that "there were times when I wanted to push away the lid and get out of the boat and couldn't, I was so indolent and weak, so content deep down where I was" (p.93).

In both of these stories there is a kind of thematic counterpoint in which an apparently antagonistic impulse is expressed. Before he sets out after his initial expulsion, the narrator of "The Expelled" raises his eyes to the sky, "where there

are no roads, where you wander freely, as in a desert, and where nothing obstructs your vision, wherever you turn your eyes, but the limits of vision itself" (p.37). And as he leaves the cabman's yard the next morning, ^{he} remarks that "I would have liked a sea horizon, or a desert one" (p.48). This desire would seem to be the direct opposite of the need for enclosing sanctuary, but actually it is not out of harmony with the psycho-philosophical origins of this need, for a featureless landscape, absolutely devoid in its uniform emptiness of all the heteroclitite clutter of materiality that limits sight and distracts the mind, drains the threatening impingement of the world upon the self of its menace and its power. There is no need for shelter if there is nothing to shelter from, nor can one lose one's way where there is no way, or ever be out of place where every place is identical. In such emptiness the very distinction between inner and outer worlds seems to break down, as it does in the vision of death which closes "The End", in which the self as a quasi-spatial entity is destroyed, uniting the mind with the void: "The sea, the sky, the mountains and the islands closed in and crushed me in a mighty systole, then scattered to the uttermost confines of space" (p.95).

In "The Calmative" the imagery of womb-like sanctuary is conspicuous in its absence. Beckett's repertoire of unbearable predicaments includes both the agoraphobic and the claustrophobic nightmare. It is the former which is exercised in the shelterless waste of Waiting for Godot, while a play like Endgame explores the latter, like Sartre's Huis Clos, in a situation from which there is no issue. In some works the two torments are combined with perverse ingenuity, as in Happy Days, and indeed in "The Calmative". Death, for the narrator of this story, is the state of being trapped within a rotting corpse. Driven forth from this unbearable "place" - "this bed of terror" (p.52) - on an imaginary voyage, he finds himself in a world that has for him neither the haven of a snug enclosure, nor the freedom of infinite, annihilating expansion. The quasi-spectral wanderer who is the hero of this quest for "a little encounter that would calm me a little" (p.56) - an encounter, that is,

with an Other which would not only provide proof of his continued existence in the world but the "spoils" of a conversation as well, "a few words...to carry away with me to my refuge, to add to my collection" (p.56) - consequently sets out from his "den" in a shady grove of trees to enter the city nearby. As in Happy Days, light in this tale both symbolizes and intensifies the agoraphobic terror of exposedness and vulnerability. Everywhere in the deserted thoroughfares a strange luminosity reigns, and the voyager feels himself watched by unseen eyes: "I felt the houses packed with people, lurking behind the curtains they looked out into the street" (p.55). A little later, after an inconsequential encounter with an urchin on the quayside, the hero decides to hide for a while, "as in the Middle Ages" (p.59), in a cathedral, the only edifice he finds open to him. However this traditional refuge of the hunted proves an eery place, and offers nothing in the way of the shelter he is seeking; the nave is "brilliantly lit" and although it appears deserted, he again suspects the presence of invisible watchers, "hiding perhaps, under the choir-stalls, or dodging behind the pillars, like woodpeckers" (p.59). To cap it all, and to drive him out once more, "Suddenly, close to where I was, and without my having heard the preliminary rumblings, the organ began to boom" (p.59). Having regained the exterior after a misadventure in the steeple, the hapless voyager finds himself lost in "the extraordinary radiance shed by the street-lamps and traffic-lights" (p.61), and the only person whom he manages to engage in conversation is a stranger to the city, unable to direct him back to the gate through which he entered it. So on he goes, increasingly exhausted, in "the atrocious brightness" of "the brilliancy flooding the boulevard" (p.67), from which a swoon gives him brief respite before "reality, too tired to look for the right word" (p.68) is restored and he finds himself "back in the same blinding void as before" (p.68). And there the story ends, the voyager stranded in the light which prevents him from orientating himself by the stars, as his father has taught him to do. And thus the archetype of the quest - "the setting forth, the struggle and...the return" (p.54), exemplified in the story of Joe Broom

or Breen, the Ulysses of the narrator's boyhood - is broken, and the tradition of paternal wisdom proves useless.

The figure of the father in these stories is an unusually benevolent progenitor. While he is alive he provides a room for his son, and at his death leaves him an inheritance. In "The Calmative" the father figure is the subject of an almost nostalgic reminiscence (p.54). He is also the donor of the hat, which becomes associated with a sense of personal identity and paternal continuity, even though the patriarchal line has now broken down. The only confirmed father of the narrators, he of "First Love", certainly does nothing to provide his offspring with a hat, an inheritance or a knowledge of the constellations. He is, however, almost manically emphatic about the provenance of his own headgear: "the truth is they never gave me a hat, I have always had my own hat, the one my father gave me, and I have never had any other hat than that hat" (p.19). In the second story the acquisition of the hat is described in terms which make it the symbol of a double initiation into adulthood and social ostracism, something that is initially resented:

When my head had attained I shall not say its definitive but its maximum dimensions, my father said to me, Come, son, we are going to buy your hat, as though it had pre-existed from time immemorial in a pre-established place. He went straight to the hat. I personally had no say in the matter, nor had the hatter....It was forbidden me from that day forth, to go out bareheaded, my pretty brown hair blowing in the wind. Sometimes in a secluded street, I took it off and held it in my hand, trembling. I was required to brush it morning and evening. Boys my age with whom, in spite of everything, I was obliged to mix occasionally, mocked me. (p.35)

However, by the time of his father's death, this piece of apparel has become

indelibly associated with the narrator's sense of himself ("When my father died I could have got rid of this hat, there was nothing more to prevent me, but not I" p.35), and when he of "The End" is informed that his own hat has been burnt, his response is, "I understood then that the end was near" (p.71).

These short pieces, Beckett's first accomplished work composed in French, clearly signal a fresh vein in his introspective "excavation", and inaugurate what must surely be one of the most extraordinarily prolific periods of literary composition of the highest order this century has seen. Watt was something of a blind alley, a work sui generis, an "anti-novel" that transgresses the "rules" of the genre with a self-consciousness that tends towards a somewhat mechanical artificiality; the voice that Beckett finds in the four novellas opens up new expressive possibilities for him which, leaving aside the concern with a form that deliberately rejects the canons of realist fiction, he goes on to explore and exploit in the Trilogy, the work that conclusively establishes Beckett as one of the most original and significant writers of our time.

II. MOLLOY AND MORAN : A CONVERGENT PSEUDOCOUPLE ?

Molloy's opening paragraph makes a suitably odd beginning to a very strange narrative, and not merely by virtue of the singular "narrative instance" that it reveals: an apparently senile geriatric, certainly a mnemonic wreck of a man, unsure even about whether or not he has fathered a son, is cloistered in the room of his dead mother, where he lies in bed and writes, and where he is visited once a week by some kind of literary agent, presumably, who returns the corrected pages of the previous week's labour, and pays the author for the present week's, scolding him if nothing has been written. But the bizarre tone of this opening does not stem entirely from the narrator's abnormally poor memory and unusual mode of life. A curious note is struck from the very first in the jangling deictics of the pronoun "there" in the second, third and sixth sentences, and the (more logical) "here" of the eighth. More importantly however, there are two features of Molloy's rhetorical debut that are almost provocatively unconventional. Firstly, while this passage, apparently written in retrospect, is set apart from the body of the writing in the rhetorical position of a foreword or preface, the normal rhetorical functions of such an exordium - to identify the subject-matter and to emphasize the importance or the interest of the work that follows, and to lay claim thereby to the reader's attention - are inverted as the "author" barefacedly declares his ignorance about his reasons for writing at all ("I don't work for the money. For what then? I don't know. The truth is I don't know much" p.7), and locates its meagre claim to some kind of significance in the authority of a third party: "It must mean something, or they wouldn't keep it" (p.8). And secondly, this time overloading rather than cancelling a clause of the writer's generic contract with his reader, Molloy presumes a degree of intimacy with his public highly surprising in a man who distances himself from his only existing social contact (and, as far as he knows, his only actual reader) by referring to him in the third person, addressing instead that potential

and anonymous being, "the reader", with conversational questions like "I began at the beginning like an old ballocks, can you imagine that?...It was the beginning, do you understand?" (p.8), as though he were sitting at the writer's bedside, listening to him. What we read here, and presumably, what we are about to read, is thus not merely stated or noted but presented, and this necessarily entails some sense or impression on the part of the presenter of him to whose attention it is directed. It is with this topic that we broach our discussion of Molloy's writerly sensibility - Genette's *fonction de communication*, which we might define as that element of the discourse that shapes and maintains the relations existing between the writer's sense of himself qua writer and his sense of the Other, qua reader.

This sense of the "narratee", he to whom the narrative is related, is invoked not only in remarks which specifically address a second person, a "you", and there are occasions when this pronoun is used, as Wittgenstein would say, in a different language-game. Molloy's introduction proper, for instance, the first twenty lines of his second and final paragraph, which functions as a kind of incantation to the narrative act, a shutting down of the senses, before sliding with weird immediacy into the opening scene of the story itself, is voiced for the most part in an impersonal or universal second person pronoun: "All grows dim. A little more and you'll go blind....You go dumb as well and sounds fade. The threshold scarcely crossed that's how it is....So that you say..." (p.8). This is not the true second person of direct address - the French original here makes use of the impersonal pronoun *on* - but it is a way of speaking that universalizes one's own experience and to this extent makes an implicit appeal to the reader as a fellow-soul, a "companion in distress" as the Unnamable puts it. And there are also many (mainly descriptive) remarks or comments which, while not being specifically addressed to a second person, clearly have a bearing upon the relations between narrator and reader in that they presume a shared lexicon of cultural reference, appealing, in order to realize their full significance, to a fund of **common** knowledge, as in Molloy's description of how

C "often stopped to look about him, like someone trying to fix landmarks in his mind" (p.9; my emphasis), or how A and C, on meeting, "halted, face to face, as in the country, of an evening, on a deserted road, two wayfaring strangers will" (p.9; my emphasis). On the whole, however, I shall focus on those instances where Molloy's sense of his reader crystallizes into direct address - where "you" translates the French "vous".

Molloy is never able to immerse himself in his narration for long without such address, and frequently his remarks seem to arise from an anxiety to make the narrative as clear as possible. "Let me try and explain," he writes after the unexceptional statement, "He disappeared, his head on his chest, the smoking object in his hand" (p.12), going on to "explain" that "from things about to disappear I turn away in time. To watch them out of sight, no, I can't do it. It was in this sense that he disappeared." Here is a narrator nervously on the alert for possible misunderstandings, at pains to avoid the obscurity that might arise from his own idiosyncrasies. On occasion Molloy's concern to make himself clear tends to become obsessive or slightly manic, and like Sam's (in Watt), is ludicrously contrasted with the triviality of the subject-matter that he is attempting to expound. Witness his anxiously guiding hand at work as he treats the problem of which leg would be best to set to the ground as he crutches his way through the forest: "Let us try and get this dilemma clear. Follow me carefully. The stiff leg hurt me admittedly, I mean the old stiff leg, and it was the other which I normally used as a pivot or prop. But now this latter, as a result of its stiffening I suppose, and the ensuing commotion among nerves and sinews, was beginning to hurt me more than the other" (p.82). And for the next page and a half he sign-posts his exposition of the "dilemma" with pseudo-conversational expressions to ensure that the reader does not get lost in his involuted logic:

* "For the old pain, do you follow me..."

* "Nor should it be forgotten that..."

- * "So in a way, if you like..."
- * "But I couldn't. What? Lean on it..."
- * "For it was shortening, don't forget..."

The solution to the famous problem of how to rotate his sucking-stones (pp.76-77) is similarly besprent with remarks that make of Molloy not merely a finical thinker but a highly pedantic narrator.

It is not merely in the interests of cognitive clarity that Molloy addresses his reader in this fashion; he affects also, in a number of different ways, to reduce the emotional distance between himself and his audience, and to augment the degree of sympathy with which he is heard. And he appeals for credence, as well as understanding, exercising that most basic, most naked form of the fonction d'attestation in swearing to the truthfulness of what he says. In the course of his monologue he gives us his word, his oath and even "his word of honour, as a gentleman" (p.86). And, introducing his caustic opinion of social workers, he collars his reader with an aggressive "Let me tell you this" (p.25) - the vehement tone of one who knows at first hand what he is talking about, and will brook no gainsaying.

Molloy often resorts to other rhetorical turns which, more politely, seek to retain the reader's credence. One such is to admit that what he has just related is unusual or bizarre, as in this example: "I found my crutches against an easy chair. It may seem strange that I was able to go through the motions I have just described without their help. I find it strange" (p.40). While the explanation that he provides ("You don't remember immediately who you are, when you wake") does little to reduce the prima facie implausibility of the incident, his own awareness of the anomaly serves to strengthen our trust in his honesty. With similar effect he decries his ignorance or foolishness at several points in the story (inter alia, pp.16 & 40), and makes various (implicitly flattering) appeals to his reader's intellectual powers, even to the extent of requesting him to complete the sense of what he finds too difficult to articulate himself, as in this example: "I had been living so far

from words for so long, you understand, that it was enough for me to see my town, since we're talking of my town, to be unable, you understand. It's too difficult to say, for me" (p.33). His habit of sharing his conceptual problems with the reader by rendering them as open questions ("But can one speak of right and left in such circumstances?" p.41) has the same kind of rhetorical effect.

At times Molloy's anticipation of his reader's possible objections develop into little pseudo-dialogues, giving once more a familiar, almost chatty tone to his discourse, as in this example: "You may object that this is covered by the business of my legs, that it has no importance, since in any case I could not put to the ground the foot in question. Quite, quite. But do you as much as know what foot we're talking about? No, nor I. Wait till I think. But you are right, that wasn't a weak point properly speaking..." (pp.85-86). Furthermore, his self-reproaching humility, stooping even to deride himself in the third person ("Listen to him now talking about chance" p.60), sometimes gives rise to explicit expressions of apology, proffered to the reader with promises to make amends in the future. Such instances of self-disparagement, while heightening the reader's wariness in regard to matters of fact, bolster his sense of the narrator's good communicative intentions. And finally, to conclude a far from exhaustive list, we find Molloy fulfilling the narrative fonction de régie - a mode of remark implicitly indicative of the writer's consideration for his reader - in the hortative cordiality of the jussive first person plural, in this fashion: "let us go on" (p.15); "Let us try and get this dilemma clear" (p.82); "And now, let us have done" (p.95).

These ways of speaking that tend to produce, or at least to encourage, an alignment of the reader's perspective with the writer's and something of a spirit of community between them, taken on their own, coalesce into a narratorial voice not unlike that of Tristram Shandy: eccentric, muddled, garrulous, amiable, disarmingly honest about his inefficiency as an autobiographer, and cripplingly aware of the difficulties he stumbles over as he tries to relate his life and opinions - a

roguish but rather endearing figure, and one who elicits an intellectual sympathy as he extends a companion's hand through the mists of his perplexities. And our feeling towards this figure is seasoned with something like gratitude for the comic scenes of great and enduring brilliance that he has given us, and perhaps something more than gratitude in the light of Bergson's observation that "le rire cache une arrière-pensée d'entente, je dirais presque de complicité, avec d'autres rieurs, réels ou imaginaires" (Le Rire, p.5). Molloy features both as clown and wit in his own writing, and although there are occasions when he is only the object or butt of the joke, and our complicity in laughing is rather with the implied author than the dramatized narrator, most of the scenes in which he does function as a buffoon (his conversation with the first policeman and subsequent arrest* is a good example) owe their comic quality to his masterful command of the humorist's narrative art, of which his eye for the incongruous, his deadpan tone and his sense of timing and control of the narrative ellipse are outstanding features. As for his witticisms, of which we shall say more later, these generally produce a definite collusive effect of the kind described by Booth in his Rhetoric of Irony: "Often the predominant emotion when reading stable ironies is that of joining, of finding and communing with kindred spirits. The author I infer behind the false words is my kind of man, because he assumes my capacity for dealing with it, and - most important - because he grants me a kind of wisdom; he assumes that he does not have to spell out the shared and secret truths on which my reconstruction [of his actual as opposed to his literal meaning] is to be built" (p.28). (Of course, not all of Molloy's irony is, in Booth's term "stable", and may produce an unsettling effect rather than that of the intellectual freemasonry he is talking about here, as we shall see.)

The features of Molloy's rhetoric that we have examined thus far suggest then

* A familiar topos of Beckettian comedy, the verbal slap-stick of botched conversation between the hapless protagonist and the belligerent, imbecilic officer of the law has its place in More Pricks than Kicks and in Murphy, is given a more vicious cast in Mercier and Camier, and is carried into the four novellas in the encounters of "The Expelled" and "The End".

a narrator who, though often bewildered, is anxious to make himself understood and believed, and who leans toward an amiable fellowship with his imagined readers. Of course, this is only half of the whole picture, if that much, for Molloy also shows himself to be testy, petulant and even downright hostile towards his public. In almost every mode or type of utterance I have mentioned above we may cite instances in which he effects a deliberate alienation of his reader. The care he sometimes takes to secure our understanding and credence evaporates in places, leaving behind it an expression of cantankerous indifference such as, "But how could I press my legs together, in the state they were? I pressed them together, that's all I can tell you. Take it or leave it" (p.90). The air of frank discussion in the pseudo-oral exchanges is replaced at other times by sheer irritability when Molloy's sense of his reader becomes that of a troublesome interlocutor, threatening to interrupt him by pointing out contradictions or omissions, as in these examples: "To decompose is to live too, I know, I know, don't torment me, but one sometimes forgets" (p.26); "Outside in the road a wind was blowing...from what quarter I could not tell. And don't come talking at me of the stars, they look all the same to me, yes, I cannot read the stars, in spite of my astronomical studies" (p.63). And the tone of conversational intimacy which Molloy himself has fostered in such remarks as "For why deny it, and to whom, to you, to whom nothing is denied?" (p.48), is irascibly revoked as certain subjects are indignantly decreed off limits: "And if you don't mind we'll leave my mother out of this" (p.60); "Don't talk to me about the chambermaid, I should never have mentioned her, she was long before, I was sick, perhaps there was no chambermaid, ever, in my life" (p.62). Then the attitude of painstaking care attested to by Molloy in his exordium - "I took a lot of trouble with it" (p.8) - and demonstrated in some of the extracts quoted or referred to above, is totally lacking in certain passages, as the following examples show: "So that she, I mean Sophie, must have told me the reasons why I needed her, since I had dared to disagree. And perhaps if I took the trouble I might find them again, but trouble, many

thanks, some other time" (p.36); "Now as to telling you why I stayed a good while with Lousse, no, I cannot. That is to say I could I suppose, if I took the trouble. But why should I?" (p.53). In the same way, his claim to narrative completeness and coherence, made *inter alia* when speaking of "the so rigorous chain of events I had just undergone" (p.44), wastes away in fits of tedium that occasion a sudden narrative ellipse, often on the brink of some piquant or dramatic episode, having whetted his reader's appetite, such as, for instance, when he is handed a cup of tea in the guardroom: "The liquid overflowed, the mug rocked with a noise of chattering teeth ...and the sodden bread sagged more and more. Until, panic-stricken, I flung it all far from me. I did not let it fall, no, but with a convulsive thrust of both my hands I threw it to the ground, where it smashed to smithereens, or against the wall, far from me, with all my strength. I will not tell what followed, for I am weary of this place, I want to go. It was late afternoon when they told me I could go" (p.25). And on occasion, especially towards the end of the monologue, such ennui gives rise to far more drastic gaps in the narrative, like this: "And as to saying what became of me, and where I went, in the months and perhaps years that followed, no. For I weary of these inventions and others beckon to me" (p.72).

There are also many instances in Molloy's writing of an antagonistic attitude towards the reader expressed not in an open flouting of narratorial norms but in an ironical formality or mock politeness. To open the charge-sheet with a fairly inoffensive item we find phrases redolent of a quaintly archaic, faintly pompous narrative manner ("Judge then of my relief..." p.32); "it would ill become me not to mention..." p.17) occurring in a context which make them seem ridiculously inappropriate. The second example given above, the syntactic *pou sto* of a spacious and even grand cadence, leisurely amassing its qualifying clauses, introduces a notion of decorum ludicrously at odds with the emphatically vituperative abhorrence of its referential content. Here is the whole sentence: "But before I leave this earthly paradise, suspended between the mountains and the sea, sheltered from certain winds

and exposed to all that Auster vents, in ~~the way of~~ scents and langours, on this accursed country, it would ill become me not to mention the awful cries of the corncrakes that run in the corn, in the meadows, all the short summer night long, dinning their rattles." "Earthly paradise", coming as it does two sentences after Molloy's reference to his birth ("through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct") as the "First taste of the shit", has no chance of face value survival. At work here is straight sarcastic irony which, like Molloy's "dear little, sweet little future" (p.49), expresses an unambiguous opinion. We know that Molloy means other than what he says, and we know that what he means is a direct negation of what he says: his future will not be dear or sweet, and probably not little either. The irony simply inserts a semantic minus sign in front of the statement. Perhaps more characteristic of Molloy however is irony which is not a simple two-note chord, the said and the meant, but a jangling echo of possible meanings. "It would ill become me...": does he mean that he really does not care whether the averted omission would become him ill or not? But why then mention it? Does the fact that he does so imply that he does care to be seen not to care? Or is the expression simply a pretext to smuggle in the "staffage" he complains of elsewhere, to provide some local colour to his setting? Or is he actually mocking the empty rhetoric of such an undercover landscapist? Or is it nothing more than a fanciful way of introducing the device by which he claims to be able to date the inauguration of his story, as he does in the next sentence ("And this enables me, what is more, to know when that unreal journey began...and which I here declare without further ado to have begun in the second or third week of June")? And there are also echoes that go over Molloy's head, such as the traditional association of the corncrake with Artemis, goddess of fertility and birth, which, like the angelus, "recalling the incarnation", that he hears on the preceding page, seems to announce both his own "birth" into the world of the narrative, and the quest to reach his mother, not to mention the bird-call motif which marks the departure of both the narrator of "The Calmative" from his shelter, and

Moran from his home as he sets out in search of Molloy. In these cases the irony lies in the fact that Molloy is saying more than he realizes, irony produced by the implied author rather than the narrator. But let us shorten our gaze for the moment and return to the matter of the rhetorical implications of Molloy's "unstable" irony. Here is how he introduces the "conclusion" to his tale: "And though it is no part of my tottering intentions to treat here in full, as they deserve, these brief moments of the imemorial (sic) expiation, I shall nevertheless deal with them briefly, out of the goodness of my heart, so that my story, so clear till now, may not end in darkness, the darkness of these towering forests..." (p.83). I have spoken of the *fonction de régie*, the narrator's organisation and presentation of his story, the naming of narrative parts, as an implicitly considerate rhetorical feature. Here however it is given an ironic cast that undermines the tacit assertion of narratorial guidance. Once more we encounter a disturbing compound of stable and unstable ironies. Molloy's declaration of narratorial generosity, and his assertions that "these brief moments" deserve to be treated "in full" and that his story has been "so clear till now", are all subject to a fairly clear reversal of surface meaning. But these joshing ironies of mock politeness and wry self-deprecation sit oddly with the weightiness, the ponderability, of the phrase, "these brief moments of the imemorial expiation" to produce a tone as distant from jocular forbearance as it is from self-pity. How serious is Molloy when he calls his life an "imemorial expiation"? The irony here exerts a qualification rather than an inversion of the stated sense: life is like an expiation in that it is attended by much suffering and a sense of guilt, but our styptic narrator seems to refuse the salvatory implications of such a conception - suffering and guilt are gratuitous - and to mock those who seek a meaning for their lives in these aspects of experience. For what and to whom such an expiation is to be made are questions without answers.

In Molloy's masterfully inept hands even the apology turns ironical, and becomes an instrument of offence rather than of reconciliation. Witness the apophatic

bitchiness of "For to contrive a being, a place, I nearly said an hour, but I would not hurt anyone's feelings" (p.29; my emphasis), where the form of his retraction surely offends as effectively, and much more emphatically, than the statement it avoids would have done, and the mocking deference of "I apologise for having to revert to this lewd orifice [the anus], 'tis my muse would have it so" (p.85). The earnest formality of the little dissertation that follows, worthy of a letter to the editor ("We underestimate this little hole, it seems to me, we call it the arse-hole and affect to despise it. But is it not rather the true portal of our being....Are these not significant facts?") highlights rather than hides the writer's scatological zest. And his penitent undertaking to "do my utmost to keep it in the background in future" is as insincere as his apology, closely preceding as it does a lovely pun about accidentals and fundamentals. The comic element in such incongruous twinning of subject-matter and stylistic register is not innocent fun. A pose adopted to deride a pose, it is tendentious humour (in Freud's sense of *Tendenzwitz*; see his *Wit*, p.128), ridiculing a manner of speaking that spuriously inflates the dignity of the human being by ignoring the unsavoury elements of his corporeality. In the same vein we find Molloy pointedly, but with apparent innocence, juxtaposing the sacred and the excretory (p.86). He also wields the fart, that time-honoured salute of ridicule, to good effect, besmirching with ostensible innocence both the seriousness of public literary debate (the *Times Literary Supplement* he finds to be of such "never failing toughness and impermeability" that "even farts make no impression on it" p.31) and the tendency to substitute statistical data for real self-knowledge: "Extraordinary how mathematics help you to know yourself" (p.32) is his comment after computing that he breaks wind, on average, less than once every four minutes. Our narrator here is not a boor, but a wit posing as a boor, the better to mock "the possibility of systematic decorum", as he puts it while discussing "certain habits such as the finger in the nose, the scratching of the balls, digital emunction and the peripatetic piss" (p.26).

Molloy's taste for the more off-putting aspects of human physicality seems to run deeper than a desire to rub his reader's nose in the muck. I suppose one could make out a case to see this scatological strain in him as a distorted resurfacing of a subterranean ooze of eroticism, which, like the theme of onanism, is to run dry only in The Unnamable. In this view of things his libidinous impulse, blocked from its normal channels of expression by the "hindrance" of solitude and impotence, becomes, in Freud's words, "distinctly hostile and cruel, and utilizes the sadistical components of the sexual impulse against the hindrance" (Wit, p.143). Certainly the vitriol beneath the surface blandness of tone (a Swiftian technique that, as Fletcher observes, Beckett puts to great effect) - to be found, for example, in the minute and disgusting anatomical details of his coupling with Edith (pp.60-62) - might suggest a secret relish. It seems more likely to my mind however that it is less a case of the libido finding a twisted conduit of release than of an assault on the libido itself from some more philosophical quarter of the mind. Molloy and Edith meet in a rubbish dump where our hero is "bent double over a heap of muck, in the hope of finding something to disgust [him] for ever with eating" (p.61). It is perhaps with similar intent that he rakes over the horrid details of his affair. But let us leave these speculations aside and return to our theme with the conclusion that Molloy does, on occasion, take delight in deliberately offending the sensibility of his imagined audience.

Our narrator, then, displays a highly ambivalent attitude towards his public. On the one hand certain features of his rhetoric seem intended to draw the "author" and his reader closer together, to induce an attitude if not exactly of trust, at least of a kindly and interested attention, while on the other, and rather overshadowing the former, we find utterances that seem designed to provoke an atmosphere of suspicion, hostility, even disgust. The inconsistency of Molloy's *fonction de communication* is all the more striking in that it takes its place in a narrative act that is by its very nature orientated towards creating and sustaining a relationship

between a certain image of the individual and a certain image of the "public" as an audience, as Trilling points out: "The subject of an autobiography is...bent on revealing himself in all his truth, bent, that is to say, on demonstrating his sincerity" (Sincerity and Authenticity, p.25). In a narrative genre that is founded upon its author's "conception of his private and uniquely interesting individuality, together with his impulse to reveal his self, to demonstrate that in it which is to be admired and trusted" (ibid.), this ambivalence is indicative not only of a high degree of affective instability or moodiness on the part of the narrator, but of a deep-seated confusion about what it is he is actually doing or trying to do in writing at all.

The relationship with the "you" that is posited in the rhetoric of the monologue is ambivalent in another sense too - with respect to what we might call the degree of interiority of the Other. While at times the second person addresses a narrataire who is clearly a reader, at others it is more as a listener that this being is addressed, someone who, receiving the discourse of the narrator as it is uttered, threatens to interrupt him, criticizing or rejecting what has just been stated, a threat that Molloy counters on one occasion with this harrassed admission of error: "To decompose is to live too, I know, I know, don't torment me..." (p.26). At such times the narrator is addressing himself rather than someone else, and the seat of the receiving consciousness becomes that of an internal "you", an autonomous presence within the speaker's psyche that is not merely a passive partner in the communicative act but which is possessed of its own voice, over which, it seems, Molloy the narrator must sometimes struggle to make himself heard. In fact, one of the possible reasons for Molloy's garrulity is his effort to drown out what he does not wish to hear, the voice that he cannot silence, "a sound which begins to rustle in your head, without knowing how, or why" (pp.42-43), that whispers to him about "his ruins". On such occasions, then, the sense of the "person" that Molloy is addressing becomes that of an internal, as opposed to an internalized, psychic

entity, expressing in a dramatic mode the theme, seminal to the work as a whole, that most cohesively links the two monologues of the volume - that of the inner voice. I shall return to that theme and its treatment by the two narrators, but first let me continue my discussion of Molloy's "public" voice with the subject of his attitude towards his own act of writing.

Molloy's low opinion of his narrative is made evident in his opening paragraph, and he records his dissatisfaction *passim* with remarks like "What rigmarole" (p.13) or "What tedium" (p.38), and apologizes for "the wealth of filthy circumstance" (p.67) which impedes the progress of his story, and which he aims to replace with "vast frescoes, dashed off with loathing" (p.67). Such candid meta-narrative comments reveal the disinclination he has for the task that has somehow been imposed on him (he speaks of the experience he is striving to recall as "the remnants of a penum, one day got by heart and long forgotten" p.33), and explain perhaps why it is that he lapses so frequently from the business of narrating his chaotic chronicle to indulge in the narratorial *fonction idéologique*, giving the reader the benefit of his opinions on a variety of subjects, from the most mundane kind of general knowledge ("Constipation is a sign of good health in pomeranians" p.12) to discussions of more abstract philosophical matters, such as suicide or man's free will. And, in the tradition of the self-conscious narrator, of which Tristram Shandy is the best-known English exponent, he is led to expatiate at length on the problems of authorship, sketching as he does so a radically pessimistic critique of the expressive potency of language itself. Of course, this lands him in the inevitable logical embarrassment of someone who states the truth that the truth can never be stated, yet despite this and his wide-ranging epistemological scepticism we find him again and again striving to formulate utterances that seek to encapsulate the truth at that level of abstraction we may call "wisdom", for "there are things from time to time, in spite of everything, that impose themselves on the understanding with the

force of axioms, for unknown reasons" (p.64). And it is particularly that realm of knowledge that survives the phenomenologists' sensory *époche*, "the laws of the mind" (p.13), that our narrator attempts to espouse with his own ramshackle brand of a priori reasoning, the "divine analysis" that "conduces...to knowledge of yourself, and of your fellow-men, if you happen to have any" (p.36). Although there is a good measure of irony here (especially in the epithet "divine"), Molloy's characterization of himself as a zetetic, "a man with a passion for truth" (p.36),* is not to be entirely discounted by the somewhat fitful and despairing manner in which that passion seizes him. And naturally, his stance as a painstaking and benevolent narrator imposes upon him the duty to share his findings with his reader.

On firm ground, most notably that of his experience as a social outcast, Molloy favours the terse, nutshell form of the proverb, where the gnomic, "timeless", present tense articulates unequivocally affirmed universal categories, as in, "To him who has nothing it is forbidden not to relish filth" (p.25). This example, bitterly re-writing the old saw, "Beggars can't be choosers", is characteristic of the dogmatic Molloy of the ear-collaring "Let me tell you this..." (p.24). Often however, and rather more typical of our narrator, are those instances where the certitude of the apophthegmatic form is spoilt by doubtful afterthoughts that mar the neatness of his maxims. Thus the self-justifying and apparently incontrovertible "What do you expect, one is what one is..." is undercut by the comic metanoia of "...partly at least" (p.57), and frequently the qualification or partial retraction lands Molloy in a logical contradiction ("There is a little of everything, apparently, in nature, and freaks are common" p.15) or an infinite regress such as, "Precautions are like resolutions, to be taken with precaution" (p.34). In like fashion the smug authority of the *bon mot* is risibly deflated, either, as in the above

* A boast that receives its come-uppance forty-five pages later, when an intellectual passion turns out to be as ephemeral as any other: "And I for my part will never lend myself to such a perversion (of the truth), until such time as I am compelled or find it convenient to do so" (p.81).

examples, with the addition of an extra syntactic limb, or in a bathetic second-sentence rejoinder which shatters the seriousness of the first statement ("How difficult it is to speak of the moon and not lose one's head. It must be her arse she shows us always" p.41) or smashes its optimism, as in, "How pleasant it is to be confirmed in one's first impressions. Perhaps that is what tempers the pangs of death" (p.15).

Frequently the trickle of uncertainty reflected by these additions broadens into the fully-fledged digression so characteristic of the garrulous, Shandean raconteur. Although I agree with Fletcher that "only a superficial reading leads one to think that Molloy is a rambling monologue leading nowhere in particular" (The Novels, p.135), I think he is overstating the case when he speaks of a "firmness of structure" in which "every digression ends with a return to its point of departure before the narrator passes on to the next subject" (p.135). For, while he does on the whole pick up his story more or less where he left it, within the digressions there is often a disconcerting lack of unity and coherence, so that a logical development or even a single, definite subject of discussion may only be made out with difficulty, if at all. Let us examine an example in detail. Molloy has just lain down at full stretch in a ditch when, after eating a little grass...

It came back to my mind, from nowhere, as a moment before my name, that I had set out to see my mother, at the beginning of this ending day. My reasons? I had forgotten them. But I knew them, I must have known them, I had only to find them again and I would sweep, with the clipped wings of necessity, to my mother. Yes, it's easy when you know why, a mere matter of magic. Yes, the whole thing is to know what saint to implore, any fool can implore him. For the particulars, if you are interested in particulars, there is no need to despair, you may scrabble on the right door, in the right way, in the end. It's for the whole there seems to be no

spell. Perhaps there is no whole, before you're dead. An opiate for the life of the dead, that should be easy. What am I waiting for then, to exorcise mine? It's coming, it's coming. I hear from here the howl resolving all, even if it is not mine. Meanwhile there's no use knowing you are gone, you are not, you are writhing yet, the hair is growing, the nails are growing, the entrails emptying, all the morticians are dead. Someone has drawn the blinds, you perhaps. Not the faintest sound. Where are the famous flies? Yes, there is no denying it, any longer, it is not you who are dead, but all the others. So you get up and go to your mother, who thinks she is alive. That's my impression. But now I shall have to get myself out of this ditch. (pp.28-29)

The digression proper is launched by the first "Yes" - an emphatically self-affirming syntactic connector which, particularly when deployed anaphorically as it is here, imparts a headlong momentum to the discourse, and a breezy quality to the ironic scoffing of the sentences it inaugurates (we understand: "it is never easy, for you never know why"). The initial subject of the digression is provided in the first four sentences of the extract, which anchor it firmly to the narrative, and may be rendered as "the importance of knowing why you are about to do what you have in mind to do." This forms part of Molloy's topsy-turvy theory of motivation, adumbrated at the inauguration of the mother-quest,* in which the desire to do something must be artificially bolstered up with "reasons" before any action is possible. The shift from what is a commentary on the narrative into the philosophizing discourse of

* "But talking of the craving for a fellow let me observe that having waked between eleven o'clock and midday (I heard the angelus, recalling the incarnation, shortly after) I resolved to go and see my mother. I needed, before I could resolve to go and see that woman, reasons of an urgent nature, and with such reasons, since I did not know what to do, or where to go, it was child's play for me, the play of an only child, to fill my mind until it was rid of all other preoccupation and I seized with a trembling at the mere idea of being hindered from going there, I mean to my mother, there and then" (p.16).

the digression - "the plane of pure knowledge" (p.97) which so frequently tempts Molloy into his dubious meditations - becomes explicit with the first universalizing "you". As Molloy alters his gaze from the particular case to the general, the emblem of the psychic process under discussion is alarmingly transposed from the key of classical rationalist psychology (having "reasons" for doing something) into that of sorcery (magic spells), and then into that of Catholic theology (invocation of the saints) - a drift of context indicative of a levelling epistemological pessimism that is taken up in the substitution of the morphologically congruent "magic" for "logic" in the clichéd, "a mere matter of logic". Then, re-casting the notion of prayer as a "scrabbling" at a closed door (prefiguring an important motif of The Unnamable), Molloy's caducous attention shifts from the principle of the mechanism to its particulars before rebounding off this word to its philosophical associate, "the whole": "It's for the whole there seems to be no spell." But the sense of "whole" has mutated in this transition from its initial significance - the unit of psychological motivation - to the "whole whole" - the total unit, the life of the individual. This is followed by a further transposition of "knowing why", making it into "an opiate" - a drug which, tracing the tortuous development back to the original notion, represents that formulation, be it a reason, a spell or a prayer, that once uttered will launch the subject upon an irresistible and automatic course of action, ending the need for further decisions and silencing, presumably, "that rumour arising at birth and even earlier, What shall I do? What shall I do? now low, a rumour, now precise as the headwaiter's And to follow? and often rising to a scream" (p.10). In this regard it is worth recalling Molloy's joyous sense of release from the responsibility of choice when he is arrested: "I gave myself up to that golden moment, as if I had been someone else....Forgetful of my mother, set free from the act, merged in this alien hour, saying, Respite, respite" (p.22; my emphasis).

From this tenuously attained theoretical vantage point Molloy suddenly turns

his attention back to his own case: "What am I waiting for then, to exorcise [my life]?" And now the over-extended metaphor changes, in an alteration typical of Molloy's wont to take the most wretched view of things, into "the howl resolving all." The tonality of the passage here becomes suddenly much grimmer, the facetiously charted "plane of pure knowledge" now being pervaded with the anxiety of the speaker's present reality. (Molloy's monologue is constantly variegated by such abrupt transitions of mood, the jocular yielding suddenly to a despairing bleakness, only to be displaced in its turn by sardonic comedy.) This leads into one of Molloy's tersely sketched cameos, the imagined death-scene, details of which are evoked in breathlessly abbreviated clauses, asyndetically linked, before the sudden stillness of the verbless period, "Not the faintest sound." In this case the illustrative miniature chimes eerily with the narrator's own situation. To what does "here" in "I hear from here" have reference? Is it simply an abstract antimimetic deixis, "here" as opposed to "there" whence the howls? Or does it refer to Molloy's actual locality, in his mother's room, where he lies and writes? Molloy's question ("What am I waiting for then...") acquires particular significance when we remember that his "work" as a whole has been posited by its "author" as being itself a formulation that will bring an end to things ("What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my good-byes, finish dying" p.7), and the disquieting thought that intrudes here is that his incantatory farewell may be ineffective, that in effect, he is not able to die. Is he scrabbling at the wrong door, or at the right door in the wrong way? Has he misconstrued the principle or is it merely in the particulars that he is at fault? The question is unresolved, leaving Molloy, like the Signorina Ottolenghi (in "Dante and the Lobster") where he was, as he was, forever abused by the nature of things, forever the odd case out, he for whom not even death is as it should be. Where are the famous flies indeed! The incongruity of the question effects a humorous easing of the anxiety produced by the prospect of an endless prolongation of his miserable existence, a lighter note that is taken up, after a final "Yes...", in the

amusing impudence of the logical conjunct "so" (along with "for", one of his favorite means of stringing sentences together even when there is really no logical connection between them), in "So you get up and go to your mother...", setting the seal of a sequitur upon an arbitrary conclusion, a piece of effrontery that Molloy glosses over with the modestly subjectivizing comment, "That's my impression." From artificial, "rational" impulses to motivate action, to the life-in-death where no action is feasible, the subject of the digression dilates and sweeps away, not on the clipped wings of necessity, but on those of a wayward analogical fancy, before contracting in apprehension at the thought of a state to which no prayer, no spell, no reason can bring an end.

Two further general observations: we may see in the metaphoric transitions of the passage the remains of the prolix multiple imaging of the passage we quoted from the "Dream of Fair to Middling Women". Here the profusion has become more disordered, the motival control of analogical reiteration replaced with loose analogies of function. And there is a different dynamic quality: the metaphors are linked not in an essentially static or atemporal relation, but in a frayed concatenation of ideas, sequentially succeeding each other in the semblance of an argument. "That's how I reason," says Molloy towards the end, "with the help of images little suited to my situation" (p.87). We shall examine some of the most important and characteristic of these images a little later; what concerns us here, our second extrapolating observation, is the dramatic or mimetic aspect of the passage, the dianoetic portraiture that Kenner has described as the Trilogy's "eerie fidelity to the movements of a mind that has noticed itself in motion" (Study, p.35). We are not given a prettily, or even a coherently, arranged presentation of ideas, as in the "Dream" passage, but the trace left in words of a tumbling, stumbling, improvised trajectory of thought, a fractured arabesque of images and logic. This kind of portraiture is quite different from Molloy's explicit attempts at self-description. From time to time the monologue becomes more "dramatic" in that it presents a speaker working out something to

himself, unaware of the audience that overhears him. On such occasions Molloy's sense of a reader falls away as he gets caught up in the arcane curlicues of his cogitations. Sometimes his train of thought becomes intriguingly difficult to follow in its embroidery of idiosyncratic notions, its obscure private allusions, and its sudden coiling back upon itself, as when a metaphor is taken up and extended as though it had never been abandoned, many sentences after its first appearance. Thus, for instance, nine lines after likening the words of conversation to the unintelligible "buzzing of an insect" (p.53), Molloy turns to the similar difficulties he has in apprehending elements of the visual modality with the strange remark that "My eye too, the seeing one, must have been ill-connected with the spider..." The labour of identifying this arachnid as the (unmentioned) spinner in whose (also unmentioned) web of aural apprehension the "buzzing insect" is to be enmeshed, paralyzed and rendered fit for mental digestion, is left to the reader by a narrator forgetful of his audience, and it is at such moments that the intrinsic pattern or shape of his thought and his private reticulum of associations are more lucidly revealed than in his pedantic attempts at rational exposition.

We have seen how, in the digression quoted above, Molloy's thought, moving from the particular case to the general and back again, follows an erratic course of conceptual extrapolation in which a central notion is subjected to a succession of loose or imperfect analogical transformations. As characteristic of our narrator however, as is illustrated in the following passage, is a mode of thinking in which the first grains of the sorites will not stay in place, and instead of an acervation of associated ideas and images we find a dialectic of statement, correction or rejection, and re-statement, where the "argument" seems to generate itself out of the speaker's semantic dissatisfaction:

And once again I am, I will not say alone, no, that's not like me,
but, how shall I say, I don't know, restored to myself, no, I never left

myself, free, yes, I don't know what it means, but it's the word I mean to use, free to do what, to do nothing, to know, but what, the laws of the mind perhaps, of my mind, that for example water rises as it drowns you and that you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. (pp.13-14)

If, as Kenner says, "the sentence reproduces in slow motion some mental gesture" (op. cit., p.94), what we have here is a sentence that is masterfully perspicuous in its reproduction of a "mental gesture" of hesitant groping and frustrated casting aside of the notions that spring to mind in the effort to manifest some dimly perceived underlying idea. The supple cadence, a fine illustration of what Beckett might have had in mind when speaking of "a syntax of weakness" (Harvey, p.435), maintains its overarching intonational momentum while being able at the same time to follow each discarded false start, each spluttering fizzle of a formulation, continually positing but avoiding what might easily be said, searching this way and that for somewhere to conclude until it grounds itself, spent, in a resounding deprecation of the worst of all possible worlds. Many of Molloy's cogitations have a similar structure, their metaphorical pungency (not a marked feature of this example) eaten into at each step by vitiating doubt, searching exasperatedly for some firm conceptual foothold, and ending in a declaration of ignorance or epistemological despair or an outburst of impatience and defeat such as, "To hell with it anyway. Where was I?" (p.33). And particularly evident here too is how, in its immediacy of notation, thought set down alive, as it were, committed to paper in the very process of its formulation, Molloy's discourse seems closer to the medium of speech than to that of writing. The "syntax of weakness" is able to incorporate such revisions in mid-stream, and all the hesitations, auto-interruptions and would-be emend-

ations, in addition to reinforcing the oral quality of the discourse, often serve to challenge the spurious expressive power of the ready-made locution or cliché, while at the same time exposing its insidious appeal to the mind of the unwary speaker.

This degree of temporal immediacy between narrator and text is evoked also in other signs of an off-the-cuff improvisation where there is often a far more prominent comic quality than here, as his thought loops back to question or criticize what he has just said, frequently a common enough expression which he teases into a logical absurdity, as in, "By the time she came to the fourth knock she imagined that she was only at the second, the first two having been erased from her memory as completely as if they had never been felt, though I don't quite see how something never felt can be erased from the memory, and yet it is a common occurrence" (p.19), or in, "They paid no attention to me and I repaid the compliment. Then how could I know that they were paying no attention to me, and how could I repay the compliment, since they were paying no attention to me? I don't know. I knew it and I did it, that's all I know" (p.24).

At times the retrospective correction is forestalled by fully-fledged aposiopesis, often, as in the following example, just as Molloy seems poised on the brink of some important revelation: "I should add, before I get down to the facts, you'd swear they were facts, of that distant summer afternoon, that with this deaf, blind, impotent, mad old woman, [his mother]...and with her alone I - no, I can't say it" (p.19). And there are some highly amusing instances where Molloy finds himself launched upon some common syntactic promontory only to realize midway that it leads nowhere but into ineffable complication, and manages to effect a hasty retraction: "I know it's my only chance to - my only chance" (p.13); "What I can assert without fear of - without fear, is that..." (p.68). We also see the tergiversation of the inept improviser in various mid-sentence self-contradictions, of this kind: "A pomeranian I think, but I don't think so" (p.12); "No, I shall never draw it [a list of his weak points] up, yes, perhaps I shall" (p.86).

We have seen thus far a narrator who disdains the worth of his own writing, and the efforts of the human mind to attain "the truth" about any particular thing, but who nevertheless becomes engrossed in disquisitions on the nature of mental life, and who is so entrapped in the very moment of his utterance, maintaining a desperate improvisation under the pressure of some mysterious compulsion to keep going ("for it is forbidden to give up and even to stop an instant" p.87) that he has no recourse to the writer's privilege of re-reading his own work, pausing for reflection, and of erasing or re-casting what dissatisfies him. Another major facet of Molloy's attitude towards his own writing stems from his attitude towards language itself. Our narrator's scepticism on this subject, now bitter, now stoically resigned, is expressed both dramatically and theoretically. In addition to enacting the sad inefficiencies of speech as means of communication in, for instance, his conversations with the policemen, Lousse, and the charcoal-burner, Molloy discusses at some length the possible reasons for his difficulties (pp.52-53). It is not only as a communicative vehicle that language is impugned however, for Molloy is also unremittingly aware of the failings of language as more purely expressive or intellectual medium, the medium of introspective thought. Here is a brief summary of his unsystematic, Mauthnerian, criticisms. He opens his attack on the power of language to "name"; after alluding (unkindly, but with feigned innocence) to the incomprehensibly dual nature of the photon and the semantic quandary of quantum physics ("waves and particles" p.33), he speaks of the ineradicable disjunction between "nameless things" and "thingless names", going on to equate "meaning" with lifelessness: "the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. All I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead" (p.33). The point expressed with such pungency seems to be that language, being an hermetically self-referential and impersonal system of signification, can deal only with little codified shards of our experience, that the living,

unformed flux of our subjective reality is quite beyond its expressive powers. Elsewhere he states his opinion, in a pointed reversal of Descartes' first epistemological principle (see A Discourse on Method, Pt.II), that "all that is false may more readily be reduced, to notions clear and distinct" (p.87), and remarks, apropos something that he finds impossible to put into words (regarding his relations with his mother) that, on second thoughts, he "could say it easily, because it wouldn't be true" (p.20). He goes on, in the "long sonata of the dead" passage, to attack the question of expressive originality, deeming that "saying" is not "inventing" as it might seem to be, but is only a re-arrangement or repetition of what has already been said, already coded for in language's semantic system. He also finds that whatever may be said about anything is at once too little and too much, for whatever is said about anything is only "an infinitesimal part" (p.36) of what could be said about it, and is thus, for the idealist in Molloy, *de trop*. So it is that "all circumstances" would be "better left unspoken" (p.44). He also arraigns the time-bound linearity of language, lamenting the fact that "you cannot mention everything in its proper place, you must choose, between the things not worth mentioning and those even less so" (p.43). All this means that, for Molloy, there is no escaping "the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace" (p.93).

Unable, for reasons that are not absolutely clear, to hold his peace, we nevertheless find Molloy doing his best (when he has the mind to) to lie as little as possible. We have seen how he turns aside from the easy formulae that present themselves so readily to his mind, unable to bring himself to say even "once again I am alone" without stumbling into a lengthy exposition of what he really means. Thus our narrator is beset with a crippling awareness of, in Wittgenstein's words, "the contrast between the real state of affairs and that which our mode of expression inclines us to expect" (quoted in Hallett's Companion, p.26). And we find him worrying at words and verbal concepts, until their familiar adequacy crumbles away, their sense of assurance toppled. "And what do I mean by seeing and seeing again?" he

demands, after having used these simple terms in entirely unexceptional narrative circumstances (p.16). "An instant of inner silence", characterized in the kind of vivid and precise comparison that Nabokov handles so well, "as when the conductor taps his stand, raises his arms, before the unanswerable clamour" precedes his attempt to reply, and then the answer comes in a little list of fragments of the visual field, "Smoke, sticks, flesh, hair," which refuse to coagulate into the composite unit, "a man", followed by three phrases that qualify the perceptual circumstances, "at evening, afar, flung about the craving for a fellow." The last of these conditions is the most insidious, for it raises the problem of the perceiver's affective state, unallayably colouring the "objective" scene before him. We can never just see, Molloy seems to be saying; the word glosses over phenomenological contingencies that can never be obviated. (One is reminded here, especially by the emphatically appetitive "craving", of Bergson's notion of the utilitarian distortion of objectivity and Schopenhauer's view that the Will pollutes the purity of our perception. A good part of Beckett's Proust monograph is devoted to just this question.) Even in the heat of a set-piece landscape, that tacit endorsement of language's power to capture or represent the world, we find Molloy gesturing towards ineffable nuances of the visual modality: "From there he must have seen it all, the plain, the sea, and then these selfsame hills that some call mountains, indigo in places in the evening light, their serried ranges crowding to the skyline, cloven with hidden valleys that the eye divines from sudden shifts of colour and then from other signs for which there are no words, nor even thoughts" (p.10).

It is not just when dealing with his perception that Molloy baulks at the common way of speaking. Frequently it is verbs of mental process that receive his attention, "remembering", for instance: "Dan, you remember the day you buried the ring. I remembered, I remembered, I mean I knew more or less what she was talking about, and if I hadn't always taken part personally in the scenes she evoked, it was just as if I had" (p.18). He disputes also the spurious clarity of such verbs of

volitional proclivity as "prefer" or "regret": "And when I talk of preferring, for example, or regretting, it must not be supposed that I opted for the least evil, and adopted it, for that would be wrong. But not knowing exactly what I was doing or avoiding, I did it and avoided it all unsuspecting that one day, much later, I would have to go back over all these acts and omissions, dimmed and mellowed by age, and drag them into the eudemonistic slop" (pp.58-59). "Thinking" is similarly scathed in drubbings of varying intensity, from the pert little one-liner, "At last I began to think, that is to say to listen harder" (p.65) to the protracted *crise de confiance* just before the end of the monologue (pp.93-94). His objections come from different angles; first he attacks the active, problem-solving mode of thinking (p.52), then reduces the reference of the verb to a more passive mental activity (listening to an "inner voice" p.65), before, in the passage referred to above, collapsing the reality of such a private mental language in a desperate attempt to speak literally about his consciousness, an effort that yields only metaphor after metaphor before grounding itself bathetically in the hopelessly non-specific "somewhere something had changed" - a confession of intellectual impotence that retrospectively reduces much of his chronicle to an artificial conventionality.

Molloy's wariness at the commonplace formulation leads him not only into such moments of forlorn, bewildered recantation, helplessly exposing the inadequacy of what he has said, but is expressed also in a vigorous verbal ingenuity which actively combats the growing pale of language, the gradual congealing of metaphor into bland conventional idiom. Thus we find him re-fashioning clichés in a way that restores some of the metaphoric vividness of the original, as in these examples: "it was child's play for me, the play of an only child" (p.16); "So that I came near to wondering if I was in the right town, where I first saw the murk of day" (p.32); "That's a fairly good caricature of my state of mind at that instant" (p.67). At work in these examples is Molloy's wry wit of reversal or inversion, always prepared to go one worse in turning an expected response or emotional value on its head. Here

are some other glories of the strain: "The other thing that bothers me, in this connection, is the indifference with which I learnt of her death...an indifference softened indeed by the pain of losing a source of revenue" (p.61); "Let me tell you something, my sight was better at the seaside! Yes... my good eye saw more clearly and there were even days when the bad one too had to look away" (p.80); "...as far back as I can remember, and some of my memories have their roots deep in the immediate past..." (p.81).

We also encounter Molloy superimposing in feigned ignorance the figurative and the literal components of idioms, as in the following: "So all I know is that it was much the same weather when I left as when I came, so far as I was capable of knowing what the weather was. And I had been under the weather so long, under all weathers, that I could tell quite well between them" (p.54); "I don't like the gloom to lighten, there's something shady about it" (pp.88-89). The pun on "shady" exercises a kind of delight in the unexpected aptness of the idiom, which at first tends to mask the metaphysical overtones of Molloy's statement. But Beckett's humour is seldom purely gratuitous; in the context of a pervasive use of the imagery of darkness and light, and bearing in mind Molloy's temptation to paint the forest (reminiscent of Dante's thicket) as blackly as possible ("To say I stumbled in impenetrable darkness, no, I cannot. I stumbled, but the darkness was not impenetrable" p.88), the "impious dream" of "omnidolence" of the "First Love" narrator, and Beckett's comment to Tom Driver, "If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable" ("Beckett by the Madeleine", p.23), we may observe that Molloy's umbrage at the lightening gloom is that of a man for whom an absolute uniformity of experience and disillusionment seems preferable to the variegations that torment him with the possibility of deliverance.

At times Molloy's re-literalization of the cliché does more than give it a new lease of death by restoring some of the vividness of the original metaphor: it ren-

ders it ludicrous by taking it at face value: "I was out of sorts. They are deep, my sorts, a deep ditch, and I am not often out of them" (p.20). (This works rather better in the French, where it is not necessary to introduce a fresh substantive like "ditch": "Je n'étais pas dans mon assiette. Elle est profonde, mon assiette, une assiette à soupe, et il est rare que je n'y sois pas" p.29.*) This penchant for pretending to take idiomatic expressions literally is also apparent in several turns of phrase that at first sight seem simply odd, but which, on reflection turn out to be versions or applications of common locutions. Molloy speaks of his "little quota of love" (p.89), which immediately raises questions about the quartermaster and the quantification of affect, but is the phrase really more objectionable than the commonplace "share" or even "fair share" of love, happiness, trouble, etc.? And in one of his rare moments of compassion (there is a little of almost everything in Molloy) he refers to his "soul's elastic": "I watched him recede, at grips (myself) with the temptation to get up and follow him, perhaps even to catch up with him one day, so as to know him better, be myself less lonely. But in spite of my soul's leap out to him, at the end of its elastic..." (p.11). The jest lies in supplying the soul with a means of return (after all, if one's heart or soul may be said to go out to another person, there must be some mechanism to bring it back home again), bringing about an incongruous clash between the realms of religious thought and habedashery. And once more, in the echo of the laughter, there are serious overtones. Firstly there is ridicule for the whole manner of speaking of the soul as a substantial entity, like part of one's body (or in this case, one's clothing), as something that "I" can call "it". And secondly, from an emotional perspective, there is in the conceit a sober admission of self-obsession and the ephemerality of fellow-feeling. It

* It is strange that Kenner, often so perceptive about Beckett's work, should claim that "the Beckett comedy lies so far from word play that it can pass intact from language to language" (Study, p.16). A good part of his comedy is precisely word play, in texts written closely against the grain of their vernaculars, as it were, and the fact that the two versions are so closely congruent says more about the dexterity and serendipity of the translation than about the nature of the comedy.

is not a moral confession, rather a metaphysical or psychological observation, one of "the laws of the mind perhaps, of my mind"; just as Molloy's hat "has always been fastened, to [his] buttonhole, always the same buttonhole, at all seasons, by a long lace"* (p.14), the attention of the ego is attached to the self and its concerns. There can be no marriage of true minds, and not merely because there are no true minds.

Thus, under Molloy's oxymoronic pencil, baffled yet incisive, the idiomatic residue of our language is exposed, the familiar made strange, so that it may be examined, no longer a transparent medium of ideas. And having attracted our attention it often appears risible, ludicrous in its rigidities, its pat formulaic phrasing, its absentmindedness, its paronomasic sillinesses, in short, its lack of a limpid, fluid, intelligent, expressive vitality. Beckett's comment on Joyce's "desophistication" of English in his essay "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce"** shows a keen awareness of the writer's need to be critically conscious of his mother-tongue. But whereas Joyce in Finnegans Wake replaces the "sophistication" of conventional written English with the poetic vitality of something else, Beckett illuminates its procrustean stultification through Molloy's clownish incompetence as he stumbles over the absurdities of concealed, congealed metaphors that years of idiomatic usage have flattened into pseudo-literal clichés, or peers, with dismay, into the psychic spaces between or behind our words. Yet the weary disgust aroused by an increasing sense of falsity does not give way to passivity or despair, and in the unremitting "battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (Wittgenstein's definition of philosophy, Philosophical Investigations, #109) Molloy's

* And Molloy concludes from the fact that his hat is still fastened to his buttonhole that "I am still alive then" (p.14), importing into the Trilogy symbolic associations from the novellas.

** "Mr Joyce has desophisticated language. And it is worth while remarking that no language is so sophisticated as English. It is abstracted to death. Take the word 'doubt': it gives us hardly any sensuous suggestion of hesitancy, of the necessity for choice, of static irresolution....Mr Joyce recognises how inadequate 'doubt' is to express a state of extreme uncertainty, and replaces it by 'in twosome twiminds'" (Our Exagmination, p.15).

capers speak of a weirdly resourceful verbal agility. It is strangely invigorating to spend time in the company of this partially senile iconoclast who trusts words so little.

Molloy's critical clowning attacks not only the surface, the idiom, of the language, but the mode of discourse in which it is employed - the autobiographical narrative - which brings us to our third major theme, the relations that his discourse establishes between the *erzählendes Ich*, the "I" that tells the story, and the *erzähltes Ich*, the "I" who features as its protagonist (Spitzer's terms, quoted in Genette, p.254). Although Molloy confesses to not knowing why he writes, his immediate objective soon becomes apparent: it is to relate the "story" of at least part of his life. He even suggests a title for this autobiographical work: "Molloy, or life without a chambermaid" (p.62). Here is the beginning of his tale, an abrupt *in media res*: "So I saw A and C going slowly towards each other, unconscious of what they were doing. It was on a road remarkably bare, I mean without hedges or ditches or any kind of edge, in the country, for cows were chewing in enormous fields, lying and standing, in the evening silence. Perhaps I'm inventing a little, perhaps embellishing, but on the whole that's the way it was" (p.8). This is the generic claim of the life story, as told by its hero: that's the way it was, that's how I came to be here, came to be what I am today. The insidious equals sign between "life" and "story" is such that we find Molloy, even Molloy, speaking of a "chapter" of his existence (p.59). But the passage from the lived to the told shall prove ruinously difficult, and Molloy is recurrently debilitated by his awareness of what is being lost in the translation. The problems that beset him are twofold: difficulties of perception and difficulties of expression. We have seen how the latter reduce his efforts (in his own eyes at any rate) to a lifeless conventionality. Now let us consider the problems he faces in seeing his life, in garnering his material from the past.

As for all autobiographers, his instrument is memory, ideally to be trained like a telescope on the scenes to be recalled. This is what Molloy sounds like when the lenses are clear and the past springs back into vivid visual focus: "I see a young woman coming towards me and stopping from time to time, to look back at her companions. Huddled together like sheep, they watch her recede, urging her on, and laughing no doubt, I seem to hear laughter far away. Then it is her back I see, as she goes away, now it is towards me she looks back, but without stopping" (p.80). In addition to the apparent immediacy of the scene that is relived in his mind's eye, the process of recall, once set in motion, demonstrates a certain degree of spontaneous momentum, offering to the attention things that seemed to have vanished for good, so that Molloy speaks of "the time now coming back to me" (p.15) and observes, after an unexpected wealth of detail, "Well, well, I didn't think I knew this story so well" (p.62).

But we could hardly expect, from a man who for much of the time cannot recall even his own name, a smooth mnemonic chronicle, and Molloy's memory shows itself to be shockingly incomplete, and capricious into the bargain. The arbitrariness of mnemonic salvation and damnation is given its parable in the fate of two associated objects the narrator encounters chez Lousse - the tray and the basket on which, in which, he is daily served his food and drink. The former is still available to him in visual detail: "I can still see the tray, almost at will, it was round, with a low rim, to keep the things from falling off, and coated with red lacquer, cracking here and there" (p.58). The basket however "made no impression on me, good or bad, and I could not tell you what it was like" (p.58). And even if we were tempted to remark, like Vladimir (Godot, p.10), that this is a reasonable percentage, and that at least Molloy remembers what it is he has forgotten, such arbitrariness of recall is far from being the only charge he has to bring against his memory. He suspects it of superimposing two or more events or impressions that perhaps in reality occurred or were formed on different occasions. Thus over the apparent visual certitude of

the incident with the woman on the beach quoted above is spread this patina of doubt: "But perhaps I am merging two times into one, and two women, one coming towards me, shyly, urged on by her companions and the other going away from me, unhesitatingly" (p.80), and a similar aspersion is cast on the opening scene of the story: "I am perhaps confusing several different occasions, and different times, deep down....And perhaps it was A one day **at** one place, then C another at another, then a third the rock and I, and so on for the other components, the cows, the sky, the sea, the mountains" (p.15). It is not, moreover, merely a question of remembering distinct visual impressions, but of affective moods or states, in regard to which Molloy is faced with "the notorious difficulty of recapturing, at will, modes of feeling peculiar to a certain time, and to a certain place, and perhaps also to a certain state of the health" (Watt, p.72). The difficulty is raised early on, in relation to the character C, who, Molloy surmises, if he is ever to return to the scene of his encounter with A and cast a glance over the hills where Molloy is crouched, will see them "I think with other eyes, and not only that but the within, all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath, all that too quite differently disposed" (p.10). To effect a voluntary recall not simply of sense impressions, but of the full savour of that "mode of feeling" in which they were originally registered may be likened to attempting to scoop up the sea's foam in a fishing net. And so, in the absence of a miracle of Proustian *mémoire involontaire* by which a transcendent communion of present self with past self might be consummated, Molloy must accept the ceaseless fragmentation of his being in time, and acknowledge the tyranny of the present, which makes him a prisoner in a single, subjectively boundless moment, engulfing past and future: "I say that now, but what do I know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named" (p.33). Thus the "auto" of autobiography is really an unredeemable pledge, and the individual, as Beckett puts it trenchantly in his Proust essay, is

in effect "a succession of individuals" (p.19).

Just as Molloy not only states but enacts his linguistic problems, so too with the narrative difficulties, and his relation is riddled with doubt. At times Molloy can ~~do no more~~ than express his indecision over the veracity of a particular detail, as in the case of the little dog that accompanies A (or is it C?) on his way back to town: "A little dog followed him, a pomeranian I think, but I don't think so. I wasn't sure at the time and I'm still not sure, though I've hardly thought about it.... Yes, it was an orange pomeranian, the less I think of it the more certain I am. And yet" (p.12). When he examines his original assertion it seems unlikely, but it resurfaces after three lengthy sentences (left out of the quotation above) only to be knocked tottering again by the elliptical, "And yet." The little dance of tergiversation performed by the narrator's syntax gives a telling dramatic embodiment to "the sensuous suggestion of hesitancy, of the necessity for choice, of static irresolution" that Beckett spoke of apropos Joyce's "in twosome twiminds" (see foot-note to p.99 above). Another observation, initially rendered in a firm, clear delineation of visual detail - "The gentleman turned back, took the little creature in his arms, drew the cigar from his lips and buried his face in the orange fleece" (p.12) - is tested (inconclusively) in ~~half a~~ page of speculative inquiry against Molloy's notions of plausibility: "But would he have...? Did he not seem rather to have...? But was not perhaps in reality..., and were not..., and what prevented...?"

The exact extent to which an improvised sense of vraisemblance has been summoned to suppress such uncertainties in other parts of the story is naturally impossible to determine; but it is quite clear from those instances where Molloy stumbles hilariously into self-contradiction that such an imaginative or fictional faculty is at work. Sometimes he notices it, and hastily corrects his faux pas, as when, after telling us that he "got to [his] knees" in rising from his repose in a ditch, he interrupts himself with "no, that doesn't work" (because of the stiffness of his joints) and alters his account to "I got up" (p.30). "Did I say the wind had

fallen?" he asks, half a page after recording that "A fine rain was falling" (p.65). (Two pages earlier he has noted that "Outside in the road the wind was blowing" p.63.) The reason for his concern is quite obviously to avoid offending his notion that "A fine rain falling somehow...seems to exclude all idea of wind" (p.65). But while adjusting the weather to suit his idea of what is likely, Molloy makes a much more elementary mistake, failing to notice that the concavity he has had so much trouble in saddling with a name ("recesses, no, that's not the word...alcoves, wrong again....chapels, that's the word" p.64) fails to shelter him from the "fine rain" falling from the now windless sky.

The most full-blown of such narrative discrepancies is "the business of the moon" (p.43) that so embarrasses his account of his sojourn with Lousse. Molloy, seated in an easy chair, falls into a doze or reverie from which he awakes to the sight of "a huge moon framed in the window. Two bars divided it in three segments, of which the middle remained constant, while little by little the right gained what the left lost" (p.41). The first phase of Molloy's lunar quandary is one of a number of puzzles of relative motion in which his Newtonian spatio-temporal frame of reference is bemuddled by the subjectivity of the observer's perspective. In attempting to describe the movement taking place before him, Molloy enumerates all the logical possibilities in a permutative plenum strongly reminiscent of Watt's cogitations ("the moon was moving from left to right, or the room was moving from right to left, or both together perhaps, or both were moving from left to right, but the room not so fast as the moon, or from right to left, but the moon not so fast as the room"), before the foundation of his descriptive framework is shaken by the question, "But can one speak of right and left in such circumstances?" (p.41). Molloy's failure to find a satisfactory explanation of the interplay of kinetic forces that is taking place before him, thereby aligning his intellect with the sensuous simplicity of his visual impression ("That movements of an extreme complexity were taking place seemed certain, and yet what a simple thing it seemed, that vast yellow light sail-

ing slowly behind my bars") is not the only rebuff his faculty of rational objectivity receives in Lousse's house,* about which is cast a faint aura of the "impenetrability" of Mr Knott's abode, suggesting that the allusions to a personification of Reason (Sophie) and Light (Lousse) in the two names of his hostess are ironical, and that his apparent protectress is actually an enchantress, who, like Circe, would make a pampered prisoner of the quest-hero.**

For a time Molloy's pondering about the motion of the moon masks a more disturbing fact, which suddenly breaks in upon his meditations, giving him "a great fright": "this moon which had just sailed galant and full past my window had appeared to me the night before, or the night before that, yes, more likely, all young and slender, on her back, a shaving" (p.43). This evidence of chronological discrepancy is particularly disturbing, for it brings into question not merely the truth or falseness of a particular attribute (like the little dog's pomeranian-ness or the cigar-ness of the smoking object) but the whole of the narrator's temporal deixis. The story has been closely told up to this point, one time and place yielding directly to another, without apparent omission, as Molloy makes his painful way through the first two days of his tale, which makes this disruption to his time-scheme all the more damaging to his plausibility, a juddering blow to the reader's sense of his narratorial trustworthiness. And after the stay with Lousse the thoroughness with which Molloy covers his narrative ground is shattered, giving way to large-scale narrative ellipses and vague temporal summaries like, "A good while then with Lousse" (p.63).

Just as Molloy is managing to restore calm and return to his "old ataraxy"

* For example, the view commanded by the door and the window of his room seems to him to have shifted slightly each time he looks through them, as if the room (or the house) were slowly rotating in relation to the outer world.

** Molloy's chronicle, despite its picaresque character - being a seemingly inconsequential succession of encounters on a meandering journey - has at least the trappings of a quest, complete with errant hero, grail and obstacles to be surmounted. His comment to the effect that "the outer world opposed my succeeding [in 'liquidating this matter of my mother'] with its wiles, I have given some examples" (pp.92-93), confirms this basic mythos.

with the reflection that on either one or both occasions he must have been mistaken about the lunar phase, preferring to doubt his senses than to question the "so rigorous chain of events" he has just narrated (p.44), a further contradiction leaps out at him. Some twenty pages earlier, in his account of the first night of the story, Molloy has declared, with the high-handedness of someone defending his personality, "Let me hear nothing of the moon, in my night there is no moon, and if I speak of the stars it is by mistake" (p.15). It is only now that Molloy remembers this, that "my nights were moonless and the moon foreign, to my nights" (p.44), and concludes once more in negating the evidence of his eyes and his short-term memory in the interests of an absurd sort of personal coherence: "so that I had never seen, drifting past the window, carrying me back to other nights, other moons, this moon I had just seen." His excuse for all this confusion - "Yes it sometimes happens and will sometimes happen again that I forget who I am and strut before my eyes, like a stranger. Then I see the sky different from what it is and the earth too takes on false colours" (p.44) - strikes another violent blow to his esteem as a reliable narrator and indeed to the very reality of the portrayed "I", replacing an organic unity of the self, extended through time, with an arbitrary (and arbitrarily reinforced) superstructure, the personality - a dilapidated contrivance of individuation.

It is not merely in such details of autobiographical narration that Molloy's tale is ludicrously inadequate, for although it mimics the overall generic form of the long short-circuit, moving from present moment of writing, through the beginning, and then gradually working its way back to the narrative instance, effecting a gradual convergence of narrating and narrated "I's" in space and time so that, as Martin-Chauffier puts it so vividly, "celui qui tient la plume et celui que nous voyons vivre...tendent vers ce jour où le cheminement du héros en action aboutit à cette table où le narrateur, désormais sans intervalle et sans mémoire, l'invite à s'asseoir près de lui pour qu'ils écrivent ensemble le mot: Fin" (quoted in Genette,

p.236). Molloy's "beginning" is an apparently arbitrary in *media res*, except insofar as his quest to reach his mother *may be* seen as an attempt to elucidate the mystery of his origin. And how off-handedly this quest is introduced: after nearly eight pages of seemingly pointless narrative discourse about A and C, he remarks, "But talking of a craving for a fellow let me observe that having waked between eleven o'clock and midday...I resolved to go and see my mother" (p.16). The end of his tale is botched too, for although a circularity is implicitly asserted in as much as Molloy must somehow have reached the room in which he survives to write his memoirs, the narrative itself peters out in the ditch bordering the forest, and it is only through the agency of a highly unlikely *deus ex machina* that he does not perish where he lies.

There is another respect in which Molloy's preposterous narrative pointedly fails to fulfil a generic feature of its basic autobiographical form - the traditional enlightenment, intellectual and moral, of the narrating self vis-à-vis the narrated self. Genette delineates this feature as follows in the case of Proust's masterpiece: "Comme en tout récit de forme autobiographique, les deux actants que Spitzer nommait *erzählendes Ich* (Je narrant) et *erzähltes Ich* (Je narré) sont séparés dans la Recherche par une différence d'âge et d'expérience qui autorise le premier à traiter le second avec une sorte de supériorité condescendante ou ironique" (p.254). While Molloy does, on occasion, make condescending or ironical remarks about his past self - "How foolish one can be" (p.40) he says, for example, reviewing his suspicion that Lousse intended to make a human sacrifice of him - the tenor of his criticism is no different from that which he levels at his present faculties of intelligence, and in general his decaying memory and senile aporetics lay waste to the notion that age and experience bring wisdom. The only possible intellectual development in this context seems to lie in the discarding of untenable certitude, and a Socratic admission of intellectual impotence. There is some evidence of this excoriating "growth" in him - for instance, in his retrospective disdain in "I

was limply poking about in the garbage saying probably, for at that age I must still have been capable of general ideas, This is life" (pp.60-61), and in his Faustian catalogue of disillusionment with learning (a series of discarded disciplines ending, as in the case of Goethe's hero, with the study of magic). What Molloy particularly enjoyed in his anthropological studies is significant: "its inexhaustable faculty of negation, its relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not" (p.41). Unlike Descartes however, he finds no foundation in which to terminate his scepticism, and the process of doubt is thus more like an endless treadmill than a staircase descending to an unshakable basement. So there is very little difference in the degree of scornful disregard in which he holds his past and present states of knowledge. And anyway, as he realizes, his broken and falsifying memory reduces the relation of Je narrant to Je narré to little more than tautology - the present self mirroring itself in the image of a past self - so that the comparison itself cannot be validly made.

Much has been written, with regard to Beckett's work, stemming largely from his own remarks in the "Three Dialogues" with Georges Duthuit published along with the Proust study, about an "aesthetics of failure", a large measure of which criticism is fashionably paradoxical but rather vague. The approach adopted towards the question of narrative voice in this chapter allows us to speak more precisely of how Molloy fails to achieve what so many autobiographical narrators before him, real and fictitious, have achieved with such humdrum efficiency. We have seen how he fails not only to express but to discover or uncover or recover the past self that is the subject of his narration, unable to erect the edifice of a coherent history and a coherent personality, and how he fails to establish and maintain a consistent tone or communicative rapport with his audience. However, his impotence in these areas allows him to portray the intricate vagaries of his thought with a vividness that makes Roquentin's diary look contrived. It is precisely where the will sees no way

forward and no chance of success that another kind of expression takes place, and in his startling improvisations we encounter a dramatic, unconscious self-portraiture that, avoiding the summative declaration or ridiculing it in parody, captures the flux of an old man's thought processes with great particularity. And it is where Molloy seems to forget his reader altogether that his ruminations acquire a poetic, almost visionary quality. We shall return to the subject of this quality, and the imagery deployed in its evocation, but first let us turn our attention to the second panel of the dyptich that is Molloy.

It is unnecessary for me to discuss the "voice" of the narrator of the second part or chapter of the book in as much detail as I have done in the case of Molloy, as many of the narrative and rhetorical features I have already examined recur. I shall take as my leading question in the following study of Moran's discourse the fascinating tension of similarity and dissimilarity, of parallel and antithesis, that exists like an electro-magnetic field of potential significance between the two chapters of the whole work. In Beckett's oeuvre "the book" as a unit of novelistic meaning loses its clear boundaries, and in the Trilogy particularly we encounter a series of monologues that, while not interacting with each other in any explicit way at the level of their plots, do form facets of a single, composite artistic undertaking. (Beckett's concern that the three books be published as a trilogy is well-known. See Bair, p.389.) The multiple echoes and allusions, both formal and thematic, that link the monologues, cast a dubious light upon the apparent independence of their successive narrators. A major part of my concern in apprehending the entire Trilogy is to trace some of these intriguing and obscure correspondences, and thus to chart the trajectories of a development which manifests itself over the course of the whole.

The diegetic situation of Moran's narrative, the situation of the telling, is more explicitly characterized than it was in Molloy's case. Moran has been ordered

to write a "report" on the "Molloy affair" by his employer. Our narrator is an "agent", a salaried functionary in what he perceives to be a widespread but secret bureaucracy. His exact status and function in this network of authority and information remain veiled in a Kafka-like obscurity throughout the book; his duties appear to be those of an amalgam of a private detective and an undercover social worker. He is required to embark on "missions" to locate specified individuals, called variously "clients" and "patients", and to "deal with them" according to specific instructions whose purpose is not generally revealed to him. "Such operations took on a multitude of forms, from the most vigorous to the most discreet. The Yerk affair, which took me nearly three months to conclude successfully, was over the day I succeeded in possessing myself of his tiepin and destroying it....On another occasion my mission consisted in bringing the person to a certain place at a certain time" (p.146-47). And "sometimes", as in the present instance, "I was asked for a report" (p.147). So the discourse, from the opening page, is provided with a definite perlocutionary orientation, quite unlike Molloy's ignorance as to why he is writing.

The overall form of Moran's narrative loosely resembles that of its predecessor, with some important differences. Moran, like Molloy, opens with a description of his present situation, pen in hand, as he inaugurates his report, and then jumps backward in time to the start of the story proper, a narrative which produces a gradual convergence in space and time of the narrated and narrating "I's" of the homodiegetic narrative. In this, as in many respects, Moran's narrative appears more orderly, more coherent, than Molloy's, covering, without major hiatus, the course of events of a defined period of his life, lasting almost exactly a year ("It is summer again. This time a year ago I was setting out" he remarks at the end, p.188), and effecting a return to the point of his departure, where he now sits and writes - the long short-circuit of the traditional autobiographer. The monologue opens and closes on the same scene - the writer at his desk - and it is implied that his task has occupied the space of a single night, from midnight (p.99) to near dawn (p.188) when

Moran tells us that he is going to blow out the lamp he trimmed some ninety pages earlier. His occasional references to this (rather implausible) narrative instance, which, like Molloy's, interrupt but do not seriously disrupt the account of his adventures, reinforce this impression and establish an evocative picture of the objective and subjective circumstances of the writing: the rain beating down in the outer darkness, the author at his beloved desk, in the "soft and steady light" of his lamp (p.99), writing in a complex mood of diligence, sadness, fear and resentment, his "firm hand weaving inexorably back and forth and devouring the pages with the indifference of a shuttle" (p.142). As we read the strange relation that follows we never really forget this "realistic" setting, as we tend to do with Molloy, and our impression of the narrator is thus successfully grounded in the actual moment of composition, a moment which looks forward in time as well as back, as Moran refers from time to time to what lies before him. Midway through his account he wonders, "Does this mean I shall one day be banished from my house, from my garden, lose my trees, my lawns, my birds...lose and be banished from the absurd comforts of my home where all is snug and neat and all those things at hand without which I could not bear being a man, where my enemies cannot reach me, which it was my life's work to build, to adorn, to perfect, to keep?" (p.142). By the end of the report, the comforting vagueness of "one day" has fallen away, and the "long anguish of vagrancy and freedom" (p.142) is at hand. By this time however, Moran's attitude towards his future has changed somewhat:

I am clearing out. Perhaps I shall meet Molloy. My knee is no better. It is no worse either. I have crutches now. I shall go faster, all will go faster. They will be happy days. I shall learn. All there was to sell I have sold. But I had heavy debts. I have been a man long enough, I shall not put up with it any more, I shall not try any more. I shall never light this lamp again. I am going to blow it out and go into the garden.
(p.188)

The shift of perspective that occurs during the course of the writing is expressive of a manifold process of change which gives the second part of Molloy a dynamic quality very different to Molloy's state of changeless flux. Nothing happens to Molloy but the processes of deterioration that are already in motion; Moran suffers, in a dramatically short period of time, massive damage to his health, his social and financial standing, his family and domestic relations, his religious Weltanschauung, and in short, to his sense of who and what he is. And this complex change is manifest not only in the past tense of the story he tells, but, as we have just seen, occurs during the act of his narration too, suggesting that some kind of resolution, or catharsis, or valedictory mourning, has been effected in and through that act.

Moran's attitude towards his task is one of resentment at its imposition ("All is tedious, in this relation that is forced upon me" (p.141), and he claims to be complying with Youdi's demand for reasons very different from that of simple obedience to his master:

I am still obeying orders, if you like, but no longer out of fear. No, I am still afraid, but simply from force of habit. And the voice I listen to needs no Gaber to make it heard. For it is within me and exhorts me to continue to the end the faithful servant I have always been, of a cause that is not mine, and patiently fulfil in all its bitterness my calamitous part, as it was my will, when I had a will, that others should. And this with hatred in my heart, and scorn, of my master and his designs.
(p.141)

One of the most striking of the "great inward metamorphoses" that Moran undergoes in the course of his narrative, is the development of this "inner voice". There

are a number of characteristics in Moran that can be seen as atavistic forerunners of corresponding traits in Molloy, of which the "inner voice" is a prominent example. Molloy, though he still tries to obey his "imperatives", as long as he remembers them, does so with a wearied **cynicism**. Moran presents us with a dramatic history of the birth of this mystical or psychotic phenomenon, from its disregarded initial occurrence ("It was on my way home..." p.182), to the prophetic authority it finally acquires: "I feel I shall follow it from this day forth, no matter what it commands. And when it ceases, leaving me in doubt and darkness, I shall wait for it to come back, and do nothing, even though the whole world, speaking through the channels of its innumerable authorities speaking with one accord, should enjoin upon me this and that, under pain of unspeakable punishments" (p.142).

It is far easier to speak of a psychological "theme" in Moran's monologue than in Molloy's, and not absurd to speak in fact of a psychological "plot", which might be delineated as the story of a mind's struggle to assert itself against an internalized figure of authority, thus clearing the way for a deeper, truer, understanding of its own nature. It is an equivocal struggle, both in outcome and upshot. As he writes, Moran is outwardly obeying Youdi - in which figure, a number of remarks and allusions suggest, the images of God and boss have become for Moran partially superimposed* - just as he obeyed him, reluctantly but to the letter, in setting out from his comfortable home, in threatening weather, and with the intolerable encumbrance of his sick and recalcitrant son, on the disastrous quest for Molloy, only minutes before midnight on the stipulated day. And having staggered home in the most debilitating climatic and nutritional conditions, again at the express behest of his master, he is still bowing in a sense to Youdi's domination by submitting to "this paltry scrivening that is not of my province" (p.141). Seen in this light, Moran's

* Inter alia, as has been pointed out by several commentators, "Youdi" is a phonological anagram of "Dieu" (and "Gaber", the name of his messenger, brings to mind the archangel Gabriel), and is explicitly associated in Moran's mind with thunderbolts and the Old Testament (p.127).

"voice" might be seen merely as a face-saving internalisation of an implacable external authority. Moreover, the process of change that Moran suffers on this quest is described in terms of loss, damage and attrition. He speaks variously of his "disintegrations" (p.169), of his being "dispossessed of self" (p.160), of his "loss of will" (p.141), and of "a crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was condemned to be" (p.159). But Moran's perception of his metamorphosis is not uniformly that of an involuntary lapsing into decrepitude, for he writes also of "a kind of clawing towards a light and countenance that I could not name, that I had once known and long denied" (p.159). This assertion of desperate aspiration, coming directly after the "frenzied collapsing", expresses the other pole of the ambiguity, in which Moran's transformation is given a more active, almost heroic aspect, and becomes in effect something like a quest for self-knowledge which results in "a sharper and clearer sense of my identity than ever before, in spite of its lesions and the wounds with which it was covered" (p.182).

The radical and complex alteration to Moran's character which occurs during his investigation into the Molloy affair has its insidious overture in the unwonted twinges of confusion and doubt that beset him after Gaber's visit on that fateful Sunday morning (echoed physically in the acute pain that shoots through his knee that evening) and has its crisis in his bloody murder of a stranger. The first man he encounters in the forest, as he waits, by now half-crippled, for his son to return from the nearest town with a second-hand bicycle, strongly resembles the man Molloy calls C - the one whom Molloy watches with a leap of fellow-feeling as he (C, that is) leaves the city behind him to journey alone into unknown lands - and is received by Moran with concealed admiration and gestures of kindness. The second man he meets is his own semblable, and is, like Moran, engaged in the pursuit of a solitary wanderer. Moran's destruction of this individual may be seen as an attack upon a suddenly detestable image of himself. He remarks, with significant satisfaction, as the fury of the assault ebbs away, that the murdered man no longer resembles him-

self (p.162). Both of the fits of uncontrollable violence which Moran recounts in his narrative are preceded by narcissistic acts of self-examination. The first, in which he loses his temper with his sulky and deceitful son and has to rush outside to work off his rage on the chopping-block with an axe, occurs soon after he examines himself in the bathroom mirror. "I looked at myself, puffing out my lips which normally receded into my mouth. What do I look like? I said. The sight of my moustache, as always, annoyed me. It wasn't quite right" (p.127). Shortly before his encounter in the forest Moran drags himself to the stream near his shelter: "I lay down and looked at my reflection, then I washed my face and hands. I waited for my image to come back, I watched it as it trembled towards an ever increasing likeness. Now and then a drop, falling from my face, shattered it again" (p.156). This coincidence suggests an ego which responds to its own image with a repressed loathing that erupts in irrational fury. In the light of this notion it is not difficult to see Moran's metamorphosis as the result of a conflict between two powerful intrapsychic forces: on the one hand, the ego seeks to entrench its ontological security, its sense of having a duty, a purpose, a meaning, even though this necessitates a submission to a god-like authority figure; the other impulse is to let go of this sense of identity, to destroy the existing self-concept in order to align itself with a more authentic inner landscape, in all the loneliness and suffering this entails, along with an acceptance of the essential formlessness of a life in which the social, economic, moral, rational and religious relations which so preoccupy the earlier Moran lose their potency to give meaning to his existence. It is only in this perspective - the death of a factitious sense of self - that Moran's development may be seen as a process of self-assertion; not in respect of the rebellion of a unitary ego towards a figure of authority.

The drastic transformation of Moran's character, whether seen as evolution or devolution, gives Moran qua narrator a vantage point from which to examine his earlier self, and this he does with a high degree of candour, astutely catching and

recording in some of the most psychologically evocative writing of the Trilogy the stink of his own emotional breath in all its unconscious hypocrisy, and exposing the vanity of his intellectual, moral and aesthetic pretensions. The dense self-portraiture of the first forty pages of his report have as their subject a decidedly nasty character, an individual who would make an admirable illustration of Freud's famous "anal triad" of characteristics - "orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy" (see Grunberger, p. 139) - hoarding in the smug bowels of his imagination his familiar, well-fondled pleasures of ritualistic self-congratulation, a man who laughs uproariously at his own jests, his amusement heightened by the bafflement of his son and his servant. He prides himself on being "a sensible man, cold as crystal and as free from spurious depth" (p.121), his need for a sense of order expressing itself in a petty and self-righteous meticulousness ("Fortunately I rather enjoyed dotting my i's" p.126), which allows him to cast over his frozen impulses of love and sympathy the respectable cloak of duty, and to indulge without guilt his proclivity for sneaking and spying. Moran's anal "tendencies" are reflected in two other questionable areas that are gilded with moral approbation: his megalomania and his "horror of the body and its functions" (p.126). The former leads him, under the guise of responsible paternal and domestic authority, to exercise his disposition towards a bullying manipulation of his household in an imperfect duplication of the attitude of fearful and resentful submission he himself bears towards his master. The latter, expressing itself in an obsession with cleanliness ("I sat down on the edge of the bath. The porcelain, the mirrors, the chromium, instilled a great peace in me" p.127), combines with the former in the distasteful scene in which Moran forcefully gives his son an enema:

Have you shat, my child, I said gently. I've tried, he said. Do you want to, I said. Yes, he said. Suddenly I remembered Father Ambrose's cigar. I lit it. We'll see what we can do, I said, getting up. We went upstairs. I

gave him an enema, with salt water. He struggled, but not for long. I withdrew the nozzle. Try and hold it, I said, don't stay sitting on the pot, lie flat on your stomach. We were in the bathroom. He lay down on the tiles, his big fat bottom sticking up. Let it soak in well, I said. What a day. I looked at the ash on my cigar. It was firm and blue.

(p.127)

Here the strong undertones of homosexual sadism, reinforced with the associated "adult" oral gratification of the priest's cigar, betray a libidinous displacement far more significant than Moran's joyless acts of masturbation, and reveal also a fascination with the excremental ("We bent together over the pot which at length I took by the handle and tilted from side to side. A few fibrous shreds floated in the yellow liquid" p.128) which subverts his clear-cut assertion of hysteric disgust towards human physicality. So much for the fastidious, law-abiding, church-going citizen of Turdy.

I have mentioned that it is not only in his role as a narrated self that Moran undergoes a transformation, for his narratorial presence also changes - in the course of the writing - in a way that is significant when we consider the relationship existing between his monologue and that of Molloy. Molloy as a narrator is inconsistent, forever shifting his approach and his tone, both towards his audience and his material, but his narrative performance does not display any significant development or major shift of temperament other than a gradual increase in weariness or boredom that is reflected in the accelerating pace of his narration. Moran's report exhibits such an acceleration much more prominently. Almost half of his monologue is concerned with the first twelve hours of the twelve months of "story time", giving a vivid account of "the day I received the order to see about Molloy" (p.99). His writing in these forty pages (ending conclusively with, "And off indeed I did

go, what is more, and my son drew out behind me. I had left, accompanied by my son, in accordance with instructions received" p.141) is highly detailed, lush with the flora of sensuous, "realistic" descriptions that are, as in this lovely opening example, phenomenologically filtered through the mind of the narrated self:

I remember the day I received the order to see about Molloy. It was a Sunday in summer. I was sitting in my little garden, in a wicker chair, a black book closed on my knees. It must have been about eleven o'clock....The weather was fine. I watched absently the coming and going of my bees. I heard on the gravel the scampering steps of my son, caught up in I know not what fantasy of flight and pursuit. I called to him not to dirty himself. He did not answer.

All was still. Not a breath. From my neighbour's chimneys the smoke rose straight and blue. None but tranquil sounds, the clicking of mallet and ball, a rake on pebbles, a distant lawn-mower, the bell of my beloved church. And birds of course, blackbird and thrush, their song sadly dying, vanquished by the heat, and leaving dawn's high boughs for the bushes' gloom. Contentedly I inhaled the scent of my lemon-verbena.
(pp.99-100)

Commingle with this profuse narrative "staffage" is an equally detailed representation of Moran's inner life. After a full page of facts and opinions on diverse subjects ("my son, my lack of breeding, Father Ambrose, Verger Joly with his register" p.103), in what appears to be an informative intrusion by the narrator, interrupting his story to flesh out its background, Moran grounds his musings very specifically in the *temps de l'histoire* with the comment, "Such were my thoughts as I waited for my son to come back and Gaber, whom I had not yet heard leave, to go. And tonight I find it strange I could have thought of such things... at such a time"

(p.103). Moran also spices the first part of his narrative with lengthy (and often very amusing) conversations in an untroubled oratio recta. (The exchange with Father Ambrose (pp.107-109) is a fine example, and a pathetic one for all its comedy, evoking the loneliness of the garrulous priest without overt comment.) The implicit and embarrassing claim to an extraordinarily good memory made in such detailed quotation of thought and speech - the mnemonic implausibility of so much homodiegetic narration - is dealt with by Moran in an assertion of the imaginative co-identity of narrating and narrated selves: "in describing this day I am once more he who suffered it, who crammed it full of futile anxious life..." (p.131). And so, with never a qualm about its historical and representational veracity, he delivers himself up to his Belacqua-like recall, painting his sensory, affective and dianoetic impressions in a fascinated minuteness that suggests the intensity of both a narcissistic self-examination and a final, nostalgic savouring of something that was but that can be no more. Surely this copious portraiture is not the brief of Moran's official report, but rather a lament for and a farewell to an identity that has fallen into desuetude, to an outmoded self that had for years dwelt in the factitious serenity of its domestic, religious and professional relations and the sly, snug security of a gloating self-approval.

Perhaps the most striking change in Moran's attitude toward himself as the subject of his narration is the growing sense of dissatisfaction and even disgust which accumulates as his report progresses. There is certainly a degree of this quality from the start, but in recounting the vicissitudes of that memorable Sunday his critical candour is imbued with a remnant of self-obsession that manifests itself in the slightly pompous, "dramatic" tone of his unrepentant confession. Thus, for instance, Moran closes the tranquil cameo of his story's opening scene with the rather melodramatic "In such surroundings slipped away my last moments of peace and happiness" (p.100) - a statement given heavy typographical emphasis by virtue of the fact that it is set on its own as a separate paragraph. And at one point, in the

bridging passage between his account of the first day and the rest of the story, a pang of loss and self-pity threatens to smash his narratorial poise in a plangent outcry, the poignancy of which is heightened by its self-consciously stoic quelling: contemplating the loss of his home, "which it was my life's work to build, to adorn, to perfect, to keep" (p.142), Moran exclaims "I am too old to lose all this, and begin again, I am too old!" before admonishing himself with "Quiet Moran, quiet. No emotion, please."

Once under way with his narration of what follows the departure from his beloved home, this quality of muted but indulgent *Abschied* dies away, and Moran's degree of imaginative and affective involvement with his report alters. Instances of narratorial *fonction de régie*, a feature which in itself implies a certain distance from the narrative, and which is almost entirely absent from the first forty pages, now become frequent, and frequently they announce some omission or ellipsis in the story, giving it an intermittent narrative structure quite different from the minute, moment by moment coverage which Moran lavishes upon the first phase of his report. (For examples of this negative *fonction de régie*, the narrator's directing of his reader's attention to what will not be narrated, see pp.141, 169, and 178.) Thus the smoothly interlocking detail of the first part gives way more and more to a jerky dialectic of summative and iterative narration (expressing the habitual rather than the specific occurrence, in this fashion: "The weather was kind. We easily managed our ten miles a day. We slept in the open....We lived on tinned food which I sent him to get in the villages..." p.145) with the punctual narration of specific events.

Combined with this growing degree of narratorial distance, we find also, after the surety of detail in the opening section, an epistemological and mnemonic remove. "It would not surprise me," Moran informs his reader, "if I deviated, in the pages to follow, from the true and exact succession of events" (p.143). And instances of sheer forgetfulness now begin to intrude. Moran, who recalls every nuance of the

earlier confrontations with his son, can now not even bring to mind the subject of dispute: "That night I had a violent scene with my son. I do not remember about what. Wait, it may be important. / Ah, I don't know" (p.171-72). The vivid recall of the opening pages, based as we have seen on the imaginative co-identity of narrator and character, is now replaced by a convention, a "rule" of composition, by which Moran seeks to align the perspectives of narrating and narrated "I's": "that must again be unknown to me which is no longer so and that again fondly believed which then I fondly believed, at my setting out. And if I occasionally break this rule, it is only over details of little importance. And in the main I observe it" (p.143).

These indications of a greater cognitive and emotional distance between the teller and the told-of are heightened by the evidence of plausible-sounding fabrication that creeps into the narrative, further eroding our credence in Moran's mnemonic power. Thus, for instance, we find him describing his reaction to the second "fulgurating" pain in his knee in the clichéd terms of received opinion: "I waited anxiously for it to recur, motionless and hardly breathing, and, of course, sweating. I acted in a word precisely as one does, if my information was correct, at such a juncture" (p.148). And half a page later he wakes up again, "this time in consequence of an actual need, and with a mild erection, to make things more lifelike ..." (p.149; my emphasis). Similarly, Moran adds three extra points to a discussion of the degree of trust he came to place in his son, simply "in order to make all this sound more likely" (p.172).

Further evidence of an increasing alienation of the narrator from his tale comes in various confessions of narrative impotence, suggesting that Moran is becoming, as he writes, too weary or disaffected to make even the effort to sound plausible. "Stories, stories, I have not been able to tell them. I shall not be able to tell this one" he sighs, (p.147), and he breaks off his account of a dialogue between himself and his son with a Molloy-like, "No, I can't" (p.153). This goes hand in hand with another change in the narratorial ethos, this time in respect of Mor-

an's attitude to the narration itself. While there is about the earlier writing an autotelic or self-justifying motivation, like that of a self-engrossed diarist, springing from the genuine interest with which the narrator regards his subject, as the account of the journey progresses there is an increasingly obvious element of rankling disdain towards "this relation that is forced upon me" (p.141), this "penance" (p.142). This shift of attitude is made explicit when Moran comments that "It was my intention, almost my desire, to tell of all these things, I rejoiced at the thought that the moment would come when I might do so. Now the intention is dead, the moment is come and the desire is gone" (p.169).

Turning now to the rhetorical aspect of Moran's report, the way in which the narrator presents himself to his reader, we find again in comparing it to that of Molloy's monologue, striking similarities and differences. We have mentioned that Moran's narrative has a much more explicit (apparent) rhetorical orientation: it is ostensibly written for Youdi, in the form of a professional report. But, just as there is in Molloy's case a divergence between the intradiegetic audience (the man who corrects his pages) and the fictional reader of Molloy's imagination, addressed in the second person, so Moran's references to his official narratee, Youdi, are made in the third person, and his "you" of direct address refers to a different entity - that generic potentiality of "the reader" to whose attention he directs his narrative and his observations. But, unlike Molloy's text, in which the intradiegetic reader is merely a functionary who is quickly forgotten, Moran is recurrently, if not constantly, aware of how his boss, "whose favour I know I should court, now more than ever" (p.142), will receive his narrative. Although our narrator is, in the mere act of writing, complying with Youdi's demand for a report, the manner in which he discharges his duty is indicative of his rebellious attitude. He announces, for instance, that "I shall conduct it [his account of the Molloy affair] in my own way, up to a point. And if it has not the good fortune to give satisfaction, to my employer, if there are passages that give offence to him and to his

colleagues, then so much the worse for us all, for them all, for there is no worse for me" (p.141). Often, as we have seen, Moran's real interest in his writing seems rather of a private, personal concern - a coming to terms with a radical change in his self-perception - than in satisfying Youdi's demand for information on the Moll-oy affair. Another obvious example of the narrator's impertinence lies in the very fact that he addresses himself to the reading public, not to his employer. Moran's attitude towards his reader is unstable and capricious, but demonstrates nevertheless a clear development over the course of the narration. In the first phase of the account, Moran, where he is not carried away in rapt self-examination, addresses himself to the reader in a tone of intimate, if slightly bombastic, frankness - a tone best exemplified perhaps in the confessional introductory formula, "And, to keep nothing from you..." (p.115). It is as though Moran, in this section of the writing, is eager to espouse his reader's confidence and support in the struggle against Youdi's domination. Thus he makes various (implicit) appeals to the reader's sense of fellowship, presuming to exercise the rights to a mutual understanding based on the assumption of a common bond of normality, after this fashion: "And when I say that he [Gaber] reflected on his messages and drew conclusions from them, it was not as we would have reflected on them, you and I..." (p.114). Moreover, like Molloy, he evokes the intimacy and immediacy of conversation, as in the gossipy, "Do you know what he was doing?" (p.117), and in the nudging appeal to his interlocutor to seize the gist of that which is too obvious or painful to be plainly stated: "And having made away with Gaber and the chief (one Youdi), could I have denied myself the pleasure of - you know" (p.116).^{*} In addition, he makes apology for some of his idiosyncratic quirks, like this: "I'm sorry, but there it is, in a house without a gas-oven I would not have felt easy" (p.132).

This amiable tone is soon shattered however, shortly after the beginning of

* The context makes it plain that the "pleasure" Moran alludes to is that of denying his own existence.

the second phase of the narrative, when Moran suddenly displays a flatly bloody-minded hostility towards his public: "What then was the source of Ballyba's prosperity? I'll tell you. No, I'll tell you nothing. Nothing" (p.144). And seven pages later he reinforces this cancellation of his earlier, generously communicative "narrative contract" when he appends to a rather obscure paragraph the following: "I shall not expound my reasoning. I could do so easily, so easily" (p.151). This alteration of rhetorical stance is not as distinct as these examples, taken in isolation, might suggest, for Moran does revert to a more considerate attitude, and takes pains to elucidate his meaning, but the general trend is undeniable, and may be further illustrated in contrasting two rhetorically isomorphic utterances in which the narrator explicitly motivates segments of his narration. The first occurs shortly after Moran's major non serviam - "I have no intention of relating the various adventures which befell us...before we came to the Molloy country" (p.141). A page later he concedes nevertheless to narrate briefly some of the incidents of the journey, "because that seems to me desirable, and in order to give some idea of the methods of my full maturity" (p.142). In a very similar announcement towards the end of the story, the didactic motive has disappeared: "I shall not dwell upon this journey home, its furies and treacheries....But one or two words nevertheless, for my own edification and to prepare my soul to make an end" (p.178). Here Moran's motives are entirely self-interested; the enlightenment of Youdi and the public alike have ceased to matter to him.

Finally, we must confront what is perhaps the most striking single aspect of the change in Moran's willingness to communicate - the renowned denial with which he closes his monologue: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining" (p.189). This stupefying negation may best be explained, in terms of the diegetic situation, by seeing it as Moran's spiteful and mocking parting shot at Youdi. "He asked for a report, he'll get his report" our narrator mutters vehemently, on more

than one occasion (pp.128 & 130), but perhaps it is only now that the real meaning of his sarcasm becomes apparent - oh yes, he'll get his report all right, but it will be a document that will tell him nothing with any certainty, except about my defiance. For this inscrutable, last minute retraction makes of the report a long and treacherous joke, of which the reader as much as Youdi, is the fall-guy. The negation refers directly only to the framework of Moran's narrative instance, but the intentional blow it strikes to the reader's sense of trust in the narrator casts into doubt the whole substance of the narrative. In this self-contradiction Moran proves himself not so much an unreliable narrator, like Molloy, but a deliberately duplicitous one. If he is capable of deceiving us with his opening words, is there any reason to believe anything that he tells us subsequently? In whatever quandary this malicious confession of falsehood might leave Youdi, however, for the reader it does not simply cancel out what he has just read; we have been told a story, and we have been able to read it with the insight of a dramatic irony that Moran is unable to suspect: we have read it after reading Molloy's monologue, and in the manner of their narration the two stories display a complex interaction that neither narrator seems aware of. And this means that Moran's spitefulness is not as effective in reducing his report to meaninglessness as he seems intent on making it at the last moment.

An examination of Moran's prose style also demonstrates a strong suggestion of a definite evolutionary course as the narrator retraces in his mind the journey he embarked on in the flesh, if we are to believe him, over a year ago. This change in style takes place unevenly and with many little movements of recidivism, but its overall course is clear, and, as in the areas of rhetorical presentation and narrative technique, the trajectory of change suggests a movement of convergence between Moran and his precursor, Molloy. Ludovic Janvier is probably the only critic to have treated this subject with the detail (and the sensitivity) it deserves. Here is how

he opens his discussion:

Molloy se divise en deux périodes contrapuntiques, on le sait, et si la phrase large et le ton "degagé" s'impose comme celui des aventures de Molloy, celles de Moran se donnent d'abord sur le mode dogmatique et bref qui peint le mieux ses prétentieux efforts de rigueur morale et sa morgue puritaine. A ce niveau, deux styles opposés. Mais le langage de Moran se délite, et c'est dans cet effondrement, qui fait évoluer la phrase d'une dureté incisive vers une mollesse trébuchante proche de celle de Molloy, que nous lisons le mieux le lamentable et humoristique écroulement de Moran qui se met alors...à tendre vers Molloy. A ce niveau une seule écriture. (Pour Samuel Beckett, p.232.)

Janvier focuses his attention mainly on the syntactic elements of style, but we may observe traces of Moran's "effondrement" on several different levels of stylistic analysis. In general, what stands out prominently is that his sense of logic loses its grip, his sense of order goes soft, and his sense of discrimination becomes erratic. At first we are forcibly struck by the vivid contrast between Molloy's meandering *reminiscences* and Moran's incisive brevity and sense of purpose. "My name is Moran, Jacques" he informs us (p.99), with that inversion of first- and surnames that is usually required in official statements. His paragraphs, greeted with relief by eye and intellect alike after Molloy's featureless typographical wastes, correspond sensibly with our notion of a topic or theme. His sentences are on the whole short and to the point. As we progress through his text however, and particularly in the second part of the narrative, both paragraphs and sentences display a tendency to dilate, his commentary becomes less germane, and we see more frequent intrusions of extraneous or unmotivated ideas. For instance, Moran interrupts a discussion of himself, "that unfailing pastime," with "And I note here the little beat

my heart once missed, in my home, when a fly, flying low above my ash-tray, raised a little ash, with the breath of its wings" (p.174). And four pages later, speaking of his deteriorating health, he suddenly takes up the matter again, again in an entirely arbitrary fashion: "The disease, whatever it was, was dormant! How can such things be? But to return to the flies, I like to think of those that hatch out at the beginning of winter..." (p.178). And our "sensible man, cold as crystal" (p.121) begins to speak of phantoms, fiends and familiars.

Gradually, then, we become aware of an emerging consonance of "mind-style" between the two narrators. There is an increasing lack of surety in his thought and turn of phrase, leading him into the kind of on-stage, mid-stream emendation so characteristic of Molloy: "it was not my nature, I mean it was not my custom, to..." (p.160) (cf. Molloy's "The pale gloom of rainy days was better suited to my taste, no, that's not it, to my humour..." p.31); "I thought about myself. That is to say I often took a quick look at myself, closed my eyes, forgot, began again" (p.169) (cf. Molloy's "At last I began to think, that is to say, to listen harder" p.65). At times Moran can do no more than express his semantic misgivings without finding a suitable alternative to suggest, as in "I was succumbing to other affections, that is not the word" (p.178) (cf. Molloy's "rotting in peace, that is not the word" p.80). This tendency of his thought to loop back on itself in self-criticism is expressed also in the comedy of metanoic retraction - again strongly reminiscent of Molloy: "The porcelain, the mirrors, the chromium, instilled a great peace in me. At least I suppose it was they. It wasn't a great peace in any case" (p.127); "The silence was absolute. Profound in any case" (p.170). This pattern, of thought followed by vitiating or depreciating afterthought, features also in Moran's occasional witticisms of reversed expectations, such as "I looked at the door, baroque, very fine. I found it hideous" (p.107); "Did he [Moran's son] love me as I loved him? You could never be sure with that little hypocrite" (p.128); "I asked the Lord for guidance. Without result. That was some consolation" (p.108). And he too has a penchant for

paradox, particularly in the second phase of his account: "Unable, unable, it's easy to talk about being unable, whereas in reality nothing is more difficult" (p.149); "powerless to act, or perhaps strong enough to act no more" (p.173).

Moran, like Molloy, is fairly liberal in his exercise of the fonction idéologique, sprinkling his narration with wise words and good advice, particularly psychological observations such as, "the joy inspired by beauty is often not unmixed" (p.125); "it is not without scathe that one is gentle, courteous, reasonable, patient, day after day, year after year" (p.136). He also dispenses maxims of conduct ("Humbly to ask a favour of people who are on the point of knocking your brains out sometimes produces good results" p.186) and logical axioms, of this kind: "the falsity of the terms does not necessarily imply that of the relation" (p.120). Frequently Moran spoils the effect of his gnomic utterances with a deflating or incongruous afterthought (again a trait of Molloy), such as in the improving rhyme, "To major things the surest road is on the minor pains bestowed, if you don't happen to be in a hurry" (p.183). And Moran, too, has an ear for idiomatic clichés, although the commonplace seldom enters his discourse intact. Either the optimistic punch-line is significantly forgotten ("the all too human feeling that trouble shared, or is it sorrow, is trouble something, I forget the word" p.115), or the key term is replaced with a debasing cognate ("the falsetto of reason" p.115), or, producing much the same note of ridicule, the literal or material component of some commonplace metaphor is highlighted, as in, "What I heard, in my soul I suppose, where the acoustics are so bad..." (p.121)

In addition to these correspondences of formal tendencies of thought, the careful reader cannot but be struck, when reading the second monologue of the book, by echoes of specific ideas or opinions that Molloy has voiced. Both narrators, for instance, digress at some length on the the notion of epistemological apatheia. Amongst the silver that Molloy purloins from Lousse is "a strange instrument" (p.67) (obviously a knife-rest) the purpose of which it is quite beyond his imagination to

fathom. This little object...

...inspired me with a kind of veneration, for there was no doubt in my mind that it was not an object of virtue, but that it had a most specific function always to be hidden from me. I could therefore puzzle over it endlessly without the least risk. For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, to know that you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker. (p.67-68)

For Moran the mandala of incomprehensibility is the dance of his bees: "And in spite of all the pains I have lavished on these problems, I was more than ever stupefied by the complexity of this innumerable dance, involving doubtless other determinants of which I had not the slightest idea. And I said, with rapture, Here is something I can study all my life, and never understand" (p.182).

Both narrators **subscribe** (with perhaps a touch of cynicism, granted) to the cathartic effect of expression: "Let me cry out then, it's said to be good for you" says Molloy (p.27), while Moran is not positively displeased that his son "should give free vent to his grief. It purges. Sorrow does more harm when dumb, to my mind" (p.118). Furthermore, both of them reveal an inclination to describe their bicycles (pp.16 & 166); both scoff at the pretentiousness of the citizens of Bally in describing their town as being "on-sea" (pp.81 & 144); Moran holds that "all language is an excess of language" (p.125), while Molloy, who has had longer to ponder the issue, believes that whatever is said is at once "never enough and always too much" (p.36); and both confront the problem of distributing their burdens in accordance with "the principle of trim" (pp.75 & 135).

There are also, to be sure, a number of topics on which the two narrators express neatly antithetic opinions, but these are couched in pointedly resemblant

terms, and which, moreover, may be related to each other not as mere opposites, but, in harmony with our impression that Moran is in some ways an immature antecedent of Molloy, as indices of the changes that could produce the latter from the former. The question, "What are you doing?", which is so painful to the hypersensitively defensive Moran - "the one question that I dread, to which I have never been able to invent a satisfactory reply" (p.185) - does not ruffle the well-weathered, disaffected Molloy: "I'm used to that question, I understood it immediately" (p.21). Moran's sartorial awareness - "I have always been very sensitive to clothing" (p.183) - compared to Molloy's "It is not often that I take cognisance of the clothes that people wear" (p.46), becomes a measure of their relative involvement with the superficialities of "the outer world", towards which Moran (at least at the outset of his narrative) is turned "as towards the lesser evil" (p.122). Lastly, while both narrators compare man's life-span to that of an insect, Moran endorses the traditional association of ephemerality when he speaks of himself "aging as swiftly as a day-fly" (p.159), whereas the incorrigible Molloy, perennially on the lookout for the worst possible perspective, reverses the upshot of the comparison in a statement of the unendingness of his coenaesthetic torment: "it's good to have a change of muck, to move from one heap to another a little further on, from time to time, fluttering you might say, like a butterfly, as if you were ephemeral" (p.43).

In addition, there are also echoes of near-identical phrasing in the two monologues. "Good God, what a land of breeders," laments Molloy, "you see quadrupeds everywhere" (p.31), while Moran remarks, "What a pastoral land, my God" (p.170). Molloy speaks of the "spurious deeps" of will-lessness (p.22), while Moran prides himself on being "free from spurious depth" (p.121); and both of them break the rhythm of their narration with sudden heuristic questions, like this: "But I couldn't. What? Bend it" (p.82); "It was thanks to my son. What? That I got there" (p.169). Finally, "That's how I reason, with the help of images little suited to my situation" comments Molloy (p.87), whereas Moran has, "though I must say this image

hardly fitted my situation" (p.174). The difference between the two expressions is instructive, and suggestive of the changes that might turn a Moran into a Molloy: Moran's dissatisfaction is with a particular image, and implies that in general he has better success in fitting his images to his "situation", while Molloy's remark betrays a much more widespread and radical dissatisfaction with his faculty of metaphoric expression, an attitude which undermines whatever slight degree of trust he might still have in his power to reason.

As to the images themselves, especially those concerned with the life of the mind, they might have been drawn from the same thesaurus of metaphors: both refer to a basic dualistic model of self and not-self as "inner" and "outer" worlds, both resort, in attempting to speak of the former, to the "soul-landscape", as it is termed in the addenda to Watt, characterizing the mind as a certain kind of place, and both make extensive reference to a particular facet of their consciousness as the hearing of an "inner voice". But there are significant differences, not only in the ideational nuances and varying qualities of their "inner worlds", but also in what we might call the modality of their metaphoric presentation - the (usually implicit) attitude of the speaker towards his metaphors - and in the manner or technique in which they are related to each other and the rest of the discourse. These points are best illustrated in a comparison of key passages dealing with the microcosm of the mind from each monologue.

Moran's first imagistic treatment of his inner world is concerned with expressing a certain state of mind, a mode of consciousness where thought, mood and daydream commingle in a partially ritualized fashion, giving rise to a kind of reverie over which he has partial voluntary control. Retiring to his bed from the vexations of the Sunday that has been spoilt by the arrival of Gaber with his commission and a late and disappointing lunch, "I did as when I could not sleep. I wandered in my mind, slowly, noting every detail of the labyrinth, its paths as familiar as

those of my garden and yet ever new, as empty as the heart could wish or alive with strange encounters" (p.114). The sense of cosiness and of satisfied possession that mark his feelings about his house and garden are here extended to his inner "home", and reveal a side of Moran at odds with the orderly, "sensible" and self-righteous individual he portrays himself as, a man "so meticulous and calm in the main, so patiently turned towards the outer world as towards the lesser evil...reining back his thoughts within the limits of the calculable so great is his horror of fancy" (p.122). In this state of consciousness, exploring "a world" that is half imagined and half discovered, Moran's need to know and his urge to control are relaxed, the hard demarcation between self and world melting and swimming in a regressive pleasure that harks back to the monistic, narcissistic and reputedly blissful state of womb consciousness.* Here the mysterious, usually an offence to the rationalistic Moran, becomes not only tolerated but pleasurable, and "the distant cymbals" he hears in this strange but familiar place speak to him ritualistically of an infinitely elastic present moment, assuring him that "There is still time, still time" (p.114), although the adverb of temporal deixis, by taking cognizance of a moment when this imperfect re-manifestation of the timeless life in the womb might come to an end, seems itself to puncture the reverie, and "I ceased, all vanished, and I tried to turn my thoughts to the Molloy affair" (p.114).

This conflict of temporal orders is underlined in Moran's next retreat into the reverie of his bed, in which the a- or pre-temporal order of changeless antelapsarian eternity begins to be subverted by the herald of a temporally dynamic history of the inner life, catalyzing around the figure of Molloy, a history in which massive and irreversible change is to be suffered. The trappings of regressive and narcissistic pleasure are dominant at first. Narcissistic not in the sense so much of being self-admiring or self-desiring, but in that of self-absorbing or even

* See for instance, Freud's characterization of this state in the opening chapter of one of his most philosophical works, Civilization and Its Discontents, or Grunberger's discussion of the question in Narcissism, pp.12-15 & 107-109.

self-containing, the ego taking its self as the world, as it were. Lasch underlines this aspect of the Greek legend: "Narcissus drowns in his own reflection, never understanding that it is a reflection....The point of the story is not that Narcissus falls in love with himself, but, since he fails to recognize his own reflection, that he lacks any conception of the difference between himself and his surroundings" (The Minimal Self, p.184). And the relation of this pleasurable re-uniting of self and matrix, when the mind becomes, in the terms of the metaphor with which Moran closes his first passage on his inner world (p.114), simultaneously "beacon" and "sea", explorer and explored, to the sheltered haven of womb consciousness is clearly brought out in the feeling of cosiness he experiences as he sequesters himself once more in the warmth of his bed and the snug privacy of his darkened room, echoing physically the comforts of a Murphy-like withdrawal from the sensory world: "It is lying down, in the warmth, the gloom, that I best pierce the outer turmoil's veil." For, "far from the world, its clamours, frenzies, bitterness and dingy light" in which "each pinpoint of skin screams a different message" and Moran "drowns in the spray of phenomena" (p.119), is another world, a world in darkness, "a slow and massive world, where all things move with the ponderous sullenness of oxen, patiently through the immemorial ways" (p.119). Again the ambivalences of action and passivity, imagination and perception are stressed; although Moran consciously decides to enter that state of mind in which mind becomes world, he attributes its qualities to his objective surroundings: "Warmth, gloom, smells of my bed, such is the effect they sometimes have on me" (p.119). And although strong emphasis is laid on the unchanging ~~repetitiousness~~ of "the immemorial ways" and "this atmosphere...of finality without end", Moran has now a specific task to perform there - to locate or identify the individual figure he labels Molloy in the undifferentiated block or mass of mankind within him. And it is as though our investigator is on the brink of realizing or confessing that his real task is not to track down Molloy in the outer world, but to bring into being that potential Molloy-figure within him, by, in effect, becoming

that figure.

Moran's third major treatment of the landscape of his microcosm occurs at a crucial point in the narration of this wrenching process of change. The three days that Moran spends alone in a copse, having sent his son to the nearby town of Hole to buy a bicycle, are described in particular detail. On the evening of the first day he encounters the stranger with the "pale and noble face" and the stick that so impresses him. It never occurs to Moran to wonder whether this solitary might be the very Molloy he has been sent to find, and indeed the description to which he is treated bears no obvious resemblance to the narrator of the first monologue (as we have remarked, he resembles Molloy's C much more closely). His odd social manner and his speech (his accent Moran describes as being "that of a foreigner or of one who has lost the habit of speech" p.157) are however definitely reminiscent of Molloy himself, and the appearance on the following evening of the officious and peremptory individual who is pursuing him, Moran's own double both in the question of physical likeness and, apparently, that of professional role, reinforces the impression that the first stranger exemplifies a kind of Molloy archetype, or perhaps rather one element of a Molloy-Moran double archetype (like the Unnamable's "pseudo-couple" concept of Mercier and Camier) that is now rising into the ascendancy in Moran himself. Moran's intuitive admiration for the pursued wanderer and irritation at the jovial and obnoxious agent who is following him is decisively confirmed in his savage destruction of the latter, and marks a radical shift of allegiance in the petty, law-abiding bourgeois of Turdy, with his cold politico-religious universe of domination and submission, towards the solitary outcasts and exiles from society. Between these two decisive and significant encounters, in the solitude of his shelter, Moran pores once more over his inner world, and over the changes that are taking place within it, which he speaks of now in terms of "a crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all that had protected me from all I was condemned to be" (p.159). Now the "masses ...stark as laws" no longer move "patiently through the immemorial ways" (p.119),

but smash into each other with slow and tremendous pressure, producing a "sensation at first all darkness and bulk, with a noise like the grinding of stones" before becoming "suddenly as soft as water flowing" (p.159), in which sudden release from tension Moran discerns "a little globe swaying up slowly from the depths, through the quiet water, smooth at first, and scarcely paler than its escorting ripples" (p.159) - the countenance of an emergent being ascending slowly out of the darkness of Moran's "depths", an image that stands in pointed contrast to the literal reflection of himself that he peruses on the surface of the stream the day before, the conscious self-concept that is so superficial as to be "shattered" by a drop of water falling from his brow (p.156).

From the above discussion of Moran's metaphors for his changing inner world, it is clear that these images work together in a cohesive if not totally coherent way, and stand in a clear and functional relation to the narrative in which they are embedded, the "psycho-narration" of the changes that transform Moran. And it is also clear that both the static, cosy, atemporal, and regressive qualities of his initial presentation of his inner world, and the dynamic, romantic and heroic qualities of his later treatment are imbued with a sort of enthusiasm for the images themselves, which are posited on the whole with an aesthetic confidence as to their poetic aptness.

In Molloy's discourse the images pertaining to "modes of inmost being" are not linked to an historical or psychogenetic narration, and, being more fragmentary and eclectic*, do not form as consistent a "world" as do Moran's. All traces of narcissistic and claustrophiliac snugness have been obliterated, as has any sense of large-scale and dramatic metamorphosis. The benefits of the womb are openly acknowledged in Molloy's allusion to the months he spent there as "the only enduring, just enduring, period of my enormous history" (p.19), but generally his references

* In particular, Molloy seems to have recourse to a far wider range of philosophical, mythological, biblical and theological imagery than Moran. See pages 16, 38, 54, 70, 83 for some examples of these metaphors.

to the microcosm connote no cosiness: he speaks first of "the within" as "all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath" (p.10), before changing his metaphor, in anticipation of the imagery of the Unnamable's second Mahood story, to that of a "sealed jar" (p.52), and later, a "box" (p.80). Molloy's most extended and explicit treatment of the "soul-landscape" (pp.41-43) presents no cosy, hortulan maze, where the subject immerses himself in a passive exploration of his own mysteries, but "a place devoid of mystery, deserted by magic" (p.42). And it is equally not a landscape of imperturbable natural laws, of massive geological dynamics or of anything emerging from darkness into light, being a world of ceaseless and unchanging flux, "a world collapsing endlessly, a frozen world....where true light never was, nor any upright thing, nor any true foundation, but only these leaning things, forever lapsing and crumbling away beneath a sky without memory of morning or hope of night" (p.42). In this landscape of "wastes" caught in an eternally prolonged moment of decay, all change is impossible; even if the unpassing temporal atom were to thaw and distend, becoming part of a succession of different moments, nothing could move or be moved in this "indestructible chaos of timeless things" since nothing is firm enough to sustain the pressure of a lever - everything here is "unfit for loads", and "nothing stirs, has ever stirred, will ever stir, except myself, who do not stir either, when I am there" (p.42). So whereas Moran's images present a dynamic picture of a mind in the process of such radical change that it might truly be seen as the death of one self and the birth of another, in Molloy's vision this process is arrested, birth and death somehow co-present, locked together in a single moment that has no past and no future: "its end brought it forth, ending it began, is it clear enough?" (p.42). And whereas Moran's narrative is directed towards depicting the history of a soul, the thrust of Molloy's frustrated autobiography is rather to escape from the prison isle of the unpassing present on the Daedalaean wings of memory and imagination.

These differences in affective and temporal qualities are echoed in the modality of the images. Moran's images reflect a direct visual perception of the features of the "soul-landscape"; Molloy starts the account of his "ruins" in similar fashion, and also speaks at first of "walking" there, like someone taking a scenic promenade. Soon however the concrete vehicle of the metaphor is called into question, and replaced with a more abstract, metaphysical term ("And the thing in ruins, I don't know what it is, what it was, nor whether it is not less a question of ruins than the indestructible chaos of timeless things" (p.42), and shortly after that the question of making a voluntary entry into this "place" is also revoked in another retrospective act of auto-critical attention that reveals Molloy's distrust of the metaphors that spring so readily to mind. In addition to this imagistic instability, which is to develop in The Unnamable into what has been called the "evanescent image", there is a significant modal shift halfway through the passage with the introduction of a "voice" that is the source of the images that have been proffered and corrected, making the whole experience of this "world" a matter of listening rather than of seeing, and all at once the discourse veers into a discussion of this voice, a "far whisper...which begins to rustle in your head, without your knowing how, or why" (pp.42-43) and which Molloy is powerless, despite his fear of it, to silence or drown with his own voice. This shift marks another step in the retreat into worldlessness that is a progressive feature of the Trilogy as a whole, and the consequent habitation of a more purely dianoetic "place". The line of development is clearly illustrated by contrasting the highly visual quality of Murphy's experience of a substitute inner world with the "aurality" of the Unnamable's universe, where language itself, in effect, becomes the world.

The emergence and rise to power of Moran's inner voice, which, if it is not explicitly linked to, certainly becomes associated with the face floating up from his depths, is a seminal feature of the "great inward metamorphoses" (p.175) he suffers during his quest for Molloy, and plays a direct and important part in the

psychological plot of the monologue, displacing the voice of Youdi (as transmitted by Gaber) as the agency whose directions Moran follows. Not that, as I have intimated, this entails a wresting by the ego of the right to create, consciously, its own meaning, its own moral and spiritual universe; any suggestion of an existential heroism of this kind is countered by the fact that Moran is "still obeying orders" - although certainly, that the voice he now obeys "needs no Gaber to make it heard", being "within me" (p.141), does entail a dethroning of the external God-boss from the seat of moral authority. And the new voice of conscience not only dispenses with the mechanism of fear (p.141) but "advises" rather than "orders" (p.182), and comes to evoke in Moran, after being ignored to begin with, and despite its being "rather an ambiguous voice and not always easy to follow, in its reasonings and decrees" (p.141), a feeling of passionate loyalty.

Molloy's "inner voice" is difficult to discern as a single and unitary phenomenon, as is Moran's, and is again subject to a modal variety of treatment. It might in fact be more accurate to speak of voices than of a single voice in the case of Molloy; the voice that describes in distant whispers and murmurs the "world collapsing endlessly" is distinct in burden and tone from, for instance, the laconic communication from some unconscious rational faculty that brings him the solution to the problem of how to distribute his sixteen sucking stones, an "illumination which suddenly began to sing within me, like a verse of Isaiah, or of Jeremiah" (p.76) and which Molloy does not at first understand. And this obscure voice of enlightenment is different again from the "small voice" which the narrator finally understands to be urging him to leave Lousse with the words, "Get out of here, Molloy, take your crutches and get out of here" (p.63), or the voice that utters the "hypothetical imperative" enjoining him to leave the forest without delay if it is not already too late to do so, the verballity of which thought is emphasized by its protatic clause being couched, oddly enough, in Latin. Molloy's attitude towards these specific "imperatives" is far removed from the fervour with which Moran comes to regard the

voice that issues him with similar "advice", and although the older narrator also attempts to comply with the injunctions of this particular voice which he recognizes as the "voice of conscience" ("forever reminding me of my duty" p.93) - in as far as he can understand what it is saying to him, and as long it keeps its directions alive in his forgetful old mind - he is critical of its fitfulness, to which he attributes at least part of the blame for his never having achieved the central aim of its promptings, namely, to get to his mother and "establish" his relations with her "on a less precarious footing" (p.93). And towards the end, his faith in the earnestness of this voice shaken (in the way it falters into silence Molloy finds it "hard not to hear the unspoken entreaty, Don't do it, Molloy" p.93), the very concept or image of an "inner voice" is dissolved in the passage in which he attempts to speak literally of the point at which thoughts, feelings and sensations become conscious ("And when I say I said, etc....But I think not" pp.93-94), and is reduced to generalities that gesture dumbly towards the ineffable: "simply somewhere something had changed, so that I too had to change, or the world too had to change, in order for nothing to change" (p.94). And so "Galileo's vessels" becomes a far more apt epistemological and dianoetic image than Moran's pale visage floating up through translucent waters from the the titanic pressure of his "depths". Actually, this image (Moran's) has a more direct counterpart in Molloy's monologue in another example of archetypal congruency and tonal discrepancy: Molloy describes a "desire" as a "tiny sediment, incomprehensibly stirring like grit at the bottom of a puddle" (p.23). The "modal" difference is again instructive: Moran's romantic and mysterious image is scaled down, trivialized, stripped of mythological depth and allure, and yet in his purple passages, like that dealing with his "ruins", Molloy rises to a far more impressive, and far more impersonal note, purged of all traces of self-pity, and informed with a sense of acute disaster - the disaster of the essential formlessness of the human spirit.

The exact nature and significance of the relation between the two monologues

has been the subject of much critical debate, yielding a diversity of hermeneutic opinions. In addition to the stylistic correspondences - rhetorical, narrative and metaphorical - I have discussed in this chapter, there are other intriguing coincidences which have been garnered like the clues in a detective novel by commentators and arranged in support of various interpretational hypotheses. There are, for instance, the curious recurrences in Moran's narrative of specific objects and situations that have been referred to by Molloy: the knife-rest that is such a felicitous "nameless thing" for the first narrator turns up unobtrusively on Moran's dining-room table; Moran has "a handsome lacquer tray" (p.128) like the one Molloy remembers in such detail from his stay with Lousse; and the sound of a gong being struck that mystifies Molloy in the forest summons Moran to his dinner just as he is about to "get down to the official facts" of the Molloy investigation. Both narrators assault a solitary stranger in a forest, both experience a pang of something like loneliness when they encounter a shepherd with his flock, and both receive Sunday visits from a thirsty man, bringing to each an irksome task. The juxtaposition of the two monologues under one title, in one volume, together with such formal, thematic and motivational echoes points irresistibly toward a meaningful relation between them; but what? What should happen to link parts one and two into one coherent story, and what a reader unexposed to Beckett's refusal or inability to deal in novelistic coherence might be forgiven for expecting to happen as soon as he learns that Moran is being sent on a mission to find Molloy - that he will find him, in the ditch at the edge of the forest, and take him to the shelter of his mother's room, thus completing the missing segment of the first narrative - does, of course, not happen.

Among the theories that have been constructed to fill this lacuna, three main approaches may be discerned. One asserts the identity of the two protagonists. Thus Barnard argues that "the similarities between these two men, and the parallelism in their respective adventures, both physical and mental, lead one to conclude that they are actually the same person, Moran being the middle-aged Molloy" (p.32) and

"the central person in the Trilogy" (p.54). A number of other critics have seen the relationship rather as one of antithesis, the two figures representing the poles of various allegorical and psychological dualisms: Coe suggests that Molloy represents an irrational number and Moran an integer (in Barnard's Approach, p.54); Hayman proposes that a "noman" is in pursuit of an "everyman" ("Molloy, or The Quest for Meaninglessness", in Friedman's Samuel Beckett Now, p.140), while Hesla (p.102) identifies the two as "Author" and "Character", linking them to A and C of Molloy's prologue (an association that pales rather when one remembers that the pair are labeled A and B in the French original). Fletcher, in his essay, "Interpreting Molloy" (in Friedman's collection, p.170), suggests the opposition is rather between a "masochist-type" in search of his mother and a "sadist-type" looking for his father (who happens to be Molloy!), while other psychological candidates are the Dionysian self versus the Apollonian self (Edith Kern, Existential Thought, p.96) and the Ego versus the Id (Mercier, in Graver and Federman's Critical Heritage, p.73).

The third major approach is to deny that there is any solution to the puzzle: the pieces have been designed to appear as if they fit together, but upon examination they do not. In this view of things, adopted *inter alia* by Rosen and Porter Abbot, the work is an epistemological analogue of Molloy's knife-rest (and the significance of human consciousness): something with an apparently specific but unknowable function, over which we may ponder endlessly, "without the least risk" of discovering its purpose. In literary terms, such a contrivance has been generically defined as an "open parable", a narrative in which "the author's rhetoric must be so constructed with certain opaque, irreducible details as to block the final verification of any one hypothesis" (Richard Eastman, quoted in Booth's Rhetoric, p.286). Whilst every serious student of Beckett's work (with the possible exception of Alice and Kenneth Hamilton who are nothing if not serious) must at some point have espoused such a perspective with some degree of sympathy, even relief, it is a dangerous critical approach in its invitation to the reader to throw up his hands without,

in the terms of Nabokov's chess problem analogy (Strong Opinions, pp.11-12), having tried all the false moves, and to turn his back, in concentrating on the text's ludic qualities, on its darkly disturbing and challenging power.

The reading I have given above has highlighted a pattern of convergence in the relation between the two narrators in which the second, in many ways the opposite of the first at the outset, undergoes a process of change which, if extrapolated, could very well result in a character closely akin socially, physically and emotionally to the wreck that is Molloy. There seems to me little point in insisting that they are actually the same person, and really part of the book's force lies in the suggestion that the metamorphosis Moran undergoes is not unique, and may in fact be a universal intellectual destiny, for those who cannot close their minds to the metaphysical darkness of the age. And it is a pointless identification also because neither are "actually" people at all: they are imitation people, personae in the mind of the implied author, who claims in the last volume to be the Unnamable himself, in which perspective the "Molloy-ification" of Moran remains mythically significant, although its implications of universality are thereby diluted.

Whether this significance be seen as dark or bright is another contentious issue, and one which also, to my mind, demands a qualified response. Barnard deems it unequivocally to be a major step in the process of one man's schizophrenic disintegration that is in his view the mimetic subject of the entire Trilogy. Others regard the work as "a novel not of mental sickness, but of an arduously won, and therefore doubly precious, mental health" (Fletcher, op. cit., p.170), and speak of Moran's "victory": "a triumph of the liberated imagination, as in nineteenth-century novels" (Adams, p.102). Answering Moran's question in the last paragraph of the work, whether he is not freer now than he was, Adams' answer is firm: "By contrast with what he used to be, there is no question that Moran is more free at the end of the book" (p.102). But, while Moran undeniably disencumbers himself of his submissive bad faith towards the God-boss, amid various other discarded hypocrisies, such

as his "dutiful" attention to his role as a loving father and church-going landowner, it is difficult not to hear Molloy's baleful question lurking in his future, "free to do what?" And over Moran's enthusiasm for the new-found authority of his inner voice and his reiterated notion that "I shall learn" (pp.188 & 189) is cast the sapping dramatic irony of Molloy's cynicism and senile aporia. A final answer, if one is to be found at all, is perhaps not to be reached without a consideration of the Unnamable's fate. What does seem clear is that in its intriguing structure, its metaphoric richness, its haunting sense of disaster and its stylistic vitality, not to mention its strong, black humour, Molloy will probably endure, deservedly, as Beckett's most popular single volume.

III. MALONE'S SOLITAIRE A OUSTRANCE

Malone figures next in the "gallery of moribunds" (Molloy, p.147) whose monologues comprise the Trilogy, and none so palpably moribund as he, as he waits during the course of a hundred and ten jumbled and fascinating pages for something definitive in the way of his death. His monologue is in general the least obscure of the Trilogy, and in a sense the most realistic. The mimetic convention of Malone Dies is self-justifying; there is no mysterious agent of compulsion or authority forcing the pretended author to write, and there is no partially dramatized or intradiegetic narrataire to whom the text is addressed, a lack of communicative intent which gives the work a much more intimate tone than its companion pieces. The occasional examples of second person address do not conjure up the image of any particular kind of reader, and may be seen simply as an empty compliance with a traditional narratorial manner, like that laid claim to by Dostoevsky's "Underground Man": "if I write as though I were addressing readers, that is simply because it is easier for me to write in that way. It is merely a question of form" (trans. Matlaw; p.35). And then there are no problems relating to the text's means of notation, as are raised in The Unnamable. Indeed, no other volume of the Trilogy complies so fully with what Dorrit Cohn calls "the traditional imperative to motivate the connection between head and hand" (p.177); its "author" not only provides a clear picture of himself in the circumstances in which he writes - the "narrative instance" - including several references to the old exercise-book and the stump of a pencil which are his implements, but discusses the question of why he writes, as well. In short, and disregarding for the moment the enigmatic links it has with the rest of the Trilogy, the mimetic artifice of the work is clear; the text before us poses simply as a printed version of a "found" manuscript, a kind of journal in which a bed-ridden and confused old man records his last thoughts and impressions, and all it needs to make it explicitly one of Kierkegaard's "old tricks of the novelist" (E. Kern, p.184) is an

"editor's" preface - a few words, like those that precede La Nausée or L'Immoraliste, to say how the old exercise-book came to light, and a comment perhaps on its didactic worthiness for publication.

All this does not mean that the work is comfortably "realist": there are plenty of obscurities and implausible events. Firstly, the writer's situation in the world is unusual, even unlikely; the care he receives, and then ceases to receive, in the house which he feels is not an institution is, like the visit that is paid him by the man with the umbrella, given no realistic explanation or motivation. And the setting of Malone's narrative instance, the room he occupies, undergoes a number of fantastic transmutations, disregarding a fundamental presupposition of realist fiction, namely, that places and objects in the fictional world behave as do those in the real world, subject to the laws of physics. Most of these mysteries however may be defused by grounding them in the context of the narrator's subjectivity, for, since he is a character as well as a narrator, Malone can only report about his situation what he can garner of it with his decaying senses and his muddled wits. So, for Malone, and a fortiori for us as his audience, the events and eventually the very nature of everyday life become mysterious, and, lacking in plausible causality, absurd.

On the whole, then, no narrator of the Trilogy is so cosseted in "staffage" as is Malone. This of course is partly a natural consequence of the fact that he divides his authorial attention almost equally between his narration proper (the story of Saposcat/Macmann) and his depiction of his own situation. Molloy and Moran recall their "present states" only intermittently, and their characterization of the narrative instance is no more than a cadre or framework for their real task, which is to narrate part of their histories. In the last volume of the Trilogy the ratio is inverted, and narration *per se* is only a brief and fragile refuge from the agonized attempts of the narrator to come to terms with his "present state" situation. Malone Dies may in this respect be seen as the pivot of the Trilogy, in that it presents a

narrator who is more or less evenly balanced between the impulse to talk about himself and the impulse to tell a story. The chief thrust of my study of this book will be to examine the inter-relations between these two interwoven modes of discourse.

It is not only in spatial terms that Malone gives to his narrative instance a fuller characterization than the other narrators. One of the most obvious features of the higher degree of psychosomatic vraisemblance of Malone's monologue compared to the rest of the Trilogy is the fact that the time of narration is not continuous; his conscious experience is broken, like our own, by periods of rest and sleep. Molloy writes right on, apparently without pause, in a seamless span of consciousness. Although this is rather exhausting for the reader, it does not unduly trouble us by virtue of the convention that the writer qua writer, is out of time, so to speak, and is not required to mention every occasion on which he breaks off from his efforts at composition. Malone, however, is very concerned to locate himself "in time" as his death approaches, and, like every good diarist, he separates his entries from each other, thus representing on the page the temporal intervals between successive bouts of writing. This unnarrated time, sometimes qualified by pro- and retrospective remarks, is an important element in creating the illusion of Malone's mind, and thus the typography of the book becomes a significant expressive device.

Here we must pause to decry the relative paucity of the type-setting of the English version. In the French printing (Les Editions de Minuit) there are two kinds of paragraph division: some paragraphs are marked solely by the traditional alinéa - the traditional indentation of the margin - while others (the majority) are given a much more eye-catching form by a blank space on the page that corresponds to two lines of print. This differentiation is significant in that it distinguishes the simple paragraph division - implying a change of topic or alteration of view-point, an intellectual device - from the break which suggests a temporal or experiential interruption of the writing.

Thus the breaks between paragraphs have different expressive implications as

the void of white paper is given a particular psychic quality by the surrounding context. At times it appears that no more than an intellectual disjunction is signified, most notably that between the intradiegetic narrative (the story of Macmann) and the diegetic setting (Malone's own situation). Often however the lacuna serves to indicate or to reinforce an explicit temporal break in composition, sometimes a deliberate and premeditated cessation of writing in order that some other activity might be performed, or simply in order to rest. Thus we find Malone closing a session with, "Enough for this evening" (p.8), or pausing to reflect on something he has said: "I must try and discover, when I have time to think about it quietly, why Sapo was not expelled when he so richly deserved to be....//* I have not been able to find out why Sapo was not expelled" (p.18); or in order to essay some other physical activity, such as the attempt to shift his bed: "I can always try and see if the bed will move. I have only to set the stick against the wall and push....// I have lost my stick....The bed has not stirred. I must have missed my point of purchase" (p.83). Sometimes however the blank space between paragraphs is expressive of a sudden and involuntary hiatus in the chain of ideas into which it intrudes, denoting an unforeseen lapsing into sleep or a sudden seizure or fainting fit, which strikes in mid-sentence, as in this example: "And without exactly building castles in Spain, for that // Quick quick my possessions" (p.75). These instances of dislocation gather in the last pages of the book, as Malone's mortal spasms quicken and intensify, and evoke, without the necessity for overt comment, the stoical effort of concentration required by Malone to complete his sentence, where he in fact manages to do so: "The night is strewn with absurd // absurd lights, the stars, the beacons, the buoys, the lights of earth and in the hills the faint fires of the blazing gorse. Macmann, my last, my possessions, I remember, he is there too, perhaps he sleeps. Lemuel // Lemuel is in charge..." (p.117). And as the book stutters into its final silence, a

* // denotes that in the French text the paragraphs are divided by a space on the page and not just an alinéa.

finely rendered evocation of the dregs of Malone's sentence-forming consciousness, the typographical dislocations echo and reinforce the syntactic disintegrations. A far cry, this, from Molloy's poised aposiopesis, and an index of the work's "realistic" drama, the drama of a mind on the very brink of death.

Now let us proceed with an analysis of Malone's "babble", separating out the constituent threads of his text, and commenting as we do upon the various anxieties, aims and strategies that motivate his writing, and on the obsessive network of images manifested within it, giving it its strange quality of beauty and its evocative and disturbing power. Our primary distinction, as made above, is between Malone's story-telling and his diarizing self-descriptions. On the whole there is a clear distinction between these two strands of discourse, usually reinforced by breaks in the paragraphing. There is something of a grey area where he passes comment upon his fiction while discussing himself, but generally it is apparent when Malone is wearing his narrator's hat. The only truly ambiguous statements in this regard occur on the last page, where a remark such as, "Gurgles of outflow" or "never anything // there // any more" (p.117), could apply with as much force to his own situation as to his character's.

Malone divides his writing very evenly between his story and what we shall call for the moment his "non-story"; some sixty-two out of the one hundred and ten pages of the Calder and Boyers edition are devoted to the history of Saposcat/Macmann. At work throughout the book is a dialectic of alternation between these two components, though this is not evenly distributed. If we may divide Malone Dies roughly into three sequent parts or sections, corresponding to the three disjunct narrative phases of Macmann's life (and taking the page on which the episode ends as our point of textual division) - giving us (i) boyhood and youth (pp.7-46); (ii) an extract from the Wanderjahre of maturity (pp.46-75); (iii) the last days: Macmann in the asylum (pp.75-117) - we may observe a sonata-like structuring in the rhythms

of alternation between story and non-story. The opening movement consists for the most part of shortish paragraphs, on average less than a page in length, with a fairly even oscillation between these two modes of discourse. The longest unbroken passage of non-story is the almost eight pages of the opening. Thereafter Malone weaves between the two in passages often no longer than a quarter of a page, but which tend to lengthen as we move towards the middle section, or, in terms of our musical analogy, the adagio movement. This is composed of much longer periods or units of "fiction" and "actuality": nine pages of non-story, followed by seven and a half of story, then five of the former, then eight of the latter. The third section opens like the first with a long passage of self-observation (nine and a half pages), followed by a more rapid alternation of story and non-story before Malone eclipses himself four pages from the end with "That is the end of me. I shall say no more" (p.113). These divisions are somewhat arbitrary but they do give an impression of the overall rhythm of the work from the point of view of its oscillation between narrative and non-narrative modes, with its most prominent feature a dilation towards the middle and a marked acceleration towards the end. Significantly, this overall temporal "shape" is reflected also in the story itself, in the parameter of narrative pace, and even, though less perceptibly, in that of syntactic rhythm - subjects about which we shall have more to say later. (It is perhaps worth mentioning here that there is a resemblance too between this internal structure of Malone Dies and the overall rhythm of the Trilogy, Malone's relative calm following the agitato of the first volume, and giving way to the vertiginous accelerando of The Unnamable.)

Now for the constitution of what I have been calling the "non-story", and the vagueness of my term will receive some justification, since, when he is not narrating the life of Saposcat/Macmann, Malone not only talks about himself in a number of different modes which I shall analyze from the perspective of the various kinds of temporal relation set up between the ego that commands the pencil and the self that

is its subject, but discourses upon a variety of other subjects too. Malone's self-observation is not a continuous or monolithic running commentary as some critics have intimated - Dorrit Cohn, for instance, includes Malone Dies in "that small group of texts...cast almost entirely in the iterative-durative present tense" (Transparent Minds, p.193) - and its complex temporal composition is worth a little close attention, a study which provides moreover a framework to my remarks upon one of Beckett's sempiternal concerns, the nature of the mind's self-image in the ruinous medium of time.

First of all, a small but significant portion of Malone's writing about himself is rendered in the future tense. "Soon I shall be quite dead at last in spite of all" (p.7), is the novel's justly celebrated opening sentence, and most of the next three pages are couched in this forward-looking mode as Malone draws up his "plans". These predictions, or rather statements of intent or resolutions, cast over the pages that follow a tension that is the nearest thing to "suspense" that Beckett gives us post-Murphy (apart, that is, from the minute but fascinating syntactic suspense created in the arching convolutions of his cadences). Malone's plans concern two subjects: how to die, and what to do in the meantime, and both involve a decision to allay the will; in regard to the former, by endorsing an attitude of neutrality and passivity tantamount to utter indifference: "I could die today, if I wished, merely by making a little effort. But it is just as well to let myself die, quietly, without rushing things....Yes I shall be natural at last, I shall suffer more, then less, without drawing any conclusions, I shall pay less heed to myself, I shall be neither hot nor cold any more, I shall be tepid, I shall die tepid, without enthusiasm. I shall not watch myself die, that would spoil everything" (p.7-8). And with regard to the latter by indulging in an activity that is completely gratuitous, uncommitted to anything: "Now it is a game, I am going to play" (p.8). In both these projects Malone fails, for he cannot refrain from self-observation, nor can he "play", that is, tell himself an inconsequential story to pass the time, without

becoming caught up in its unexpected mysteries and without making it to some extent a reflection of his own predicament. The vicissitudes of what is ultimately a moral struggle are the stuff of the little drama that is played out in Malone's head, the struggle to relinquish control, to give up the old yearning for self-knowledge. Of course, Malone has lost before he begins, because this prospective writing inherently expresses a desire of the ego to ordain its own nature, to project the will of the moment forward in time, to order his experience before it occurs, which is precisely the opposite of what he intends. So the whole enterprise is flawed with self-contradiction to start with.

Malone strives to bolster his resolutions, his prospective ordering of his experience, by establishing the moment of their making as an absolute moment of his history, like the birth of Christ, reputed to divide the whole of human history into an irrevocable before and after, or like the annual comedy of New Year's resolutions. Thus we observe him, in the midst of his decisions, taking little backward glances in order to harden his resolve with an edifying sense of contrast:

This time I know where I am going, it is no longer the ancient night, the recent night....I never knew how to play, till now. I longed to, but I knew it was impossible. And yet I tried. I turned on all the lights, I took a good look round, I began to play with what I saw....But it was not long before I found myself alone, in the dark. That is why I gave up trying to play and took to myself for ever shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding. Such is the earnestness from which, for nearly a century now, I have never been able to depart. From now on it will be different.

(pp.8-9)

The trouble is that for Malone the instant of resolution itself is not whole, bound-

ed, unitary, and so the very formulation of the plan or resolution is, being extended in time, subject to continual change at the hands of mnemonic failure and repeated emendations aroused by niggling afterthoughts and doubts. In this fashion Malone's simple idea of amusing himself until he dies becomes more and more elaborate till, by the time his patience fails and brings an arbitrary halt to the whole business, for the time being, he is faced with a schedule of things to be done:

"Present state, three stories, inventory, there....A full programme....So much for that. I feel I am making a great mistake. No matter" (pp.10-11).

The case of the "inventory" is a good illustration of this paradoxical transformation of velleity into duty, and characteristic of the inescapable perversity of conation that afflicts all the narrators of the Trilogy. The idea of drawing up a list of his remaining belongings occurs to Malone initially as a time-filler, an occupation to fall back on in the case of his finishing his stories "too soon" (that is, before his death). He then recalls that "that is a thing I have always wanted to do" (p.9). As soon as he realizes that he is dealing with a life-long ambition, something which, if unfulfilled, would leave his life incomplete, and by virtue of this a species of moral desiderata, the pale cast of procrastination freezes his intention: "All my life long I have put off this reckoning, saying, Too soon, too soon. Well it is still too soon" (p.10). In this manner Malone's self-allotted "play-time" becomes encumbered with the earnestness of long-delayed duty.

Malone does not ferret into the psychological origins of what he comes to presume is an "obsession" (p.24), but the clues he leaves make a plausible explanation not too hard to find. One of the unresolved contradictions that crease our narrator's wizened psyche is his ambivalent concept of death: at times he sees it as an extinction of consciousness, at others as a transformation. The two chief metaphorical vehicles for these conceptualizations are the "little heaps of finest sand, or dust, or ashes" that crumble gradually away leaving behind them nothing but "the blessedness of absence" (p.51), and the image of death as a kind of birth. Now, if

death is seen from this second point of view, as a deliverance from the womb of the world, and an expulsion into another state of being, it stands to reason that if the spirit is not to be untimely ripped from its physical abode, its emotional links with the matrices of matter must be tied off. Malone is already in a state of total alienation from other human beings. He takes no part in the relations of domination and submission that obsess Moran, and even that vague but unquenchable need for the mother, which so plagues Molloy, has ceased to be an issue for him: "My mother?" he asks himself dimly, "Perhaps it is just another story, told me by someone who found it funny" (p.98). And he refers without longing or regret to that period of his life, now mercifully passed, "when I was still looking for someone to be faithful to me, and for me to be faithful to" (p.46). So, apart from a brief flurry of desire for the company that Eros urges (pp.102-103), Malone is never lonely. In this sense he has already withdrawn from the world. He is however still linked to various little pieces of the world through the relation of possession. He is quite lucid about the substitutive role these chattels play in his affective economy: "And but for the company of these little objects which I picked up here and there, when out walking, and which sometimes gave me the impression that they too needed me, I might have have been reduced to the society of nice people or to the consolations of some religion or other" (pp.76-77). Seen in this light, Malone's desire to list his possessions (and he never just mentions those that he does get round to, but describes them, recounts what he can of their history, fondles them for a last time in his imagination) may justly be seen as a farewell, a leave-taking, a valedictory tying off of attachment - the best he can manage in his impotent corporeal state in the way of the careful burial to which, in his more vigorous years, he treated those objects "which were ousted by new loves" (p.77).

Malone's resolutions are vitiated not only in their dilated and unstable formulation but in his impotence to sustain the presence of mind to put them into effect. Thus, even in the act of willing he falls back into the old ways that he is

renouncing, the old ways of fruitless and debilitating self-questioning. "There I am back at my old aporetics. Is that the word?" he asks himself (p.9), and a page later remarks, "There I am back at my old quibbles" (p.10). Furthermore, having once launched himself upon one of his projects, he sometimes even forgets what he is trying to do. "How are my plans getting on," he wonders vaguely at one point, starting to get carried away with his story, "my plans, I had plans not so long ago" (p.44). Under these conditions, the very concept of projecting the desires and decisions of the moment forward in time is pathetically untenable; but it is also a pathetically irresistible temptation, especially for the early Malone, and his recurrent succumbing to it suggests a greater uneasiness in the face of his coming demise than he is willing to admit to himself.

What I have said about a moral struggle does not I hope give the impression of an heroic wrestling, an epically pitched set-to between the will and the inertia of recidivism. Malone is not a sanguine fall-guy in this little comedy of failed intentions. The urge to shape oneself, and to effect a continuity of purpose through the muddled experience of the "series or rather [the] succession of local phenomena" (p.63) that, he says, is all his life has been, is undercut from the outset by the cynicism of a vision that threatens to flatten all experience into hopelessly unconnectable fragments. Nevertheless, at the book's opening there is a persistent attempt at self-determination, attested to by the very fact that Malone does make some effort to control his thoughts, turning away from some of "the old quibbles" with remarks like "No, that is the kind of bait I do not rise to any more" (p.7), and announcing repeatedly that he will be "on his guard" against the tendencies that threaten to disrupt his clear-headed detachment (pp.8, 10, 17, 21). The pitiful moral energy that manifests itself in these brief moments of self-censoring control, and in the reiterated resolutions to effect a change in his character, becomes gradually sapped in a process of almost imperceptible moral "development" that plots its ill-defined and irregular course through Malone's pages. This minute, asymptotic

advance of moral scepticism is made possible in the first place by the tension of an ethical ambivalence about whether it is worth trying to do anything at all. Malone's view on this point swings about radically with his moods, cautious optimism tumbling suddenly into black despair. By the end of the book he is still trying to do something, more patently than ever, struggling to finish his story while he can still wield the pencil, in a stoic effort in regard to which the epithet "heroic" is not entirely out of place, but the conscious attempts to change his character or his habits have by this time fallen away entirely. The turning point, if one may be made out at all, comes roughly midway through his monologue. As in the corresponding disaster on the physical plane - when Malone drops his stick, irretrievably ("Catastrophe too in the ancient sense no doubt" p.83), while hubristically attempting to propel his bed about the room - the intellectual anagnorisis occurs, in keeping with Nietzsche's famous dictum, at a moment that is elevated by joy and hope. Malone loses his pencil, and during the "two unforgettable days of which nothing will ever be known" (p.50) that he spends without it he has a kind of vision of his own passing away, a joyful revelation that brings him "the solution and conclusion of the whole sorry business" (p.51), and an unparalleled alignment of his ethical and existential natures:

And I rejoiced furthermore, quite apart from the spectacle, at the thought that I now knew what I had to do, I whose every move has always been a groping, and whose motionlessness too was a kind of groping.... And here again I was utterly deceived, I mean in imagining that I had grasped at last the true nature of my absurd tribulations, but not so utterly as to feel the need to reproach myself with it now. For even as I said, How easy and beautiful it all is!, in the same breath I said, All will grow dark again.... For I knew it would be so, even as I said, At last! (pp.52-53)

When even such a moment of apparently heightened consciousness is attended with an awareness of its own transience, what hope do ordinary moral deliberations and intentions have of surviving from one moment to the next?

Malone's use of a prospective temporal mode is not limited solely to the attempted projection of his will to shape his future, for he also writes here and there in a more truly prophetic future tense, colouring the "fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome" (Proust, p.15) with intuitive intimations of what is to come, arising from that level of "feeling" that is the interface of psyche and soma. His opening sentence gives voice to such a feeling, and its anticipatory tension is maintained in such remarks as "I feel it's coming" (p.62). These intimations of death are a constant element of the book's diegetic "plot", a discourse of ongoing self-examination, rendered for the most part in the present tense, to which we now turn.

At first it is not part of Malone's plans to describe his "present state"; quite the contrary it would seem, as one of his early intentions is to live, at last, an unexamined life: "Yes I shall be natural at last...I shall pay less heed to myself....I shall not watch myself die, that would spoil everything," (p.8). However, three pages into his text, on what is apparently the second day of his writing, he announces that "I have...decided to remind myself briefly of my present state before embarking on my stories" (p.10). Malone sees this as a "weakness", but one which he decides to indulge, justifying himself with the thought that "I shall play with all the more ardour afterwards" (p.10). The next paragraph, consequently, is devoted to a summary of his situation, describing the room, his bed by the window, the view it offers, his stick, the means of his nourishment and excretion, and "a few words about myself" (p.14) - a sketch of his state of health. The passage is firmly delineated, beginning with one of Malone's verbless periods that serve as paragraph titles, "Present state," (p.11), and ending with a conclusive, "such would

seem to be my present state" (p.15), but any suggestion that this is the final word on the subject is soon negated, and throughout the book we come across Malone providing intermittent reports on his surroundings and his coenaesthetic condition. In addition he records specific incidents that befall him, such as the losing, at various times, of his pencil, his exercise-book, and his stick, and the enigmatic visit that is paid him by the man with the umbrella. Thus his initial impulse to take stock of his situation gets out of control and becomes an ongoing commentary, like that of a diary, and his "weakness" turns out to be one cast in the common mould: it is not something that can be exorcised by an indulgence that pretends to be the last of its kind. On his second lapse into this "vice" he again justifies his waywardness - and announces the principle of dialectic alternation between fiction and non-fiction - with the thought that each time his story becomes too tedious or too bothersome in its perplexities he will stop to look at himself. Although "this is just what I wanted to avoid" he again finds an excuse: "there seems to be no other solution. After that mud-bath I shall be better able to endure a world unsullied by my presence" (p.17).

However, beyond these negative justifications for writing about his "present state", Malone alludes to what is perhaps a more important motive, an irrepressible symptom of his chronic "earnestness" ("I was born grave, as others syphilitic" p.23), and an ambition presumably inherent in all diarizing that is not simply the keeping of a mere appointment book: the desire to preserve the self in its passage through time, to reinforce in writing the thread that holds Hume's bundle of identity together, and to attenuate the onslaught of change and the oblivion of forgetting. After all, if he were really intent on merely playing, why not launch straight into it? Why the preamble in which the decision to play is itself announced? This notation of thoughts in the immediacy of their coming to consciousness is for the early Malone an insidious, invisible activity, that is itself given no place in his five-fold time-table. It is only belatedly, when speaking of the manual aspect

of writing, that something of a positive motivation is confessed which takes account of this hidden activity: "I did not want to write, but had to resign myself to it in the end. It is in order to know where I have got to...At first I did not write, I just said the thing. Then I forgot what I had said. A minimum of memory is indispensable, if one is to live really" (pp.35-36). And this is the essence of Malone's ambitions: "to live...at last and die alive" (p.37). This desire is not to be seen as some surge of *élan vital*; instead his reasoning is along these lines: if he cannot live, cannot, that is, enter into wholehearted identity with his experience, it follows that he will not be able to die, and then his unendurable existence will have no end, a fear that Malone expresses a number of times, most explicitly in this moment of despair: "But what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor if I am" (p.54). This is one horn of another of Malone's unresolved dilemmas; its inverse he also endorses: "A man changes. As he gets on" (p.30). In the light of this anxiety, the purpose of his diarizing is not so much to capture a distilled, atemporal essence of selfhood as to provide evidence that he is in fact capable of changing, living and hence dying. And the function of the early summary of his "present state" is to provide a stable background against which such change may be perceptible. Thus the words he sets down seem intended to replace his crumbling memory and to reinforce his sense of time passing, without which the whole sorry business threatens to become a single and endless moment.

Now let us attempt to do what Malone himself cannot, and reassemble his scattered reports to chart the trajectory of his evolution. His remarks fall into three divisions of subject - world, body and mind - in accordance with his own proffered "solution" to the disaster of his story-telling: "I shall open my eyes, look at the little heap of my possessions, give my body the old orders I know it cannot obey, turn to my spirit gone to rack and ruin" (p.17).

Malone's initial observations on his "present state", for all their historical

and geographical vagueness, are in one respect made with a certain confidence. His remarks about the room in which he finds himself are cast for the most part in the timeless present tense of description which commands a certain degree of distance from the immediate present of the observer and allows the summarizing, static perspective of predication; his attention is directed not towards what is happening now, but towards what always happens, the prevailing state of affairs. Thus, in the iterative verbal mode, a simple present tense subsumes a multiplicity of habitually repeated occurrences, like this: "The door half opens, a hand puts a dish on the little table left there for that purpose, takes away the dish of the previous day, and the door closes again. This is done for me every day, at the same time probably" (p.13). And he is able to draw conclusions about the nature of his circumstances, expressed in the essentially atemporal present of the durative mode, noting relations and attributes that apply constantly: "It is an ordinary room.... There is a cupboard I have never looked into. My possessions are in a corner, in a little heap. With my long stick I can rummage in them, draw them to me, send them back. My bed is by the window" (p.12). The repetition of these events, and the existence and appearance of these objects, are stable and enduring in Malone's mind. Furthermore, long familiarity enables him to stress the regularity of those phenomena that are subject to variation. So, for instance, the moon seen through his window "has grown familiar, I am well familiar now with her changes of aspect and orbit, I know more or less the hours of the night when I may look for her in the sky and the nights she will not come" (p.13). On the evidence of this kind of knowledge Malone is able to deduce that he has been where he is now "for some very considerable time. For there is nothing the various seasons can do to me, within the shelter of these walls, that I do not know. That is not to be learnt in one year or two" (p.14). Thus he is able to make a rough gauge of the passage of the year; a "thousand little signs" tell him that, as he starts to write, it is March or April, and he guesses that the choir he hears thirty pages later is celebrating the liturgical feast of Easter. And so, des-

pite his Crusoe-like isolation, Malone is able to relate the time that passes within his little monad to that of the natural and social worlds outside.

However, towards the middle of the book, the regular normality of such things comes seriously into question, and the room no longer appears to be as "ordinary" as when he set about writing such things down. He notices that the quality of the light in the room is "bizarre": "I enjoy a kind of night and day, admittedly, often it is even pitch dark, but in rather a different way to which I fancy I was accustomed" (p.48). And the fluctuations of luminosity within the room can no longer be related with any firmness to the passage of the sun: "it does not always seem to depend on the time of day" (p.48). In fact, he observes that the light of the "outer world" does not seem to penetrate into the room at all, "so that here all bathes, I will not say in shadow, nor even in half-shadow, but in a kind of leaden light that makes no shadow, so that it is hard to say from what direction it comes, for it seems to come from all directions at once, and with equal force" (p.49). And the growing de-hiscence between the interior of the room and "the outer world, the other world" (p.50) is augmented by the fact that "the noises too, cries, steps, doors, murmurs, cease for whole days, their days" (p.50). Even gravity seems to lose at times the constancy of its force, so that "sometimes my bed is caught up into the air and tossed like a straw by the swirling eddies, and I in it" (p.50). Furthermore, the passage of time within the chamber that has become a monad ceases to correspond to that of the macrocosm, as when Malone, having waited impatiently for daybreak, welcomes the brightening of "the utter darkness", only to find that "the light, instead of being the dawn, turned out in a very short time to be dusk. And the sun, instead of rising higher and higher in the sky as I confidently expected, calmly set, and night, the passing of which I had just celebrated in my fashion, calmly fell again" (p.48). The theme of twin chronometers that have lost synchronicity, the Leibnizian "pre-established harmony"* falling into a jangling discordance, is evoked in a num-

* "Therefore souls or vital principles...change nothing in the ordinary course of bodies and not even give God the occasion for doing so. The souls follow their

ber of images (including, antithetically, that of the "two little heaps of finest sand, or dust, or ashes, of unequal size, but diminishing together as it were in ratio" that Malone sees in his mystical but self-cancelling vision of his own evanescence, p.51) and in this context helps to establish the impression that Malone's room is becoming for him a veritable microcosm, less part of the world than an extension of himself. We might say, in fact, of this partial independence of Malone's room from the physical laws of the world, that his perception of his immediate surroundings becomes suffused with the image of his mental being, objective space and time yielding to psychic space and time. The hard and straight edges of the walls, floor, ceiling and window-pane (the angle between sill and wall struck him earlier as being "so sharp a contrast that it often looks like the edge of an abyss" p.36) become softened and rounded until the window looks "like a bull's-eye, or a porthole" (p.66).^{*} In short, the room, losing its quality of inanimate materiality, becomes organically rounded, as if alive, and then starts to perish along with its occupant. The "flesh" of the floral wall-paper falls away, and the surfaces of the room - walls, floor and ceiling - begin to whiten, and Malone sees "at the confines of this restless gloom a gleam shimmering as of bones, which was not hitherto the case, to the best of my knowledge" (p.52). So he is led to wonder, in the central section of the book where everything slows down, whether in fact he is inside not a room but a skull, whether in fact he has not already died, and what he takes to be sense impressions are "in reality perhaps...nothing but my worms" (p.48). However, the seizure that drives him in a panic to his inventory ("Quick quick my possessions" p.75) seems to cure him of this view - "The end of a

laws, which consist in a definite development of perceptions according to goods and evils, and the bodies follow theirs, which consist in the laws of motion; nevertheless, these two beings of entirely different kind meet together and correspond to each other like two clocks perfectly regulated to the same time. It is this that I call the theory of pre-established harmony" ("Considerations on Vital Principles and Plastic Natures", II, 955, quoted in Hesla, p.74; original emphasis). Geulincx too makes use of the image of synchronized clocks (though his view of God's part in their correspondence is rather different); see Robinson, p.89).

* Bearing in mind the Jungian view of the mythological significance of roundness as

life is always vivifying" (p.40), he remarks in a different context - and after the crisis ("I have missed the ebb" p.82) the regular normality of the world (and the room) reasserts itself; light and dark resume their usual diurnal/nocturnal alternation, and the man who pays him a "visit" enters a perfectly ordinary room. But, as things accelerate in the final outrush of the book, the room becomes bizarre once more, and this time the predominant impression is that of a womb. Thus, in his last explicit "present state" report, Malone notes that "The ceiling rises and falls, rises and falls, rhythmically, as when I was a foetus....Leaden light again, thick, eddying, riddled with little tunnels through to brightness, perhaps I should say air, sucking air. All is ready" (p.113).

The overall pattern of these changes corresponds to the gradual collapse of the objective, scientific spirit in which, by which, Malone was able to relate the microcosm of his chamber to the world outside it, as the assurance and distance of the iterative-durative mode of temporally static description passes through the descriptive mode expressing a continuous but gradual change, where the progressive aspect of the verbs denotes an ongoing process (as in "the floor is whitening" p.51), into the immediacy of the synchronous or instantaneous present, where description and narration, background and action, meet, as in, "The ceiling rises and falls..." And the overall effect of the room's two-fold mutation (into skull and womb) is to express the phenomenological instability of the objective, "real" world, which, as the surety of its sensory delineation crumbles, is replaced not by chaos or void, but by the projection of a mental image which acts as a kind of mould into which the vestiges of sense data are poured, giving thereby a semblance of coherence that reinforces the original image. Thus Malone's delirious impressions of his surroundings are characterized by a reversal of the apparently empirical order in which

opposed to rectangularity - "The circle is a symbol of the psyche (even Plato described the psyche as a sphere). The square (and often the rectangle) is a symbol of earthbound matter, of the body and reality" (Man and His Symbols, p.249) - we might say that Malone is here "encircling the square" of his material existence, subjectively turning matter into mind as he approaches death.

concept arises out of percept; seemingly unnoticed by Malone, the impression of a skull, then of a womb, is prefigured by an idea of these things. The notion that he may be inside a rotting cranium precedes the sense data that seem to confirm this hypothesis, and the appearance of the room as a pulsating womb is a logical (but unconscious) corollary, arising some fifty pages later, to a "little private idea": "Be born, that's the brainwave, now" (pp.53-54). Malone is at one point dimly aware of this principle of unconscious germination of ideas, when he says, apropos something else, "If this continues...I shall resemble the wretches famed in fable, crushed beneath the weight of their wish come true" (p.22); but, of course, this insight is no more resistant to the edge of temporal oblivion than any other, and is simply not to hand when it might come in useful to him in accounting for the transformation of his "ordinary room" into something bizarre.

The transmutations have another effect as well, when we consider the skull and the womb not simply as phenomenological discrepancies in Malone's perception, but as images that in themselves evoke the obscure tensions and anxieties of the mind that has manifested them. The skull and the womb obtrude upon Malone's perceived reality not as contingent elements, nor even as images merely analogous, by virtue of their shape and their function as "receptacles" of living beings, to the room, but relate also to his precarious sense of *Existenzgefühl*, his feeling of not being really, truly alive: is he then already dead, or as yet unborn? In addition, they serve to illuminate his paradoxically opposed needs for shelter and for boundlessness, for security and for freedom. While being snuggler than any room, they are also far more claustrophobic, and his desire for a "place" in the world where he will not only be safe but at home, is balanced against the urge to be released from within the unbreachable cranial walls, and to "be given birth into death," to get clear of "the great cunt of existence" (p.113) itself.

Malone's reports on his corporeal being exhibit a similar range of immediate and distanced temporal modes of description, and a similar rhythm of alternation

between the normal and the extraordinary. In his initial "present state" stock-taking he adopts a temporal point of view that is distanced from the immediate present - again a combination of durative and iterative modes - expressing an attitude of detachment fitting to a "report", and replete with pseudo-scientific speculation: "My body is what is called, unadvisedly perhaps, impotent. There is virtually nothing it can do....My arms, once they are in position, can exert a certain force. But I find it hard to guide them. Perhaps the red nucleus has faded" (p.14). At the same time he announces his sense of estrangement from his body in terms of a quasi-physical distance between "me" and "my stupid flesh":

All my senses are trained full on me, me. Dark and silent and stale, I am no prey for them. I am far from the sounds of blood and breath, immured. I shall not speak of my sufferings. Cowering deep down among them I feel nothing. It is there I die, unbeknown to my stupid flesh. That which is seen, that which cries and writhes, my witless remains. (pp.14-15)

A little further on he underlines this alienation in declaring his intention "never [to] go back into this carcass except to find out its time" (p.21) - a remark which, recalling Molloy's reference to himself as a "Watch wound and buried by the watchmaker, before he died" (p.38), takes up the image that is only implied when he asks himself, several pages earlier, "What am I doing now, I wonder, losing time or gaining it?" (p.10). Behind the conventional metaphoric façade of this question, which makes of time a kind of currency, chimes a precision of meaning in another metaphoric key - the Leibnizian image of man's consciousness as a divinely crafted clock, set ticking in perfect synchronization with the causal clockwork of the physical world. That the timepiece of Malone's mind has started to run awry is evident not only in his impression that "in a flicker of my lids whole days have flown" (p.14), but also in the fact that his coenaesthetic sensations have become unreli-

able. "That's the style," he commends himself, regaining some of his composure after a spasm he takes at first to be his last, "as if I still had time to kill. And so I have, deep down I know it well. Then why play at being in a hurry?...Perhaps I am in a hurry after all, it was the impression I had a short time ago" (p.77).

Despite his intention to disregard his "carcass" except to take its pulse, a bare six pages later, his story going very badly, Malone resorts to a detailed description of his physical posture and sensations, rendered in the apparently instantaneous coincidence between the moment of experience and the moment of notation, and undergoes an unprecedented rapprochement between mind and body:

I turn a little on my side, press my mouth against the pillow, and my nose, crush against the pillow my old hairs now no doubt as white as snow, pull the blanket over my head. I feel, deep down in my trunk, I cannot be more explicit, pains that seem new to me. I think they are chiefly in my back. They have a kind of rhythm, they even have a kind of little tune. They are bluish. How bearable all that is, my God. My head is almost facing the wrong way, like a bird's. I part my lips, now I have the pillow in my mouth. I have, I have. I suck. The search for myself is ended. I am buried in the world, I knew I would find my place there one day, the old world cloisters me, victorious. I am happy, I knew I would be happy one day. (pp.26-27)

Unfortunately Malone is unable to surrender his life in this blissful moment, and we find the sense of distance between self and body increasing again, until in the middle of the book, his extremities seem leagues away from his centre, somewhere in his head, "for that is where I am fled" (p.63). Then, after the spasm that sends him scrabbling for his possessions (p.75), there is again a movement of convergence. His appetite picks up and, feeling hunger for the first time in the book, he moves the

little table to and fro on its castors "in the hope that the noise will be heard and correctly interpreted in the right quarters" (p.81). He starts experimenting with his voice and hearing, and with the possibility of levering his bed about with his stick, and even contemplates getting himself out of bed, dreaming of being "off and away" (p.83) on the old peregrination. All this activity indicates a renewed sense of identity on Malone's part with the "élan vital or struggle for life" (p.72), an aspiration towards the union of mind and body in a functioning whole, in striking contrast to the prevailing attitude (or policy) of abnegating the claims and potentialities of the physical self. The recovery however is short-lived, and before long he is too weak even to turn his head (p.113). And at the same time as his powers of muscular control recede, so does his mental power to distance himself from his not yet witless remains. Thus the calm detachment of his earlier reports gives way to the tortured lyricism of staccato, asyndetic gasping as the pleasantly bearable "bluish" pains somewhere in his trunk advance upon his last refuge, the head, and intensify in heat and light: "My head. On fire, full of boiling oil.... The pain is almost unbearable, upon my soul it is. Incandescent migraine" (p.103). The general pattern, then, of his intermittent corporeal reports resembles that of his observations of his immediate environment in respect of the gradual shortening of temporal focus and the irregular decline of a stoically detached observation.

Before we go on to consider Malone's commentary on the non-physical aspect of his being, it is important to note that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between his corporeal and his mental reports. His dualistic conception of himself is confused right from the start, even in the relative lucidity of his first "present state" summary. He asserts there that his real, essential self, his "I", like Descartes', is not a material thing at all, and yet is "immured" in his "stupid flesh". As Gilbert Ryle points out, it is nonsensical to say that an immaterial entity is contained within a material one: if something has no physical extension, it cannot, in fact, or at least by definition, be given a location in physical space at all

(see The Concept of Mind, p.12). Furthermore, this flawed dualism is existentially inconsistent, as is evident in the varying degree of identification Malone feels with his body, ranging, as we have seen, between the disassociation proclaimed in "I shall never go back into this carcass..." (p.21) - where, it is implied, the gulf betwixt mind and body is only to be crossed by an act of will - and the moment of monistic bliss in which "the search for myself is ended" (p.27). The situation is further complicated in certain passages where Malone describes various intra-capital "sensations", and the distinction between his plainly metaphoric statements about his "spirit gone to rack and ruin" and the literal reports on the body become blurred.

The problem is latent early on when, for instance, he describes his self, his "I", as "dark and silent and stale" (p.14). Although "all" his senses are "trained full on me" they reveal nothing of the entity that announces its being with the first personal pronoun; but because the sensory adjectives he has employed to qualify this insensible being denote negative properties (the absence of light, sound and freshness) and are all, anyway, commonly used in a non-literal, metaphoric sense, the incompatibility of the (concrete) epithets with the (insubstantial) substantive is easily accepted. Elsewhere however the difficulty is much more obtrusive, and it is not at all clear whether what Malone "feels" is perceived in a literal, physical mode or in a figurative, intellectual one. A seminal case in point is his account of the evanescent epiphany which brings him "the solution and conclusion of the whole sorry business" (p.51). The revelation concerns "the true nature of my absurd tribulations" (p.53), and reflects a period of unparalleled alignment between his conscious self and the inexorable, impersonal process of his decay. Malone has dropped his pencil, and during the two days of enforced silence before he recovers it...

...so fertile in incidents and mishaps, in my head I suppose all was

streaming and emptying away as through a sluice, to my great joy, until finally nothing remained, either of Malone or of the other. And what is more I was able to follow without difficulty the various phases of this deliverance and felt no surprise at its irregular course, now rapid, now slow, so crystal clear was my understanding of the reasons why this could not be otherwise. And I rejoiced furthermore, quite apart from the spectacle, at the thought that I now knew what I had to do, I whose every move has always been a groping, and whose motionlessness too was a kind of groping... (p.52)

At first Malone's description of this process, this "deliverance" into non-being, is couched in the terms of an overt simile, an act of fancy the artifice of which is heightened in a statement of its expressive inadequacy: "it was, though more unutterable, like the crumbling away of two little heaps of finest sand, or dust, or ashes...diminishing together as it were in ratio...and leaving behind them, each in its own stead, the blessedness of absence" (p.51; my emphasis). This explicit comparison between the familiar and the strange, the concrete and psychic, is converted, after half a page of digression, into a metaphor, a trope in which the conquest of the "to-be-expressed" is carried out through an implicit assertion of the identity of tenor and vehicle: "And all this time the sand kept trickling away..." (p.51). A page later, after further digression, Malone increases the literality or concreteness of the vehicle by specifying the physical place in which the tenor, the psychic experience, is supposed actually to occur: "And during all this time...in my head I suppose all was streaming and emptying away as through a sluice..." (p.52; my emphasis). From here it is but a short step, and one which Malone seems to take unbeknown to himself, to complete the reification of the tenor: the figurative "sands of time" have become actual particles of bodily substance, the subsidence of which, he claims, he literally "feels" within him. Thus, the vision faded, the beautiful

and lucid vision of gradual and inexorable evanescence, leaving behind it the painful prospect of time that will not pass of its own accord, but must be "removed grain by grain" (p.53), Malone speaks of "the sensation of a blind and tired hand delving feebly in my particles and letting them trickle between its fingers. And sometimes, when all is quiet, I feel it plunged in me up to the elbow..." (p.53; my emphasis). Once again, imaginative conceit has invaded the field of the perceptual, and moulds a sensory actuality from the dianoetic experience it was designed to describe. At the same time, the metaphor itself evolves from something fairly straightforward - man's temporal existence being presented in the likeness of a gradually diminishing heap of particles (or, in the case of Malone's schizophrenic vision, two such heaps), like the "sands of time" "streaming and emptying away" through the neck of an hour-glass - into the bizarre, surreal picture of an arm, plunged "up to the elbow" in someone's head, sifting the temporal atoms whose passage from future to past through the "sluice" of the present has been somehow obstructed. And this image, resonating in the theme of faulty timepieces, gives somewhat nauseating expression both to Malone's fear of temporal stasis, "when to live is to wander the last of the living in the depths of an instant without bounds" (p.61), and to his feeling of complete powerlessness in relation to the processes that are taking place "within" him.

Another example of the tendency outlined above - the unnoticed literalization of metaphoric language - is provided by Malone's intra-capital "sensations" in another modality, that of the heard. When, on page twenty-six, he speaks of the words and images that "run riot in [his] head, pursuing, flying, clashing, merging, endlessly" and goes on to summarize all this as a "tumult", it is clear that he is using the terms of the physical world metaphorically in order to express his dianoetic state. "In my head" in this context signifies more "in my mind" or "in the mental realm" than an actual, physical location within the walls of his cranium. Towards the end of the book, in Malone's antepenultimate version of his "present

state", these metaphors become literal manifestations of an audibility of inexplicable provenance: "Do I hear anything at the present instant?" he asks himself, and "the answer is no" (p.104). Nothing, that is, of the "outer" world, "Neither the wind, nor the sea, nor the paper, nor the air I exhale with such labour." But he does "hear" something: "this innumerable babble, like a multitude whispering? I don't understand" (p.104).

A final illustration of Malone's confusion of physical and psychic statements is to be found in his "sense of dilation" (p.62). When it first comes up, this distortion of his body image, the "feeling" that his extremities are growing more and more distant "from me...from my head I mean, for that is where I am fled" (p.63) is a comprehensible expression of his diminishing sensory contact with his limbs. But in the "few lines to remind me that I too subsist" (p.113), his last explicit report on himself, it is "I", not "my body", that is "swelling". We may see in this latter "sensation" a reinforcement of Malone's notion that he is a foetus, about to be given "birth into death" (p.113), but also, perhaps, another facet of his "death-wish" - the unconscious aspiration of thinking substance towards a state of physical extension, as if an increase in experiential size will ensure his place in the realm of matter, where death is undoubtedly feasible. For Malone does not desire immortality - the thought that "it" might go on "beyond the grave" (p.65) is something that he does not care to think about - but merely, shall we say, a moment of authentic existence, precisely in order to clear the way for an eternity of authentic non-existence.

Apart from these grey areas, where mental and somatic being become entangled in "the symbols of time and space", Malone does cover a fair proportion of the pages devoted to himself with observations on his purely mental or moral constitution. In this endeavour he adopts two chief modes of characterization, one being his self-definition in terms of a distinct "personality", in which he lists various timeless attributes of his character; the other consisting of an intermittent running comm-

entary upon the state of his morale. Neither brings him the satisfaction of "a true statement at last" (p.24). The former involves for the most part little one-liners of unpremeditated self-observation, Malone on the qui vive for a nutshell phrase that will fit him snugly. Here are some examples:

* "I am not much given to nostalgia." (p.14)

* "I was always sentimental." (p.22)

* "Ah yes, I was always subject to the deep thought, especially in the spring of the year." (p.26)

* "Scrupulous to the last, finical to a fault, that's Malone all over." (p.62)

The formal aspiration of such remarks is to relate the specific mental or emotional configuration of the moment to the stability of an enduring pattern of such moments, and thereby to establish or maintain the edifice of a personal essence or character that is unique and timeless. The futility of such self-characterization is not hidden from Malone, and arises not merely from the fact that he cannot remember what he has said about himself - a drawback that is obviated to some extent, in theory at least, in that it has been written down, giving the security of the thought that "there is a record of it somewhere" (p.36), although as he never seems to turn back his pages to review what he has written, this bulwark against the edge of temporal oblivion remains only a potentiality anyway - so that he contradicts himself on a number of points, but also from an awareness of the arbitrariness with which certain ripples of particularity are selected from the heaving swell of the multifold totality of all that might be said. This accounts for the predominantly flippant tone of such statements, their ironic aspect forming part of Malone's pervasive self-deprecating humour, and a wry testimony to the banal but irresistible need to assert a definite "character" despite the obvious futility of the undertaking. In a moment of articulated auto-critical irritation Malone demands of himself, "But I tell myself so many things, what truth is there in all this babble?" (p.64), and, unable to answer, goes on to affirm, paradoxically attributing to himself yet another charact-

eristic (and neatly subverting his claims to scrupulousness and finicality), the fatuousness of just such an act of self-description: "Yes, that's what I like about me, at least one of the things, that I can say, Up the Republic!, for example, or, Sweetheart!, for example, without having to wonder if I should not rather have cut my tongue out, or said something else" (p.64). Where the substratum of an "essential" personality is so radically inaccessible, sincerity ceases to be an issue.

(While on the subject of Malone's "personality", I should like to rebut a piece of slander committed by Fletcher who, while commending what he sees as a plucky and resilient moral nature, deplures "a less attractive side of his character", namely, "a tendency to voyeurism: he gazes on the intimate activities of the couple opposite" (The Novels, p.158). Malone does watch with some fascination the "big complicated shape" that is silhouetted against the curtain in the window opposite his, and notes "how it sways and totters" (p.67). But this fascination is that of a puzzle, the tension of an unresolved visual *Gestalt*. When he realizes what is happening - "Ah how stupid I am, I see what it is, they must be loving each other.. .." (p.67) - he quickly loses interest, and after a couple of lines of reflection, turns away to take up his tale of Macmann with "Enough, enough, goodbye.")

Malone's other major vein of self-observation, the finger he keeps upon the pulse of his morale, suffers from another aspect of the ineradicable disjunction between what may be said to be and what really is, between (in this case) self and self-image. The veracity of such statements as "I am so happy" (p.27), "I want nothing" (p.27), "I fear nothing any more" (p.37), "I am calm, insufficiently, I still lack a little calm" (p.84), or "I am growing nervous" (p.85), would seem to be, in their immediacy of reference, beyond question. Unfortunately, for Malone, as for Molloy, the translation of even such subjective, lyrical utterances onto the page is one of dubious fidelity, the divergence between "saying" and "writing" being highlighted early on, in this passage: "it must be over a week since I said, I shall be quite dead at last, etc. Wrong again. That is not what I said, I could swear to it,

that is what I wrote.... Yes, I shall soon be, etc., that is what I wrote when I realised I did not know what I had said, at the beginning of my say" (p.37). What is more, the significance of these reports is further undermined not only by the fact that it seems to make no difference to Malone whether he is happy or discouraged - he goes on doing what he always has, in our experience of him, giving irascible utterance to certain of the thoughts he entertains ("Did I say I only say a portion of the things that come into my head?...I choose those that are somehow akin. It is not always easy" p.82) - but also by the alienation that underlies this lack of emotional consequence. In the same passage in which he speaks of the "distance" that separates his self from his body ("I am far from the sounds of blood and breath" p.14), Malone voices also the disjunction between his "I" and the content of his cerebration: "Somewhere in this turmoil thought struggles on, it too wide of the mark. It too seeks me, as it always has, where I am not to be found" (p.15). This sense of disparity between whatever may be thought and true being, is heightened and dramatized in a rare passage of extended self-analysis, that is neither strictly atemporal nor instantaneous commentary, but cast in a non-specific, iterative past tense. In this important section Malone adumbrates his conception of an intra-psychic dualism, and goes to the root of his estrangement from his own experience.

Live and invent. I have tried. I must have tried. Invent. It is not the word. Neither is live. No matter. I have tried....And gravely I struggled to be grave no more, to live, to invent, I know what I mean. But at each fresh attempt I lost my head, fled to my shadows as to sanctuary, to his lap who can neither live nor suffer the sight of others living....After the fiasco, the solace, the repose, I began again, to try and live, cause to live, be another, in myself, in another....But little by little with a different aim, no longer in order to succeed, but in order to fail. Nuance. What I sought, when I struggled out of my hole, then aloft

through the stinging air towards an inaccessible boon, was the rapture of vertigo, the letting go, the fall, the gulf, the relapse to darkness, to nothingness, to earnestness, to home, to him waiting for me always, who needed me and whom I needed, who took me in his arms and told me to stay with him always, who gave me his place and watched over me, who suffered every time I left him, whom I have often made suffer and seldom contented, whom I have never seen. (p.23)

In this murky meditation, where Malone's deft and vivid metaphoric figures disport themselves against a ground of arcane opacity - "I know what I mean," he says at one point, and a few lines later, "No time now to explain" - our monologist explores the cause and the consequence of a double failure: his failure to be a "real" person, and his failure to be a writer, the author of "real" characters. Implicit in his equation of these two projects, and in the common cause of their collapse, his "earnestness", is the assumption that the same kind of imaginative effort is involved; both require a fabrication, a suspension of disbelief, an exertion of "negative capability", which is beyond Malone. He is able neither to endorse, to identify fully with, his own emotional experience in all its varied colours, nor to enter the experience of a fictional character, to "get into the skin of the creature," as Henry James puts it, deeming it "the act of personal possession of one being by another at its completest" (The Art of the Novel, p.66). The first consequence of his existential failure is isolation: Malone cannot "play the game", cannot accept or assume or maintain a coherent, consistent identity, either as a child or as an adult, and has therefore no place in the world of human society, from which he flees in defeat. The image of "flight" (in the sense of running away) is transposed from its literal usage in the context of the implied physical setting, the play-ground replete with toys, children and watchful grown-ups, into a metaphysical or psychological key, the flight to a hiding place becoming the flight "to my shadows", a

place of refuge in the mind. The concept of the mind as a place, into which the conscious self, the "I", can withdraw in order to find sanctuary from the "outer world", is as we have seen, a prominent theme in Beckett's work, and Malone, like Molloy, in another statement of his alienation from his own experience, speaks of wandering among the "ruins" of this microcosm (pp.44-45). What is new here is that the "place", qualified progressively as "my shadows", "my hole", and "home", is the abode of a psychic entity which Malone endows with the autonomy of the third person pronoun. The failure to assume a convincing human identity, leading to the "fiasco", and the relinquishing of the imaginative effort involved, results not in non-being, but in a state which, although it displays some of the attributes of non-being - "the relapse to darkness, to nothingness" - is yet suffused with the sense of an enduring, unchanging personal presence: the substratum of dark, formless identity that can never itself wield the pronoun "I", and with whom the Malone who speaks, thinks and feels can never be truly at one.

This schizoidal vision of the self, with its pathetic personification of "the old dark...the solitude...by which I know myself" (p.17), and its narcissistic touches of human intimacy that Malone can experience only within himself, displaces the essence of a-seity from the realm of the conscious ego and banishes it to darkness and ineffability. It is this vision or sensibility that saps Malone's affects of any real power, and which allows him to attribute to himself contradictory emotional and dianoetic states at the same moment, as in "Words and images run riot in my head....But beyond this tumult there is a great calm, and a great indifference, never really to be troubled by anything again" (p.26). And it is, I think, to the shadowy arrheton in the depths of this vision that Malone refers as "the other"* in his account of the epiphany of evanescence that brings the (soon-to-be-forgotten)

* There is room for another reading here: Malone elsewhere refers to his overtly fictional creature, Saposcat/Macmann, by the same indefinite pronoun: "The Lamberts, the Lamberts, does it matter about the Lamberts? No, not particularly. But while I am with them the other is lost" (p.44; my emphasis). The ambiguity is not susceptible to apodictic resolution, but to my mind the first interpretation I have given is weightier and more satisfying in the context.

"solution and conclusion of the whole sorry business, I mean the business of Malone (since that is what I am called now) and of the other, for the rest is no business of mine" (p.51). And it is in these moments, bearing an aura of resigned and joyful enlightenment, that he experiences what seems to be the highest possible degree of union between the "I's" image of itself - the conscious identity - and the true, unlivable self itself: not consubstantiality, but congruence: "it was, though more unutterable, like the crumbling away of two little heaps of finest sand, or dust, or ashes, of unequal size, but diminishing together as it were in ratio, if that means anything, and leaving behind them, each in its own stead, the blessedness of absence" (p.51).

Given this state of affairs, the first person singular pronoun is a precarious semantic device, referring sometimes to the superficial, temporal consciousness as distinct from the unspeakable inner self, while at others it seems to denote this dark, formless identity, the "real" self, in opposition to the former. This is the position of pronominal deixis that Malone takes up when, disturbed by the fact that "I write about myself with the same pencil and in the same exercise book as about him [Sapo]" (p.36), he explicitly declares his lack of identity with the narrated self, he of the dropped pencil and the mislaid exercise-book and all the little moods of equanimity and discouragement: "It is because it is no longer I, I must have said so long ago, but another whose life is just beginning" (p.36). The life of this other is just beginning in that it is just beginning to be written, to be given one of the forms "in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness" (p.26). Hence the justification of the parenthesis in which he qualifies the tenure of his name - "Malone (since that is what I am called now)" (p.51), and hence too the spectre of a single, unnamed spirit that transcends the individual manifestations of all the narrators of the Trilogy, individuals who are only dimly and momentarily aware that they form part of a series.

Before concluding our discussion of Malone's non-narrative discourse in the

present tense two short passages which do not fit easily into any of the categorizations I have made above deserve some comment. These are the two practically tenseless prose-poems in which he writes about the moon. Only the first (pp.29-30) is explicitly linked to the framework of the narrative instance, when it becomes clear that the "Dead world, airless, waterless" that Malone suddenly mentions in the middle of one of his most fluent narrative assaults on the Lambert family is the moon that has just passed before his window (his "sliver of sky is silvery with it yet" as he writes); the second (p.93) is only by inference related to his immediate environment, and the thrust of both of them is plainly metaphoric rather than descriptive or metonymic, giving vent in asyndetic, staccato phrases to the narrator's sense of lassitude and death-bound isolation. In fact, these lunar passages are really better seen as Malone's only recourse to the "soul-landscape" than as descriptive or discursive passages. Their faint, barely audible note of lyricism and regret stands out in contrast to the would-be literalism of most of Malone's writing, and also to Molloy's energetic epistemological puzzling when confronted by the same sight. The prominence of this first contrast is heightened slightly by their symmetrical positioning in the book, the first passage occurring twenty-four pages into it, the second twenty-two pages from its end, and both are isolated in a fairly lengthy bout of narration. The lovely verbless period that inaugurates the second of these passages gives a hint of the utter sparseness and exhausted economy of expression that Beckett is to explore in some of his short, post-Trilogy pieces like "Lessness" and "Imagination Dead Imagine": "Weary with my weariness, white last moon, sole regret, not even."

To complete our annotated survey of the various temporal perspectives Malone adopts as he writes about himself, we come now to his treatment of what is past. This is the legitimate domain of narration, which in its common form affects to reproduce or represent what has already happened. Most of the "action", the occurrence of specific incidents of the diegetic situation, is narrated in this punctual mode,

that of the preterite, where the temporal relations between *Erzählzeit* (the time of the narration) and *erzählte Zeit* (the time that is narrated; Gunter Müller's terms given in Genette, p.77) are fixed and definite. A prominent example, and the only one of any length, is Malone's account of the "visit" that is paid him by the mysterious man with the umbrella (pp.98-102). First Malone gives a summary of the whole incident ("The visit. I felt a violent blow on the head. He had perhaps been there for some time....I don't know what he wanted. He's gone now" p.98), and then goes into detail concerning the man's appearance and actions during the hours he spends in Malone's bedroom. Such narrative statements form a very meagre part of the book's composition, and their narrative flow is continually interrupted with passages of speculative digression and frequent, garrulous returns to the present moment. The effect of such interruptions, combined with the fact that Malone does not adhere with any rigour to chronological order in his account of the visit, is to fracture the advancing edge of narrated time and to make it difficult to reconstruct from even so recent an incident of his history a sure and coherent sequence of events. And although there is a high degree of causal speculation by the narrator, extending even to the neurotic discussion of the actions and motives of people whose very existence is a matter of hypothesis (see, for instance, his suspicions about "the consortium" that want him dead, pp.81-82 & 84), there is actually very little causal enchainment of events, the concatenation of cause and effect that is an essential ingredient of the (Aristotelian) "mythos" of a narrative. So, properly speaking, Malone's diegetic "story" has no plot, being merely a loose succession of unconnected incidents.

His treatment of his more distant past is similarly lacking in narrative coherence. An autobiographical approach, sequentially linking times and places, actions and emotions, is simply beyond his mnemonic powers, and the attempt to exercise deliberate, investigative memory brings very poor results:

I do not remember how I got here. In an ambulance perhaps, a vehicle of

some kind certainly.* One day I found myself here, in the bed. Having probably lost consciousness somewhere, I benefit by a hiatus in my recollections, not to be resumed until I recovered my senses, in this bed. As to the events that led up to my fainting and to which I can hardly have been oblivious, at the time, they have left no discernible trace, on my mind....I have often amused myself with trying to invent them, those same lost events. But without succeeding in amusing myself really. But what is the last thing I remember, I could start from there, before I came to my senses here? That too is lost. (p.11)

What few details he does manage to summon quaver on the edge of fabrication; as for Molloy, so too for Malone, the sensation of remembering something follows dubiously in the wake of speculation: "... perhaps I was stunned with a blow, on the head, in a forest perhaps, yes now that I speak of a forest I vaguely remember a forest" (p.12). Malone is hardly disturbed by these gaping rents in the fabric of his past life; as he says, extricating himself from this poor foray into his history, "All that belongs to the past. Now it is the present I must establish" (p.12).

When he is not consciously trying to recall his past, Malone's memory sometimes pipes up of its own accord, another instance of the pervasive phenomenon of conatory perversity. His recollection of past mental habits, for example, arising *sua sponte* in contrast to his present state, is delivered without hesitation or doubt: "In the old days I used to count up to three hundred, four hundred, and with other things too, the showers, the bells, the chatter of sparrows at dawn, or with nothing, for no reason, for the sake of counting, and then I divided, by sixty. That passed the time, I was time, I devoured the world. Not now, any more. A man changes. As he gets on" (p.30). And occasionally, his present thoughts or sensations spark off a specific memory that is firmly etched in sensory detail, as in the following

* Almost an exact echo of Molloy's, "I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind" (p.7).

finely evoked recall, which illustrates in addition Malone's fascination with border-line phenomena, things on the very edge of non-being, a trait he shares with several other Beckettian heroes, like Mr Kelly of Murphy, flying his kite at the vanishing point of visibility, or the narrator of "First Love", straying back and forth at the boundary of earshot of the cries that drive him from his den. These sensory motifs of "things that scarcely were" reflect indeed one of the primary themes of the last two volumes of the Trilogy, the concern with exploring the ultimate dregs of consciousness on the brink of extinction. In this fashion the images of the individual narrators resonate in a larger structure of meaning, the outlines of which are apparently obscure to their ostensible authors.

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 stonecutters 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 pale 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 my joy to end, straining towards the joy of ended joy. (pp.34-35)

This recollection, for all its spontaneous and concrete vividness, does not bear the aura of a miraculous Proustian re-creation of lost time, and certainly brings Malone no saving sense of timeless personal essence. The passage closes with a dismissal of "these futilities", and in the two flashbacks comparable in length and in the intensity of their detailed, lyrical evocation, pointlessness is overlaid with a sense of doubt as to whether the remembered scenes actually took place at all, or, if so, whether Malone himself actually took part in them. Thus the memory of having "wandered in the towns, the wood and wilderness and tarried by the seas in tears before the islands and peninsulas where night lit the little brief yellow lights of men..." (p.54) is designated in advance as one of "the stories I've told myself clinging to the putrid mucus, and swelling, swelling, saying, Got it at last, my legend" (p.54). The other instance, which, unlike these two, has as its subject a single, specific incident, and even has the trappings of a significant, formative moment in Malone's *éducation sentimentale* - an intellectual rebuff from the mother that figures with minor variations also in "The End" (p.74) and in that fascinating later work, *Company* (p.12) - is likewise discarded as "perhaps...just another story, told me by some one who found it funny" (p.98).

So much then for Malone on himself, truly a subject of "shadow and babble", of isolated reminiscences, of memories that seem more like fables, drained of life and

significance, of fruitless attempts to capture a definite and essential character, and, at the mercy of his capricious and sometimes hallucinatory senses, to chart the progress of his demise - a subject in short on which Malone, for all his prolix lucubrations, is really in the dark, his wearied and cynical aspirations to self-knowledge vitiated by the unbridgeable schism that, he feels, exiles his consciousness from his "real" self, so that the exact shape and texture of his experience (in fact, such is the state of his withdrawal from "life", even the very reality of that temporal experience) is in any case of little or no importance: "But what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing what I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am" (p.54). And so, to pass the time, he gives his thoughts some other, perhaps less obscure, subject on which to focus - a "little creature", made of words, in a story, a fiction composed of narrative statements which bear no burden of truth, which are (in theory) free from the taint of "earnestness" - *une écriture gratuite*.

Of course, this is not quite how things turn out, and it is only two pages into his story that Malone begins to wonder if he is not writing again about himself instead of his hero. "Shall I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject?" he asks himself wryly (p.17). Porter Abbot expresses this central irony neatly in contrasting Malone's fictional enterprise with the narratives of Molloy and Moran: "in Molloy we have two narrators under strict orders to report a certain passage from each of their lives and who, in the process of reporting become involved in the process of creating, of lying, of making up stories about themselves; in Malone Dies we have one narrator under no orders but those of his fancy who, in the process of making up stories, becomes involved in the process of reporting, that is, of telling stories very much in the image of what we imagine to have been his

life" (p.114). But Porter Abbot's view of this matter - the (unprovable*) assumption that Malone's story is a disguised autobiography - obscures or at least leaves out more subtle and interesting aspects of the relations between his "fiction" and his "reporting". A number of critics have addressed the "content" of Malone's story in a similar fashion, notably Fletcher, who pulls the resultant "pseudocouple", Malone/Macmann, into line with the typical "Beckettian hero" (The Novels, pp.170-76). Not much comment has been passed however on what is really a more fruitful question. The story *per se*, the *fabula*, is, as it always is post-Watt, a poor thing in itself; the plot, as far as it subsists, is monotonous and inconsequential, and hardly worth the repeated summaries that feature so irresistibly in almost every critical treatment of the works. But if we look at Malone's story as a reflection not of his life but of his *état d'âme* as he tells it - a perspective given legitimacy and precision by virtue of his self-presentation in another mode - its composition or treatment, the *discours* as opposed to the *histoire*, becomes highly revealing, especially since Malone, when he is "playing", has a far greater repertoire of narrative approaches to choose from than any other of the dramatized narrators in the canon up to this point. His predecessors were constrained by the autobiographical nature of their narratives (whether invented or remembered is beside the point here) to the limited omniscience and unvarying focalisation of mnemonic, homodiegetic narration. And, as Dorrit Cohn points out, "the first-person narrator has less free access to his own past psyche than the omniscient narrator of third-person fiction has to the psyches of his characters" (op. cit., p.144). Malone, in creating an overtly fictional discourse, lands himself with the freedom to select not only what he will represent, but *how*. The following study of his narrative technique (or, rather, techniques) is concerned to describe the nature and degree of Malone's imaginative involvement with his fictional world, a central element in the drama of his dying, by examining his narratorial

* But likely; without being able to point to any exact coincidences of circumstance, what Malone's fragmentary reminiscences suggest - a life-long, aimless, solitary picaresque - resembles in its general outline the adult life of Macmann.

voice, his "presence" in his narrative "comme source, garant et organisateur du récit, comme analyste et commentateur, comme styliste...et particulièrement...comme producteur de 'métaphores'" (Genette, p.188).

Malone's story might be called a novella. It is an episodic life-story, told, as we have seen, in three parts. These three stages in the progress of the hero correspond to Malone's three major efforts of narrative attention, each distinct in narrative handling and tonality, which are separated in the text by two extended sections of "non-story", during the first of which Malone loses his pencil and has a vision, while in the second he suffers a spasm he takes to be mortal, and drops his stick. Tracing the course of these shifts in narrative approach gives us, then, another trajectory of Malone's gradual and irregular decline.

Our narrator, after much hemming and hawing, plunges abruptly into his story, beginning, like Mr Spiro of Watt, with "the essential" - the name to which the attributes and experiences of a character are to be attached: "The man's name is Saposcat" (p.15). But before he becomes a man, "A few words about the boy. This cannot be avoided." The first section of the narrative, as promised, treats of Sapo's early days, and, as implied, consists largely of background material. Specific, punctual events are almost completely absent, the dominant verbal form being the descriptive or habitual imperfect, and instead of the traditional novelistic dialectic between linking summary and dramatized scene* (the Jamesian "telling" and "showing"), Malone's temporal structuring of his narrative is characterized by an alternation between an iterative summary and a "scene" which does not represent a single

* Genette summarizes this generic trait with insight: "Dans le récit romanesque tel qu'il fonctionnait avant la Recherche, l'opposition de mouvement entre scène détaillée et récit sommaire renvoyait presque toujours à une opposition du contenu entre dramatique et non dramatique, les temps forts de l'action coïncidant avec les moments les plus intenses du récit tandis que les temps faibles étaient résumés à grands traits et comme de très loin....Le vrai rythme du canon romanesque, encore très perceptible dans Bovary, est donc alternance de sommaires non dramatiques à fonction d'attente et de liaison, et de scènes dramatiques dont le rôle dans l'action est décisif" (p.142).

historic occurrence, but, cast also in the iterative mode, like those exploited at length and with such brilliance by Proust, illustrates a prevailing or habitual series of similar events. Genette denies, wrongly I think, the dramatic quality of such scenes (though perhaps it is more a semantic difference than anything else; "dramatic" is a sadly overworked adjective), but his comment on their function in the narrative is germane here: "Il ne s'agit donc pas ici de scènes dramatiques, mais plutôt de scènes typiques, ou exemplaires, où l'action...s'efface presque complètement au profit de la caractérisation psychologique et sociale" (p.143; emphasis in original). In such scenes even the apparently unmediated "showing" of *oratio recta*, taken by both Barthes and Genette (following Aristotle) as literature's purest form of mimesis, that in which "representation" is replaced by direct "presentation", and the role of the narrator as an intermediary is reduced to the minimum, functions in Malone's narrative as an inherent expression of the narrator's presence: we cannot overlook the mind that from a multiplicity of similar occasions has extracted a pattern that is deemed typical or habitual, and which presents that norm in the form of an actual conversation. Thus, for instance, the exchanges of Mr and Mrs Saposcat are set before us as an unvarying and fruitless ritual: "He used to say to his wife, I really must find work for the evenings and the Saturday afternoon...His wife would answer, But if you do any more work you'll fall ill" (p.15; my emphasis). Their farcical "palavers" ridicule conversation not through misunderstanding as in Molloy's dialogue with his mother or the policeman - husband and wife know only too well the response each will make to the other - but through the practice of useless conjugal worrying, a habit whose only purpose is to dull the anguish of their hopeless economic and domestic predicament. And let us observe here how this orientation towards the iterative, this focus on the habitual trivia of the quotidian, corresponds to Malone's dominant mode of self-characterization in this part of the book. As he himself remarks, underlining as he does this mimetic aspect, his stories "will be neither beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm,

there will be no ugliness or beauty or fever in them any more, they will be almost lifeless, like the teller" (p.8)

The degree of narratorial presence implied in this presentation of the actual as the habitual is given explicit confirmation in the explanatory remarks with which Malone intersperses the dialogues, demonstrating his direct and uninhibited knowledge of the minds and histories, as in, "And in the silence which followed Mr Saposcat applied his mind, with the earnestness he brought to everything he did, to the high price of manure which prevented him from supporting his family in greater comfort, while his wife made ready to accuse herself, in her turn, of not doing all she might" (p.16). These elucidatory intrusions also confirm the derisive attitude which Malone adopts towards these predictable puppets.

Malone treats his hero more sympathetically, excluding him from the ridicule of the iterative oratio recta, almost in fact from direct speech altogether - his only recorded utterance is made in the classroom, when, "pestered with questions one day he cried, Haven't I told you I don't know!" (p.18). At first Malone attempts a summative and systematic treatment of Sapo's character, with particular reference to his growing epistemological confusion, directly reviewing his characteristic mental state at home, at school and in the fields, where he receives an anti-Wordsworthian education from the universal preceptor (p.19). But as Sapo emerges from the state of a tabula rasa upon which any arbitrary attribute may be inscribed (as is evident in this mid-stream revision: "Sapo had no friends - no, that won't do. / Sapo was on good terms with his little friends..." p.18), our narrator seems less and less willing (or less and less able) to describe his character's inner life in terms of traditional personality traits (as in "this patient, reasonable child" p. 21), or through a paraphrase of his thoughts (as in "He was sometimes tempted by the knowledge of these strange things [the celestial bodies], sometimes beautiful, that he would have about him all his life. But from his ignorance of them he drew a kind of joy, as from all that went to swell the murmur, You are a simpleton" p.19). In-

stead Malone's treatment of Sapo's consciousness is more often, in the later pages of the episode, effected through vivid, particular, and highly detailed tableaux, with no conclusions drawn, no explanations offered, and in which, as in this memorable example, the narrator's depiction of the outer scene is registered through the eyes of his character (though not in his voice*):

Sapo remained alone, by the window, the bowl of goat's milk on the table before him, forgotten. It was summer. The room was dark in spite of the door and window open on the great outer light. Through these narrow openings, far apart, the light poured, lit up a little space, then died, undiffused. It had no steadfastness, no assurance of lasting as long as day lasted. But it entered at every moment renewed from without, entered and died at every moment, devoured by the dark. And at the least abatement of the inflow the room grew darker and darker until nothing in it was visible any more. For the dark had triumphed. And Sapo, his face turned towards an earth so resplendent that it hurt his eyes, felt at his back and all about him the unconquerable dark, and it licked the light on his face. Sometimes abruptly he turned to face it, letting it envelop and pervade him, with a kind of relief. Then he heard more clearly the sounds of those at work, the daughter calling to her goats, the father cursing his mule. But silence was in the heart of the dark, the silence of dust and the things that would never stir, if left alone. And the ticking of the invisible alarm-clock was as the voice of that silence which, like the dark, would one day triumph too. And then all would be still and dark and all things at rest forever at last. (p.31)

* As Genette points out, much discussion of narrative "point of view" fails to make this distinction, and consequently demonstrates "une confusion irritante entre la question, quel est le personnage dont le point de vue oriente la perspective narrative? et cette question toute autre: qui est le narrateur?" (p.203).

The passage is also a significant illustration of how Malone, as he makes his central character the phenomenological focus of the scene, projects into his oblique portrait of that mind, apparently without realizing it, his own preoccupations. The ambivalent imagery of darkness and silence that pervades the Trilogy (and indeed, much, if not most of Beckett's work), here linked predominantly to the theme of entropy, the final product of which becomes in The Unnamable a *consummation* devoutly to be wished, is given in the extract above the trappings of an active and even menacing personification: darkness and silence are not presented simply as the absence of light and sound, but, as they are in the Manichean cosmology, in the guise of powerful forces, the evil metaphysical overtones of which are emphasized by Malone in two apparently unrelated passages where he expresses his consternation at the intellectual darkness that threatens to invade first his story ("I want as little as possible of darkness in his story. A little darkness, in itself, at the time is nothing. You think no more about it and you go on. But I know what darkness is, it accumulates, thickens, then suddenly bursts and drowns everything" p.18), and then language itself: "I am easily frightened now. I know these little phrases that seem so innocuous and, once you let them in, pollute the whole of speech. Nothing is more real than nothing. They rise up out of the pit and know no rest until they drag you down into its dark" (p.21; original emphasis). And in the same paragraph in which Malone pronounces with satisfaction on how different he has succeeded in making his "creature" from himself - "We are getting on. Nothing less like me than this patient, reasonable child, struggling all alone to shed a little light upon himself, avid of the least gleam, a stranger to the joys of darkness" (p.21) - he subverts his claim, unwittingly, by referring to "the goal I set myself in my young days and which prevented me from living...the desire to know what I am doing, and why" (p.22). Another telling resemblance which again Malone seems not to notice is the proclivity of both narrator and character towards mental arithmetic (see pp.15 & 30).

Strengthening this sense of partial identification with his central character

is the fact that Malone uses very similar or homologous metaphors in describing his own as well as his "creature's" mental state. For instance, five pages after speaking of "the babel raging in his [Sapo's] head, the doubts, desires, imaginings and dreads" (p.21), we find him writing of his own confusion in these terms: "Words and images run riot in my head, pursuing, flying, clashing, endlessly" (p.26). This empathetic metaphorical correspondence is occasionally extended to other characters as well. Two stand out in particular: Mrs Lambert, the farmer's wife, and Lemuel, one of the staff of the asylum, who features prominently in the concluding pages of the narrative. The consciousness of the former is characterized in a way that echoes the two examples cited above: "Her mind was a press of formless questions, mingling and crumbling limply away" (p.45). The latter's mind is "crawling with cobras, not daring to dream or think and powerless not to" (p.97), while within Malone "the wild beast of earnestness padded up and down, roaring, ravening, rending" (p.23). The degree of empathy implied in such metaphoric parallelisms, and in Malone's consonant, figural "psycho-narration" in general (see Dorrit Cohn, p.115) exists in inverse proportion to the character's complacency in the face of the world's suffering and his unshaken, unquestioning acceptance of his own identity and worth, social, religious or personal. The self-esteem of the pig-slaughtering *salaud*, Lambert, and the idiotically blithe charity of Lady Pedal, "a huge, big, fat, tall woman" (p.114), are ranged in caricatural disdain alongside "the toffs" - "I mean fine handsome men six foot tall and over and all in keeping but the head, small from over-breeding" (p.57) - against the restrained pity of the more sensitively drawn portraits, such as that of Mrs Lambert in the drab misery of her domestic and conjugal hell, or of Lemuel, the agonized *héautontimorouménos*.

As the narrative proceeds, the only measure of diachronic advancement provided by the vague and intermittent references made by Sapo's anxious parents to "the decisive moment" of his approaching examination, the setting (now almost exclusively that of the Lambert's farm) becomes far more concretely realized, and in particular

the interior of the livingroom-cum-kitchen of their mean dwelling is described in considerable detail, replete with that kind of chosiste symbolism that Balzac made so much of, evident in this passage, for example: "[Mrs Lambert] lit the lamp where it stood at its usual place on the chimney-piece, beside the alarm-clock flanked in its turn by a crucifix hanging from a nail. The clock, being the lowest of the three, had to remain in the middle, and the lamp and crucifix could not change places because of the nail from which the latter was hung" (p.42). The muted theme of the suffering Christ figure runs through the entire Trilogy, usually, as here, present only in the apparently chance juxtaposition of everyday objects. (Molloy provides a good example of this kind when, shortly after observing a team of little grey donkeys hauling a barge with "a cargo of nails and timber, on its way to some carpenter I suppose," he lies down in a ditch "at full stretch, with outspread arms" pp.27-28).

In this phase of the narration Sapo is in fact displaced from the limelight, both as focaliser and character, by the Lamberts (as Malone himself notices with some concern (p.44)), and his psychological nature and development is no longer a subject for the narrator's direct "psycho-narration". His motivation too is left obscure, most prominently in that Malone does not even pose, let alone attempt to answer, such questions as, Why does Sapo spend so much time with this poor peasant family, watching in silence as Mrs Lambert goes about her chores? And the only significant action of the entire episode - Sapo's decision to leave home - takes place off-stage and without discussion.

At the same time as Malone fleshes out these minor characters (particularly the wife) and makes them and their world the focus of his story, he apparently becomes more engrossed in his narrative than he has been up to now. This alteration in the quality of narratorial attention, implicit perhaps in the greater density of realistic detail, the "wealth of filthy circumstance" so deplored by Molloy, is expressed also in the degree of facility with which Malone tells his tale. The earlier

part of the narrative is related jerkily, in short, choppy scenes and sudden, gauche changes of topic. Stylistically, both the brief, verbless periods that act as paragraph titles (for instance, "The summer holidays" p.22; "The market" p.24; "The peasants. His visits to" p.24) and the little fits and starts like, "Sapo loved nature, took an interest. // This is awful. // Sapo loved nature, took an interest in animals and plants" (p.19), or, "He attended his classes with his mind elsewhere, or blank. // He attended his classes with his mind elsewhere..." (p.15), bear witness to the difficulty Malone has in launching his story, and to the state of his inventive powers, teetering on the brink of exhaustion - and even over it on occasion, as in the declaration of impotence with which he breaks off from the passage dealing with Sapo's perception of the political economy of his district, "In his country the problem - no, I can't do it" (p.24). Such aposiopesis, and such metanarrative comments as "This is awful" and "What tedium" fall away as Malone gets his eye in, and starts to shift his narrative perspective with an unannounced, Flaubertian fluidity between the outer world, depicted in vivid sensory detail, and the inner world of various characters, notably Mrs Lambert.

Although this increased absorption in the story on the part of the narrator tends on the whole to reduce his presence as mediator and presenter in that the scenes of the narrative stand forth more vividly in their own right, Malone remains in one respect as garrulous as ever, exercising his narratorial *fonction idéologique* without inhibition. He passes judgement, draws conclusions both moral and factual, and indulges at will in his "taste for generalization" (p.82) as he extrapolates from the given details of his story to the state of affairs in the "real world". He gives his authoritative opinion on a diversity of subjects, from the propensity of rabbits to die of fright before they are killed (p.43), to the way people mourn their deceased acquaintances (p.46), and in a variety of discursive lengths and depths, from the apothegmatic one-liners, such as "The dolt is seldom solitary" (p.18), to the little essay, complete with hypothetical examples, like that on the

subject of futile tasks (pp.42-43). As is generally the case, this digression starts out as an explanatory comment on a specific action in the narrative, but this function is soon eclipsed as it becomes clear that Malone is really more interested in defining a universal truth than in discussing the behaviour of his characters, evident in the intrusion of the pronoun "one" that ousts "she" (Mrs Lambert) as the subject of the meditation, the use of the present tense in its atemporal or gnomic aspect ("But the moment comes when one desists..." p.42), and in the reference to hypothetical categories of experience.

The first part of Malone's story is closed rather than simply ended, with a passage tinged with a mood of wistful valediction, as the Lamberts summon up "such memories as [Sapo] had left them, helping one another and trying to agree," (p.46), as though Sapo were truly dead. This mood, charged with the Lambert daughter's unspoken feelings of attachment to Sapo, and the impressive piano judgement of the narrator, "But we all know that little flame and its flickerings in the wild shadows. And agreement only comes a little later, with the forgetting" (p.46), indicates that the major biographical ellipse which follows is not unpremeditated.

In the nine pages that separate the first two phases or chapters of his story, Sapo is not mentioned by name, and we learn nothing further of his character or history. However, during this narrative hiatus Malone's musings give evidence of a significant change in his attitude towards his hero. To a certain extent this is nothing more than a belated recognition of a prevailing state of affairs: the recognition that Sapo is more than an ordinary fictional character, but, to some degree, a persona, a representation or re-creation of its author. In the first episode Malone laments his inability to make Sapo distinct from himself, other than himself (p.17), and applauds himself when he feels (quite mistakenly, as we have seen) that he has succeeded in adding a touch to his portrait that is not a reflection of its author (p.21). But in the final paragraph of the writing that divides parts one and two of Sapo/Macmann's life-story our narrator accepts that he cannot "make a little

creature" except in his "own image" (p.54). At the same time the aim of his story-telling changes. At first the "game" of telling himself a story is just that, an amusement, a diversion, a pastime, something to take his mind off himself and to give him access to "a world unsullied by my presence" (p.17). Now the game takes on a more serious, mythic aspect. No longer is it a question of a mere character, but "my little one...a homuncule...a little creature to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say" (p.54). This new perspective on the relation between author and character prepares the way for an imaginative investment that goes beyond that involved in "making up" a fictional character, or even James' "beautiful infatuation": "the intensity of the creative effort to get into the skin of the creature; the act of personal possession of one being by another at its completest" (op. cit., p.66). For suddenly, after the reference to "a little creature to hold in my arms" where the role of the persona is like that of a doll, a substitute for someone on whom to lavish the affection that has no other object, and which recalls the relationship Malone speaks of having with his "real" self, "who took me in his arms and told me to stay with him always" (p.23), Malone says something that alters the picture drastically: "And seeing what a poor creature I have made, or how like myself, I shall eat it" (p.54). This fantasy of ingestion relates less to the myth of Chronos, I think, fearing usurpation at the hands of his offspring, than to the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist: as the believer partakes of the transubstantiated essence of Christ, so Malone imagines taking into himself a talismanic reflection of his own externalized essence, in a narcissistic sacrament of self-communion. In this view of the creative act the (unavoidable) links of identity between author and persona become the *sine qua non* of a mythic enterprise that would make the self visible and accessible to an ego that is ontologically insecure, unsure of its own being.

However, as the objective of the game alters, so do the conditions of play, and Malone comes up against a new kind of obstacle. If the fictional character is to

be created in the image of his author, he must be granted a degree of autonomy; he cannot be merely a puppet whose strings are manipulated by its creator. This requirement alters the fictional status of the narrative, from that which is "made up" - narrative discourse in which invention and representation are but two aspects of the same process - to that in which the story has a mimetic role, representing something that pursues its own independent course. The first chapter of the story demonstrates a certain confusion of these two perspectives. On two occasions Malone stumbles upon questions about his narrative which he cannot answer: he cannot say why Sapo was not expelled from school "when he so richly deserved to be" (p.18), nor whether the grey hen that enters Mrs Lambert's kitchen is the same hen, every time (see pp.31-32). But these factual lacunae appear rather as comic anomalies than as a serious challenge to the overt fictionality of the narration; the absentminded narrator merely forgets for a moment that his is the power to decree, with as much precision as he likes, what "actually" took place and why, and the dominant mode is plainly one of fabrication, the story being an improvisation in which the narrator is both omniscient, knowing all he chooses to know about his characters' minds and histories, and omnipotent, as when he decides that "I shall make [Sapo] live as though he had been punished according to his deserts" (p.18) or when, capriciously exerting his power, he halts the passage of time in the fictional world: "I stop everything and wait. Sapo stands on one leg, motionless, his strange eyes closed. The turmoil of the day freezes in a thousand absurd postures. The little cloud drifting before their glorious sun will darken the earth as long as I please" (p.22-23).

A very different approach, one in which the story-teller's role is altered from that of an ostensibly omnipotent creator to that of a passive witness, is announced in the very first sentence of Malone's resumed narrative: "I have taken a long time to find him again..." (p.54). The hero of the story is no longer to be created *ex nihilo*, or simply summoned into being upon the required scene; he has to

be discovered in the world of the story: "I ran him down in the heart of the town, sitting on a bench" (p.55). That this is more than merely a fanciful way of inaugurating a new chapter of the story is borne out by the fact that throughout the seven pages of the tableau that forms the first of the two scenes of the middle section of Malone's narrative, he maintains this "objective", passive, narratorial stance, his knowledge of Macmann limited to what he can "see" and what he can deduce on the basis of this "visual" evidence. What has befallen our hero since he left the Lambert's farm can only be guessed at in the most general terms: "What can have changed him so? Life perhaps, the struggle to love, to eat, to escape the redressers of wrongs" (p.55). In fact, the narrator cannot even be sure that he has the right man, a doubt that is dismissed with the thought that it really makes no difference: "No matter, he is mine now, living flesh and needless to say male."

Malone proposes to "slip into" his character, "I suppose in the hope of learning something" (p.55), but this fruitless imaginative descent is made into "a stratum, strata, without debris or vestiges" (p.55), and he can tell us no more of Macmann's thoughts and feelings than of his lost history. Instead he embarks on a detailed description (two and a half pages in length) of the external appearance of the figure before his mind's eye, elaborating his "empirical" observations with tentative speculations about the origins and nature of his clothing. After this meticulous and exhaustive descriptive discourse, we might expect a resumption of the narrative proper, but Malone's new stance of narratorial passivity forbids him to force his "creature" into motion, or perhaps it is simply that he can come up with no plausible motive for him to do anything: "The trouble is he does not move. Since morning he has been here, and now it is evening" (p.58). And so our exasperated witness-narrator, having presumably spent the (fictional) day depicting his motionless character, must keep the "story" going without recourse to "action", and consequently enters upon another descriptive passage, this time detailing Macmann's surroundings. Once again the immediacy of the visual is heightened by the use of the

instantaneous present tense, and there is even a brief moment of scenic beauty: "The water cradles already the distant fires of the sunset, orange, rose, and green, quenches them in its ruffles and then in trembling pools spreads them bright again" (p.58). This lovely example of the descriptive topos that Beckett handles so well, the play of light on water, is immediately and typically offset by the suffering of animate beings and the uglier aspects of the scene that Malone goes on to mention: "the dreadful cries of the gulls that evening assembles, in paroxysms of hunger, round the outflow of the sewers, opposite the Bellevue Hotel. Yes, they too, in a last frenzy before night and its high crows, swoop ravaging about the offal" (p.58). Once more the narrator returns his attention to Macmann, and once more there is nothing to report, so that Malone is forced to broach yet another description, this time of the populace emerging from their places of work. Here he is far less scrupulous in adhering to appearances, and the perspective of the passage hovers between the visual and the conceptual, the observed and the known, as he traces the social habits of the townsfolk in the iterative present tense.

All the while, and in stark contrast to both the bustle of the throng and the enforced garrulity of the narrator, Macmann remains seated, mute and inert, his posture "so stiff and set in the sharpness of its planes and angles, like that of the Colossus of Memnon, dearly beloved son of Dawn" (p.56). It is only by a desperate and tenuous shift that Malone is able to make his lifeless hero the focus of a discourse that resembles narration. Although nothing is known of his immediate past, and his present is that of a statue, the necessities of life and the lever of logic provide Malone with a hypothetical entry into Macmann's future: "But it must not be thought he will never move again, out of this place and attitude, for he has still the whole of his old age before him....He will therefore rise, whether he likes it or not, and proceed by other places to another place....Because in order not to die you must come and go, come and go..." (p.60). In the passage which follows, developing this theme, until it is interrupted in full flight and mid-sentence by the spasm

that brings this phase of the story to a sudden end, Macmann's role as a persona begins to acquire some weight, as he starts to become a character into whose thoughts and attitudes those of the narrator may be projected. As the passage slides suddenly from the particular and the trivial into the general and the visionary, and the nominal subject veers between the universal "you" of the theoretical gloss and the third person referring to Macmann, Malone's discourse upon "terminal waiting" clearly reflects his own situation and his own fears: "And perhaps there is...no morrow any more, for one who has waited so long for it in vain. And perhaps he has come to that stage of his instant when to live is to wander the last of the living in the depths of an instant without bounds, where the light never changes and the wrecks look all alike..." (p.61). Significantly, it is in this passage that the derisive name Saposcat ("knower of dung") becomes unbearable to Malone, and is replaced with Macmann, "son of man", which both strengthens the idea of the relationship between author and character as that between parent and offspring, and brings the central "fictional" figure of the book into line with the "gallery of moribunds" whose Irish names all begin with an M.

If there is felt to be an allusion to Christ in Macmann's name, this is certainly strengthened in the second episode of the central section of the narrative, in which our hero lies upon the ground, cruciform, beaten by a "heavy, cold...and perpendicular rain" (p.71). But the suffering of this "son and grandson and great-grandson of humans" takes place in no grand drama of sacrifice and redemption. Like the scene that precedes it, this section of Malone's narrative is written in a single unbroken paragraph (of eight and a half pages), and it is similarly devoid of all but the most rudimentary historical linkage and consequential action. There is nevertheless action of a kind. After the narrative abortion occasioned by Macmann's inertia in the previous scene, where the hero is effectively *hors du monde*, staring sightlessly before him, here he is to be found *en situation*: the circumstances in which Malone is "fortunate enough to circumscribe" his hero (p.72) demand a reaction

to an unpleasant stimulus. Macmann is discovered in a heavy downpour far from shelter, and his mental and physical responses to this predicament become the fragile thread of narrative action that holds the "episode" together. It is minimalist action to be sure, composed only of mental acts - saying things to oneself, fancying, supposing, wondering - which are concerned exclusively (with one notable exception) with the contingencies of the weather and the terrain, and of corporeal actions of the most limited significance - lying down, rolling over, extending the arms, clutching at the grass, buttoning and unbuttoning a coat - but its temporal sequence is clearly defined and, moreover, constantly linked to a theory of motivation, and held together in a chain of pseudo-logical coherence.

Having nothing to narrate forced Malone into digressive scene-setting and a social, impersonal, treatment of human experience; here the little motions of Macmann's mind and body in response to his environment are not merely symbolically analogous to the story-teller's own situation (one of waiting and suffering), but provide Malone with the means to depict an earlier stage of his own cognitive development, while avoiding the embarrassments of direct recall. The impression that our narrator is, once more, speaking from experience is strengthened in his proleptic aside, "the age he will reach, as I know to my cost, without serious mishap" (p.72), so that we recognize in Macmann's confused association of suffering and guilt a primitive version of Malone's own metaphysical understanding. At the same time, Malone the narrator is at pains to voice his intellectual superiority to his "creature", and his narration is full of corrective and informative comments, often directly critical of Macmann's views, be they meteorological ("as if there were a relation between violence and duration [of rain]" p.67), medical ("But he fancied that the nape of the neck and the back right down to the loins were more vulnerable than the chest and belly, not realizing that..." p.67), or logical and metaphysical, as in, "as if there existed a relation between that which suffers and that which causes to suffer" (p.71). The general upshot of Malone's greater wisdom in most of these

cases lies in a rejection of the spurious causal relations that seem to exist between different phenomena. Thus Malone can accept, as his creature cannot, that there is no necessary link between suffering and guilt, that human discomfort is contingent and accidental. In one respect however Malone is no better off than his hero. Taking up again the theme of waiting in a situation of temporal arrest, Malone says that Macmann has only possibly reached the stage of life at which he, Malone, has by implication arrived already:

But the better late than never by which true men...can acknowledge the error of their ways and hasten on to the next, was beyond the power of Macmann, to whom it sometimes seemed that he could grovel and wallow in his mortality until the end of time and not have done. And without going so far as that, he who has waited long enough will wait for ever. And there comes the hour when nothing more can happen and nobody more can come and all is ended but the waiting that knows itself in vain. Perhaps he had come to that. And when (for example) you die, it is too late, you have been waiting too long, you are no longer sufficiently alive to be able to stop. (p.70)

This second extended cameo of the central section of Macmann's story ends like the first with a brutal interruption, which leaves Macmann still rolling on the plain in the rain. In mid-sentence some unspecified physical shock wrenches the narrator's attention away from his fiction (p.75). Nine and a half pages later, during which interval Malone attends to some of his possessions, misses the fatal ebb, and loses his stick, the story of Macmann is taken up again, in a narrative mode worthy of the name, and which differs emphatically from the static, meditative and biographically unconnected scenes we have just examined. The third major phase of Malone's "creative writing" is cast in a much more definite narrative form; a

"story" gets under way at last. There is a distinct, summarizable sequence of events or processes in which the little cast of characters which the narrator assembles interact ~~with each other~~ in a gamut of emotional relations from love through to murder, set against the backdrop of a scenically detailed and geographically defined setting which forms a consistent fictional "world". The characters, most of whom are treated to a physical description as they are introduced into the narrative, are firmly delineated, and express themselves frequently in direct speech, or in letters and verses, or even in song, as does Lady Pedal. The simple preterite of temporally specific narration becomes the dominant verbal mode, and scene alternates with summary, highlighting and dramatizing the most important events in the traditional manner. At the same time there is a marked decrease in "ideological" commentary. Where Malone does intrude to voice his own opinions on things in general, such judgement is kept, for the most part, much terser than in either of the two earlier phases of the narration. The narrator himself remarks upon this change when, after delivering one of his extempore philosophical axioms, he brings his attention back to the story with, "But let us rather let events speak for themselves, that is more or less the right tone" (pp.92-93). This is not to say that we are ever given the illusion of the action unfolding unmediated before our eyes; indeed, in one specific respect - that of the narrator's *fonction de régie*, the way the story-teller organizes and presents his narrative to the reader - the presence of the narrator is more noticeable than previously. Thus Malone divides his account of Macmann's sojourn in the House of Saint John of God into three distinct "phases" (p.88), and he is sufficiently in command of his material to mark off, clearly and distinctly, illustrative incidents and examples, in this manner: "How understanding she was, and how good-natured, appears from the following anecdote. One day....End of anecdote" (p.87-88). The sense of a much wider historical amplitude and a far higher degree of narratorial control of this material which is imparted by such remarks stands out in strong contrast to the uneasy, almost static improvisations of the "slow" section,

where Malone can hardly be said to be telling a story at all. At the same time the narrative subject alters from the microscopic depiction of impressions and thoughts to the swifter delineation of grander emotions, such as the rise and fall of erotic passion, while the physical action of the narrative shifts from the most trivial of corporeal movements to the dynamic and momentous activities of love-making, murder and suicide.

These alterations in both narrative treatment (*discours*) and subject matter (*histoire*) are expressive of the narrator's state of mind. Perhaps the most evident evolution is Malone's growth in narratorial confidence, manifest in his more poised tone, urbane engaging the attention of his reader in such examples of the *fonction de régie* given above, and such leading questions as, "Does this mean that she stayed with him all the time? Why no..." (p.87). This change in narratorial manner is related to the fact that Malone now has a sense of where his story is heading, in outline at least; no longer on the treadmill brink of improvised invention, the narrator can pay more attention to the organisation and presentation of his narrative. This new feeling of directedness, after the meandering insignificance of the earlier "action", springs from the fact that Malone's fiction in its final phase is imbued with the sense of an end, in both meanings of the word, a goal and a conclusion. And they are related in this way, that the goal is to end. The point of the story is no longer simply to pass the time but has now a more specific ambition: to bring an end to itself, and at the same time, to bring an end to the story of its teller. This is now the particular purpose of the narrative, arising out of the talismanic identification between author and creature. Malone emphasises this new element of directedness in a proleptic comment in the first paragraph of the terminal narrative movement, while introducing Moll: "She seems called on to play a certain part in the remarkable events which, I hope, will enable me to make an end" (p.86).

It may seem odd that, with this end in view, Malone should introduce Moll at all, not to mention Lemuel and the other lunatics with whom Macmann is set adrift in

the vessel of death. But Malone's motive for this late influx into the *dramatis personae* is not too difficult to fathom. Macmann's late-flourishing bloom of love, while being in part perhaps simply a product of Malone's libidinous tensions, springs also ~~out of the~~ desire to make his character's life whole, as his own is not, so that it may indeed be complete, which, lacking its "little quota of love" (Molloy, p.89), it would not be. Needless to say, the temporal displacement of passion within the life-story, from the spring to the autumn, or should we say the winter, renders this most significant phase of the *éducation sentimentale* ridiculous, which suggests another possible authorial motive: the need to debase what is commonly portrayed as man's most fulfilling emotional state, in accordance with the principle that the best way to deal with inaccessible grapes is to decide that they are sour.

The function of Lemuel and the other characters who share Macmann's end is of a different order. Again we might ascribe Lemuel's presence partly to the demands of the plot. Suicide is simply out of character for Macmann (the necessary will-power is beyond him for one thing), and a natural death in bed, apart from being unbearably banal, would be difficult to time, and his end must come at precisely the right moment. Lemuel is the means of dispatch, the angel of death who may be unleashed at a moment's notice. A hint which strengthens this impression of Lemuel's special "meta-fictional" role is the fact that it is Lemuel, not Macmann, who is the subject of Malone's final syntactic splutters, in which the pencil, the literal object with which the narrator "kills" his characters, becomes confused with the fictional instrument of murder:

Lemuel is in charge, he raises his hatchet on which the blood will never dry, but not to hit anyone, he will not hit anyone, he will not hit anyone any more, he will not touch anyone any more, either with it or with it or with it or with or

or with it or with his hammer or with his stick or with his fist
 or in thought in dream I mean never he will never
 or with his pencil or with his stick or... (p.117)

The other characters Malone refers to, in plain contradistinction to Lady Pedal and the sailors ("two decent, quiet, harmless men, brothers-in-law into the bargain, there are billions of such brutes") as "my creatures" (p.115) have a different function again. In the meditative interlude that separates the two scenes of the central section of the narrative it is recalled by Malone that the mythic, talismanic links of identity between himself and his "homuncule" are not unique: Macmann is revealed as being one of a series of fictional incarnations, who are listed by name, in the chronological sequence of Beckett's heroes and narrators. Malone looks forward to the time when "it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones" (p.65). (Malone's inclusion of his own name in the list is disturbing, and seems to admit of two possible avenues of interpretation: within the mimetic frame of the single volume we might explain the inclusion either as an error due to his confused mental state, or as another example of Malone's existential identity crisis, where his concept of the "real self" as being inevitably and eternally disjunct from the conscious ego renders his self-image as much a fiction as any of the other characters; or, within the framework of the entire Trilogy, what we have here is another hint at the existence of the unnamed arch-narrator.) Determined that this end will be a real, final end, Malone decides in the closing section of his narrative to put all his totems in the same boat, tying off all the loose threads, and to take them all down with himself. Referring to this series of personae he says, "I want to put down in it [his exercise-book], for the last time, those I have called to my help, but ill, so that they did not understand, so that they may cease with me" (p.104). And thus he assembles his little group of "creatures", each of whom bears distinct marks of resemblance to one of the earlier heroes

or narrators.

The first is "a young man, dead young, seated in an old rocking-chair" (p.111) whose catatonic refusal of the world and the body (he eats not neither does he shit) make him a Murphy who has succeeded in entering upon his "slap-up psychosis". In the second cell Lemuel enters on his rounds is a man reminiscent of Watt, "whose only really striking features were his stature, his stiffness and his air of perpetually looking for something while at the same time wondering what that something could possibly be" (p.111). In addition, his speech recalls that of the heartily blasphemous reincarnation of Watt who appears at the end of Mercier and Camier. Furthermore, his epithet, "the Saxon" ("though he was far from being any such thing" p.112), emphasizes the fact that his is the only name that is not distinctively Irish. Lastly, he punctuates his speech with the exclamation "What!" (p.112), as a kind of nervous idiolectal tic. In the third cell "a small thin man was pacing up and down, his cloak folded over his arm, an umbrella in his hand. Fine head of white flossy hair. He was asking himself questions in a low voice, reflecting, replying" (p.112): evidently a senile Moran. The last of the group is "a misshapen giant, bearded," who "still loved the gloom and secrecy of the ferns" (p.112) but who is too lazy or exhausted to venture forth. The sketch of this "giant" is not too obviously Molloy (though his habit of scratching himself is a clue; see Molloy, p.26), but definitely bears some resemblance to Moran's vision of him: "He was massive and hulking, to the point of misshapeness" (Molloy, p.122). As Malone admits, mnemonic failure is responsible for blurring the outlines of these correspondences - "I don't know if they have changed, I don't remember" (p.112) - but the important aspect is not historical accuracy so much as the gist of this impulse to gather together in one place and apparently for the last time the discarded identities of these misfit and outcast personae, and perhaps to achieve, at the moment of death, a plenitude of temporal identities, of fractured facets of the global self, as envisioned by Belacqua in the "Dream of Fair to Middling Women". So it is that Lemuel raises his

hatchet, "on which the blood will never dry," not to hit anyone but, we surmise, to smash a hole in the hull of the rowing-boat, puncturing the fragile tegument between the bounds of the self and the vast anonymity of death.

Given this scenario of sympathetic magic and simultaneous extinction, timing becomes of crucial importance. The end is to be made at precisely the right moment, the death of the hero coinciding in time with the death of the narrator, so that the life of the latter may become at last, the very last, something formed and definite and conclusive, putting an end to the waiting that Malone fears may already have been going on too long ever to end. Thus the pace of the narrative becomes of central concern to the story-teller, and we find him adjusting this pace in accordance with his coenaesthetic intuition of his approaching demise.

The overall effect of this attempt to achieve a precise synchronization of erzählte Zeit with Erzählzeit is one of acceleration and a progressive shortening of temporal focus, a quickening that is manifest both within and between each of the three narrative phases of this final chapter. After the first paragraph of the initial phase, "that of the bed" (p.89), Malone pauses to record that "I feel in extraordinary form" (p.86). The corresponding narration at this point demonstrates a leisurely amplitude of treatment; plenty of descriptive detail and anecdotal illustration embellish the account of the affair between Hairy Mac and Sucky Moll. After a few pages however, the narrator's tone of poker-faced, ironic suavity, and the polished surface of his syntactical arabesques, suddenly breaks down into the bald flatness of, "A few words in conclusion on the decline of this liaison. No, I can't" (p.93), and a few lines later he bluntly announces, "Moll. I'm going to kill her" (p.93). After this spasm of impatience, Malone re-assumes with an effort his former tone, and it is only two pages later that Moll is finally dispatched, with the remark, "There is one out of the way at least" (p.95). Such metanarrative comment, the story-teller muttering to himself about his intentions and their execution, creates the impression of two distinct narratorial styles or registers, one for the novelis-

tic public, and the other a mode of self-address, made up of private, off-stage asides.

In the second phase of Macmann's life in the asylum, introduced with a weary, but premature, "A last effort" (p.95), there is a similar violent (and hilarious) disruption to the decorum of Malone's narratorial manner, where, midway through the depiction of a landscape, his impatience at the tardiness of his own story-telling bursts out again: "A stream at long intervals bestrid - but to hell with all this fucking scenery" (p.107). Once more Malone recovers his poise, to such effect that a page later we find him ostentatiously inviting his reader to view the prospect before him: "But let us cast a glance at the main entrance, wide enough to admit two large vehicles abreast and flanked by two charming lodges covered with Virginia creeper..." (p.109).

In the third and final segment of the narrative, the eight pages presenting the fatal excursion with Lady Pedal, the sense of haste grows progressively more anxious, until the disparity between Malone's controlled and stylish narratorial manner and the frank brevity of his private metanarrative comments falls away, and the last incidents are related in a terse narrative shorthand. Description is greatly reduced, and where present, is given in breathlessly brief, often verbless periods, such as: "The boat. Room, as in the waggonette, for twice as many, three times, four times, at a pinch. A land receding, another approaching, big and little islands. No sound save the oars, the rowlocks, the blue sea against the keel" (p.115). Psychological analysis and motivation fall away altogether as the action, the machinery of events that will bring the end, becomes paramount in the scrambling urgency of the last pages. Thus the impression of how quickly the story is told, both syntactically and in the larger stylistic domain of narrative presentation, functions as a dramatic correlative to Malone's sense of the imminence of his end.

There is another dimension in which the story is expressive of its teller's *état d'âme* - the "tonality" of the events themselves, as distinct from the narra-

tor's tone of voice. As it becomes more and more difficult for Malone to withhold his attention from his increasingly dolorous plight, his intensifying pain imposing itself more and more insistently upon his consciousness, and the poise of his narratorial manner, where it subsists, is increasingly indicative of a stoically heightened act of concentration, the action of his story is given a much more lurid and sensational turn. Erotic passion, extravagantly painted in the most repulsive of physical detail (yellowing skin, body odour, blubbery lips, toothless gums, vomiting, etc.), gives the mind something to fasten on amidst the distractions of a "grandiose suffering" (p.113). And in the last moments it is the vivid appeal of violence - the masochism of Lemuel, the brutality of the hatchet jobs on the sailors - that takes Malone's mind off his own discomfort. (Not that Malone is graphically explicit in the latter case - perhaps time is simply running out too fast at this point for him to go into detail - but what blood-letting horrors are conjured up behind the surface blandness of the second murder: "Going to meet him Lemuel killed him in his turn, in the same way as the other. It merely took a little longer" p.116.) These episodes, "remarkable events" indeed, stand in stark contrast to the low-key, hum-drum, quotidian incidents of the earlier fiction.

There is another respect too in which Malone's last literary efforts might be designated "escapist": for the first time, Macmann's adventures are manifestly not simple transformations of his creator's experiences. Malone has earlier voiced this need for novelty, for a fiction that is patently divorced from the dim memory of his own life, when his tale was at its most lifeless (after the scene in which Macmann will not be prodded into action): "Yes, what I need now is a touch of the unimaginable, coloured for preference, that would do me good" (p.65). In the concluding chapter of Macmann's story, this "sudden desire" (p.65) is at least partially realized, for here Malone's fiction becomes, in one sense of the word, fantastic. Not that he breaks any of the rules of what Kathryn Hume calls "consensus reality" (Fantasy and Mimesis, p.xi) - though the events related are improbable, they are not

physically or psychologically impossible - but here Malone, having established the shadowy links of identity between himself and his hero, clearly extrapolates beyond the realm of his own personal experience.

This element of "fantastic" invention intrudes gradually into the story. At first, the basic congruencies of the diegetic and intradiegetic situations strengthen the autobiographical feel of the fiction; like Malone, Macmann awakes to find himself in a bed, in a room, where he is at first cared for by an old woman, whose ministrations slowly become less and less attentive before ceasing altogether. Thus Moll emerges as a reflection of the old hag who feeds Malone and empties his pot, a manifestation of the archetype of the benevolent, nurturing and intolerable female which has its place somewhere in each volume of the Trilogy; and, just as Molloy cannot prevent an excruciating coalescence of the images of mother, lover and enchantress, so in Malone's fiction does this figure become a ghastly personification of sexual love, his need for novelty fastening onto and altering a "given" of his own life, transforming the relationship between nurse and patient into that of a grotesque geriatric love-affair. Even the erotic element does not arise *ex nihilo*, but has its cognate in Malone's "factual" world in the sight of the lovers in the window opposite his, of which he wistfully remarks, "Back and forth, back and forth, that must be wonderful" (p.67). And in the deliberate repulsiveness of their love-play we may see a chastening repudiation of the vestige of libidinous desire, that impulse so destructive to the ideal aseity of the self, which Malone expresses at about this point in his "non-story" (see pp.102-103).

After Lemuel takes charge, the disparity between diegetic and intradiegetic reality yawns, but nevertheless no completely extraneous or gratuitous theme is introduced, and so, for instance, the violence of the hatchet murders has its "real-life" counterpart in the "violent blow on the head" (p.98) dealt Malone by his unidentified visitor. Once more, the dramatic significance of the interplay between Malone's "fact" and "fiction" is to be noted, a significance which disappears alto-

gether if we, like Robert Adams, make too casual a fusion of the two diegetic levels of the book. In his careless reading this critic, on the premise that "[the narrative] consists of *disjecta membra* which the reader is under no great pressure to assemble, even supposing it were possible to do so" (p.103) and holding that "Malone is sometimes Malone but sometimes Saposcat and sometimes Macmann" (without further qualifying his copulative), makes out that what happens to Macmann happens also to Malone and vice versa, so that Malone has "actually" experienced (and somehow survived) the affair with Moll and the outing with Lady Pedal. While the traditional rationalist distinction between fact and fiction is never established with any solidity in Malone Dies, and sometimes disappears completely in a subjective fusion of experience and imagination (as in the transformations of Malone's room), to ignore it altogether in this clumsy conflation is to ignore what might be considered the primary theme of the work, certainly the mainspring of its dialectic structure, and to dismiss entirely the play of its realized tensions. It is not surprising then that Adams judges that the work "has never had a very good press, for reasons that are fairly clear. Though its basic situation is grimly absorbing...the narrative is often distracted and distracting" (p.102). On the contrary, as I hope I have shown in this chapter, Malone's narrative, both in its matter and its manner, its implicit interest and its dramatic significance, while often appearing to be written in the terminal stages of novelistic ennui, forms part of a fascinating and carefully crafted portrait of a man's consciousness, as he struggles, his memory dim, his senses fading and reeling, to muster the resources of his mind against the old enemies, boredom and anxiety, writing till the very last moment in "that kind of epilogue when it is not very clear what is happening and which does not seem to add very much to what has already happened or to shed any great light upon its confusion" (p.60). No great light certainly, but in the midst of darkness even a guttering candle-wick has its measure of drama, even nobility.

IV. THE CORE OF THE UNNAMABLE EDDY

The relation The Unnamable bears to the other volumes of the Trilogy, and, in fact, though with less precision, to Beckett's entire prose oeuvre, is disarmingly logical in so far as it presents a clear extension of certain lines of development or tendencies already projected in the preceding works. Two points are sufficient to establish a straight line, three to define a trajectory, though here the mathematical figure of the asymptote is evidently more suitable. The basic drift is fairly obvious when we consider what condition each successive narrator (re-locating the reactionary Moran to a pre-Molloy position in the series) is in as he composes his monologue, and may be loosely designated as a charting of the progressive attrition of ageing. In each case corporeal mobility, sensory perception, the memory, and a sense of social identity deteriorate and wither until in The Unnamable there is effectively no contact with the world at all, nor even a coherent mental image of ever having lived in the world. Of course, it is not just at this primary diegetic level that a definite tendency of excoriation is discernible, for at the same time as the relations between the narrator's mind and the world fade and blur the monologues move further and further away from the traditional form of the novelistic narrative into what Genette calls "l'espace sans limites et comme indéterminé de la littérature moderne", a movement definable in terms of "cette invasion de l'histoire par la commentaire, du roman par l'essai, du récit par son propre discours" (p.265). While Molloy and Moran indulge in extended passages of discursive commentary, both are anchored in the basic arc of their autobiographical narratives. Malone, as we noted, divides his time more or less equally between his fiction and his commentary. In The Unnamable the narrative function is further reduced, not only in length but also in substantiality, so to speak, until, in the case of Worm's narrative, what we are left with is rather a discussion about a potential story than an actual narration at

all. In this progressive hegemony of the immediate present, this obsessive foregrounding of the narrative instance itself, the fundamental elements of "the story" are stripped away or reduced to a parodistic vestige of their former selves. Setting or "staffage", as Malone puts it, is reduced from the fully-fleshed fictional world of Moran's narrative to the indeterminate, bare "place" in which Worm is tentatively located. The complexly drawn psyche atrophies, as does the network of social relations which define a human identity, and which both motivate and provide a canvass for "action". And, in the hands of a discourse that questions the validity of logical consequentiality at each step, this "action" becomes increasingly self-conscious and tentative until the *erzählte Zeit*, the time told about, is emptied of all events, and may be said consequently to have stopped passing at all. As a result "the story" is no longer able to represent events in a representation of the world, and thus becomes useless as a means to define or characterize a sense of identity that is based upon the accretion of experience in a temporal existence.

Given this schema of progressive excoriation, the term "development", suggestive of a constructive elaboration of earlier complexities of theme and structure into a unified and summative whole, needs qualification. In each work of the series the fundamental narrative conventions of the previous work are pared down, so the Beckettian notion of "depth", the "going within" which eschews the distractions and demands of the the world for the most isolated reaches of the self, is echoed in a Chinese box effect. Malone cannot command the mnemonic resources or the rhetorical voice of the confessing autobiographer. His attempt to grasp himself and apprehend the nature of what he is undergoing must be made with simpler, more restricted means: a running commentary on himself and his world, and a ramshackle fiction bearing some vague and tenuous relation to his own story. The protagonist of The Unnamable is deprived even of these means of passing the time. This paradoxical "development" that proceeds by means of an increasing penury of subject-matter and treatment, "the aliment" and "its manner of dispatch" (Proust and Three Dialogues, p.

124), is exactly congruent with Beckett's early and categorical views of "the creative process" to which we have referred above: "The only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction" (ibid., p.64). However, in the light of the Unnamable's experience, "spiritual development" must be stripped of all connotations of grace, harmony and peace, for the process that results in one's doing less, seeing, hearing, feeling, remembering and knowing less than one did before appears to lead neither to a stoic indifference nor to a primal or "pre-primal" stillness. The barriers that the earlier heroes sought to erect to shelter the self from the contingencies of what is felt to lie outside it become the walls of a prison, inevitably to be reinforced by the decay of the sensory continuum and the eventual demise of the body. The increasing unreality of the not-self, and the corresponding increase in self-absorption and the preoccupation with identity and authentic being, together with the lack of something against which these could be defined and given weight, results instead in an augmented state of anxiety and frustration. Whether the abnegation of the world be seen as saintly, psychotic, or simply the outcome of extreme old age, the torments of Beckett's eirons intensify instead of abating as consciousness is increasingly isolated and comes more and more to make itself the sole object of consciousness, a dual role bewailed by many thinkers since Hegel's unglückliches Bewusstsein - "the Alienated Soul which is the consciousness of self as a divided nature, a doubled and merely contradictory being" (The Phenomenology of Mind, tr. Baillie, p.251). And instead of achieving an essential a-seity of being, as dreamed of by Belacqua, distilled in utter self-sequestration, the self finds itself corrupted by an enemy within the citadel, as the Unnamable's obsession with the usurpation of his voice makes so clear, and which makes of this most introverted of works paradoxically the one of the Trilogy most imposed upon by a sense of the Other. Impotence, frustration and an agonizing sense of inauthenticity are the rewards of self-incarceration and self-contemplation, not the divine attributes towards which Murphy asp-

ires when he dreams of "his own little dungeon in Spain" (p.102): mind become its own sole abode and impregnable demesne.

There are a number of other respects in which the last volume of the Trilogy more specifically serves to dispel the fond illusions of earlier narrators longing to shed the tribulations of body and world. Perhaps the best example of this ironic, retrospective linking of The Unnamable to the rest of the opus in an anagnoristic disillusionment of the kind that Malone limns when he speaks of the wretch who is crushed beneath the weight of his wishes come true (p.22), is the bliss which Moran dreams of, speculating upon "the unspeakable satisfactions" offered by sensory deprivation: "To be literally incapable of motion at last, that must be something! My mind swoons when I think of it. And mute into the bargain! And perhaps as deaf as a post! And who knows as blind as a bat! And as likely as not your memory a blank! And just enough brain to allow you to exult!" (p.150).

The Unnamable not merely presents the disillusioning reality of such dreams but fulfils also certain predictive hints made by earlier narrators who seem at times to glimpse beyond their present identities a mysterious series of which they are only a temporary manifestation. Thus Molloy begins his story with a reference to those that may follow it: "This time, then once more I think, then perhaps a last time, then I think it'll be over, with that world too. Premonition of the last but one but one" (p.8)* and Malone speaks of his death-chamber as his "second-last abode" (p.63). Which brings us to the most direct and the most challenging aspect of

* The original French text foresees only one following volume (if this is what Molloy is referring to): "Cette fois-ci, puis encore une je pense, puis c'en sera fini je pense, de ce monde-là aussi. C'est le sens de l'avant-dernier" (p.9), suggesting that the structure of the Trilogy as a whole was not clear to Beckett as he commenced the work, and illustrating the groping, exploratory, and serial nature of his artistic "excavation"; while there is a definite sense of direction in which to proceed there is none of a clear theoretical overview of what remains to be achieved. Even at the commencement of Malone Dies, it seems, the idea of The Unnamable had not yet suggested itself to him; in a letter to Tom McGreevy in December, 1947, he wrote: "Molloy is a long book, the second last of the series begun with Murphy, if it can be said to be a series. The last is begun, and then I hope I'll hear no more of him" (quoted in Bair, p.372). The third person singular in the second sentence quoted is a significant hint of how Beckett perceived the whole business.

the relationship of The Unnamable to the other monologues, and one which reinforces the ever more constricted box within box within box shape of the Trilogy as a whole: the claim by the speaker* of this work to be the author of its precursors, just as Malone alludes to "the Murphys, Merciers, Molloy's, Morans" as his characters (p.65), and as Moran mentions the "rabble" in his head, "Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier and all the others" (p.147). The overall effect of such inter-textual supercession of authorship, each succeeding narrator consigning the former to the status of a character, and rupturing in a serial fashion the illusion of narratorial autonomy that is an inherent claim of the convention of the homodiegetic monologue, is one of a revelatory stripping away of inauthentic personae, again a motion of discarding the adventitious or false in a would-be descent to the core, the essence of selfhood. The title of the work, especially set against those of the preceding volumes, suggests that here some kind of bedrock is reached, some ne plus ultra of personal being, even if it proves ultimately to lie outside the realm of language, beyond the reach of the name.

Although the links of continuity between The Unnamable and its precursors are therefore strong, there is a clear qualitative difference which sets this work apart from all the others, as becomes evident when we consider its narrative instance. Unlike Molloy, Moran and Malone, the Unnamable is not a writer. As the present moment of composition invades the vacuum left by the collapse of the narrative, it comes in this book to occupy a contradictory position in the mimetic order in which the I-figure claims in his text to be the literal author of that text. Although the Unnamable does make a reference to the "manual aspect" of the "bitter folly" of writing (p.17), this is in a statement of its incomprehensible impossibility, and the dominant tenor of the discourse is clearly that of an oral or perhaps a purely

* This term, borrowed from the theoretics of lyrical poetry, is really more apposite here than its novelistic cognate, "the narrator".

mental nature.* Thus the writing before us imitates not writing, but language of a different kind - the language of an impromptu cerebration - and the monologue cannot be seen as a discourse that is externalized on paper by its (pretended) author, but as some species of interior or dramatic monologue. Again we might say that The Unnamable simply extrapolates a tendency already evident in preceding volumes - the recourse to an improvised, off-the-cuff sentence structure that we have discussed above, associated with oral rather than written discourse, a groping syntax that does not at its outset command a clear overview of its total shape or its referential import. This "syntax of weakness" comes to predominate in The Unnamable, forming sentences which change direction unpredictably, forgetful of their original premisses, which hobble on to an inordinate length in search of some point upon which to conclude, and which collapse suddenly into lame and arbitrary endings. But the difference is not only one of degree, because for the first time in the Trilogy the "old trick of the novelist" is abandoned, and the text, far from furnishing the manner of its own notation, presents a situation in which it is impossible for the speaker to record anything.

Naturally, The Unnamable is not unique in this respect, but may be related to the modernist genre of the stream-of-consciousness novel. And it is a characteristic of this genre to leave in abeyance the question of the provenance of the writing that purports to set before us the experience of its central character, as Michel Butor points out: "in the standard interior monologue, the problem of writing is purely and simply bracketed out, obliterated. How could this language arrive at being written, at what moment could writing recover it? These are questions left carefully in the shadows" (quoted in D. Cohn, p.175).**

* Despite such occasional references to the written medium as "But see, above..." (p.94) and "the comma will come where I'll drown for good..." (p.127; my emphasis), this remains the dominant impression given in any reading of the monologue that pays the slightest attention to its syntactic rhythms and "dramatic" quality.

** Genette too takes note of this characteristic of the interior monologue, but chooses one of his examples with uncharacteristic carelessness: "la narration

There are however several important differences between The Unnamable and "the standard interior monologue" which would make its inclusion in this genre an extremely uneasy one. Firstly, "the problem of writing" is not "purely and simply bracketed out" but, as we have remarked, is specifically addressed in the text, albeit in a way that presents us with a logical contradiction: the Unnamable, by his own account, both has and has not written The Unnamable. Dorrit Cohn outlines the problem in this way, but without really exploring why it exists:

For the Unnamable, the origin of the text remains undecided, though it is discussed at some length. His immobile position, "seated, my hands on my knees," let alone his identity of as a "big talking ball," offers little promise for the scribal act. "How, in such conditions, can I write, to consider only the manual aspect of that bitter folly? I don't know." And yet he asserts it as a fact: "It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee. It is I who think, just enough to write, whose head is far." We have here a last, ironically twisted vestige of the traditional imperative to motivate the connection between head and hand - in a text that, in most respects, abandons all semblance of realistic motivation. (p.177)

It seems to me that the contradiction admits of two possible avenues of interpretation, neither of which conclusively dispels the other. Either Beckett is here deliberately breaking a code of literary convention, and, in blurring the comfortable divorce between "fiction" and "reality" ("I" qua author am writing this, but "I" qua literary character am not) is challenging, if not mocking, the reader's very

extradiégétique n'est...pas forcément assumée comme narration écrite: rien ne prétend que Meursault ou Malone aient écrit le texte que nous lisons comme leur monologue intérieur...: c'est le propre du discours immédiat que d'exclure toute détermination de forme de l'instance narrative qu'il constitue" (p.240). On the contrary, Malone claims just as explicitly as Roquentin to be not just the author but the scribe of the work that bears his name. J. E. Lewin, translating the "Discours du Récit" into English (as Narrative Discourse; Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980), has kindly, but without acknowledgement of his alteration, replaced this erroneous example with "the Unnamable", which makes better sense.

willingness to suspend disbelief in the artifice of a make-believe author and his need for a traditionally realistic "connection between head and hand" which maintains the consistent surface of the illusion; or else, if we regard the whole matter dramatically, that is, in terms of the Unnamable's subjectivity, the contradiction may be read as a faulty and vestigial mnemonic remnant of an earlier activity that is somehow superimposed in his mind upon his present state of total corporeal immobility or even of total disembodiment. This latter hypothesis is given some support by relating it to a number of other impossibilities concerning the corporeal being of the "narrator/ narrated".

Initially, the Unnamable describes himself as a normally embodied human being, albeit in very strange circumstances. Totally paralyzed, being unable even to blink, his body is a purely passive receptor of sense impressions; certain tactile, visual and auditory stimuli seem to relate the speaker to some ill-discerned but perceptible physical environment. He claims to have seen Malone passing mysteriously before him, as well as some other figures that have moved at less regular intervals into his field of vision, and "dim intermittent lights" suggest a "kind of distance", leading him to suppose that "the place is no doubt vast" (p.9), although visibility is restricted by the "grey air" which, "spreading its fine impenetrable veils", is close to hand "murky", becoming, further away, "faintly opaque" (p.16). He also claims to have heard sounds, the exact nature of which he is unable to determine, but which suffice to convince him that he is not deaf, and lead him to conclude that "though the silence here is almost unbroken, it is not completely so" (pp.11-12). Soon however, a bare thirteen pages into the monologue, as the Unnamable turns in disdain from the "Murphys, Molloys and Malones" that have usurped his identity in the past, these paltry impressions of a sensory continuum are suddenly swept aside:

There, now there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me, no one comes towards me, no one has ever met anyone before my eyes, these creatures have never been, only I and this black void have ever been. And

the sounds? No, all is silent. And the lights, on which I had set so much store, must they too go out? Yes, out with them, there is no light here. No grey either, black is what I should have said. Nothing then but me... and this black, of which I know nothing...except that it is black, and empty. (p.20)

This cancellation of previous information, a typical motival pattern throughout the work, suggests that what the Unnamable has at first presented as a priori perceptual knowledge has in fact not really been sensory data at all, but a corpus of dianoetic "impressions". In other words, the Unnamable seems to have taken as real certain "thought images", defined by R. H. Holt as "A faint subjective representation of a sensation or perception without adequate sensory input, present in waking consciousness as part of an act of thought. Includes memory images and imagination images; may be visual, auditory, or of any other sensory modality, and also purely verbal" ("Imagery: The Return of the Ostracized", quoted in Arnheim's Visual Thinking, p.99). There are earlier hints that something of the kind is the case, as when the speaker mentions "the beings, things, shapes, sounds and lights with which my haste to speak has encumbered this place" (p.16; my emphasis). A clear example of how an idea antedates a related sensation in this unstable world is given a page later, as the Unnamable thinks about his eyes: "They must be as red as coals. I wonder sometimes if the two retinae are not facing each other. And come to think of it this grey is shot with rose, like the plumage of certain birds..." (p.17).

The tactile modality proves a little more resilient than that of the visible or the auditory, but not by much. Having renounced as illusory the sights and sounds that he thought he perceived, the Unnamable sets about a positivist defence of what he "knows" about himself: "I know my eyes are open, because of the tears that pour from them unceasingly. I know I am seated, my hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet, against the palms of my hands, against my knees....My spine is not supported....I feel my back straight, my neck stiff and free of twist and up on top of it the head, like the ball of the

cup-and-ball in its cup at the end of the stick" (p.20).^{*} However, as he describes how his tears flow down his cheeks and gather in his beard, he suddenly checks his account, like an author changing his mind over some detail of his description of a fictional character, deciding that he has no beard after all, and no hair, and no eyes either, only sockets, streaming with tears: "it is a great smooth ball I carry on my shoulders, featureless" (p.21). The next step is soon taken as the Unnamable sheds the last pretensions to a human body: "I'll dry these streaming sockets too, bung them up, there it's done, no more tears, I'm a big talking ball....I always knew I was round, solid and round, without daring to say so, no asperities, no apertures, invisible perhaps, or as vast as Sirius in the Great Dog, these expressions mean nothing" (p.21).

Thus the whole question of the physical being of the speaker is reduced to something that may be given an arbitrary and fantastic resolution; having no stable evidence of a perceived environment, but seeming unable, at least at this point, to countenance the idea that he has in fact no extended being, the Unnamable ascribes to himself the simplest, purest three-dimensional form, the sphere. And thus the opening paragraphs of the monologue clearly serve to demonstrate the failure of the speaker to locate himself within a phenomenal world, and his early attempts to describe himself and his situation ("revolting word" p.27) in empirical terms may be seen, as may his reference to "the manual aspect" of writing, as recalcitrant and confused mnemonic relics of an earlier order of things, which, if at some previous time it was apparently tenable, is certainly false as regards his present state, and which, along with his notions of "God and man, nature and the light of day, the

* Reminiscent, of course, of Malone's Macmann, seated on the bench, whose posture, a "double flexion of the body, first at the base of the trunk, where the thighs form a right angle with the pelvis, and then again at the knees, where the shins resume the perpendicular", is "stiff and set in the sharpness of its planes and angles, like that of Memnon, dearly loved son of Dawn" (pp.55-56). Although (in the case of the Unnamable) this posture is soon discarded along with the flesh that adopts it, its reverberations as a powerful visual image cast a strong tonality over the work that follows. If, as is common in many cosmologies, man's soul is conceived as a homunculus or mannikin situated in the head, for the Unnamable this figure is catatonic, sitting and staring sightlessly before him at nothing.

heart's outpourings and the means of understanding" (p.20) are now to be denounced, either as base "inventions" which have served "to put off the hour when I must speak of me," (p.20) or, more philosophically, simply as epistemologically useless topics of conversation, being "things that do not exist, or that exist perhaps, impossible to know, beside the point" (p.21).

This then is the most striking feature of the "narrative instance" (in so far as this term is still applicable): that the "narrator" finds himself in a sensory void. Even the predication of the emptiness as "black" is swept away before long: "All the rest I renounce, including this ridiculous black which I thought for a moment worthier than grey to enfold me. What rubbish all this stuff about light and dark" (p.22). Whether this purely mental realm be seen as the psychotic literalism of a Cartesian lunatic who has failed to find a cogito upon which to found the universe and its creator, and is consequently plunged in the vacuum of an existential solipsism, or the victim of a stroke (the Unnamable himself raises this possibility), the cruel life-support system of the benefactress who fed Malone continuing to function now unnoticed, or as the experience of a mind disembodied by corporeal death, is ultimately a fruitless subject of speculation. Such a literal, objective identification of the narrative instance is impossible since from the opening lines of the work the reader's perspective is located within the speaker's subjectivity, and must therefore participate in his ignorance on such questions. Intimations of a post-mortal state are of course strong, given the major emphasis on death and decay throughout Beckett's work (not to mention Malone's comment about "it" all being over with his demise, "unless it goes on beyond the grave" p.65). For the mind/body dualist the book embodies a disturbing prospect: given the basic divorce of the extended and the unextended, bodily death specifically does not entail the end of mental life, but may have the chilling corollary of utter and absolute isolation, since intercourse with other minds is conducted solely, it appears, through the medium of the senses. Death, then, when the sensory interface with the world breaks down, is quite literally a case of there being "no communication because there are no veh-

icles of communication" (Proust, p.64). But we need not become preoccupied with ideas of an eschatological phenomenology to enter the drama of the work before us; we have mentioned some of the philosophical and psychological aspects of the emotional and sensory disengagement which afflicts to some extent all of Beckett's "people", a dehiscence of self and world which the author in this work simply takes to its logical extremities. What is indisputable is that a sensory *époche*, similar to those conceived at a theoretical level by Descartes, Bergson and Husserl, has become an existential fact for the speaker, and that his concerns are those of a purely dianoetic or metaphysical nature. Abandoning the question of whether he is at rest or in motion, the Unnamable designates his real subject: "let us then assume nothing, neither that I move, nor that I don't, it's safer, since the thing is unimportant, and pass on to those that are. Namely? This voice that speaks..." (p.23).

A second major difference between The Unnamable and the "standard interior monologue" arises directly from this absence of a sensory world. Valéry Larbaud, quoting Joyce's remarks about his (Larbaud's) pioneering work of the genre, Les Lauriers sont coupés, writes of how, in this narrative form "le déruolement ininterrompu de [la pensée du personnage principal], se substituant complètement à la forme usuelle du récit, nous apprend ce que fait ce personnage et ce qui lui arrive" (quoted in D. Cohn, p.273). In The Unnamable, the principal character does nothing and suffers nothing except mental events. Usually the interior monologue, while presenting the thought processes of the hero, paints at the same time a fairly full, if subjective, picture not only of his actions, but of his surroundings, of the sights and sounds, the olfactory and tactile impressions that constitute the sensory level of his experience. And often, of course, the monologue serves to manifest a rich interplay of sensation and reflection, as in, for instance, Joyce's own work. (The very term "stream of consciousness", as originally defined by William James, specifically includes other "mind stuff" besides the verbal or pre-verbal coinage of cerebration, that is, the "stuff" of the subject's sensory continuum. See his Principles

of Psychology, vol.I, pp.166-271.) The sensory sequestration of the Unnamable naturally precludes this "staffage", and deprives him of the kind of present state reportage that served Malone as such a valuable resource when his imaginative energy flagged. The spontaneous dollops of vividly detailed personal reminiscence that fatten and variegate the monologue of Molly Bloom, for instance, often sparked off by some sensory stimulus, are similarly unavailable to the Unnamable, his recollections being dim, niggardly scraps from the stories of his "vice-existers" and little bits and pieces of general knowledge.

A third significant difference between the discourse of the Unnamable and the "standard interior monologue", no doubt connected with this lack of such spontaneously occurring material, lies in the degree of self-consciousness and intentionality with which the verbal articulation of the character takes place. The mimetic aim of the canonical monologue intérieur is, to quote Auerbach, "to render the continuous rumination of consciousness in its natural and purposeless freedom" (Mimesis, p.538). The degree to which this "continuous rumination" is mimetically informed by the verbal utterances which serve to present, represent or symbolize it is a moot point, and one which can only be fruitfully discussed in relation to individual works and authors. Faulkner, for instance, seems to penetrate more radically into the realm of pre- or non-verbal consciousness than does Joyce in Molly's monologue, and Ulysses itself consists of a whole range of approaches in regard to the extent of mimetic literality, the extent, that is, to which the language that appears on the page is or is supposed to be a direct transcription of the words and sentences that the character actually says (or hears - an inescapable ambiguity for the Unnamable) silently to (or in) himself. It is clear that the mind of this narrator/narrated is engaged with language in an entirely different mode from that of Mrs Bloom. Her "continuous rumination" is entirely unconcerned with the problems of self-expression. Although occasionally linguistic topics become the subject of her thought ("and that word met something with hoses in it" p.675), the words with which

those thoughts themselves are formulated never do. That language is invisible or at least transparent to her, and her self-communion is an uncritical meandering of associations. Beckett's monologist, on the other hand, while similarly liable from time to time to a chance or unconscious linkage of subjects, is constantly and acutely aware of language as a thing in itself, and of the relentless business of choosing what to say next, and how to say it, of selecting words and shaping sentences, structures which frequently loop back on themselves in critical appraisal and emendation. Moreover, instead of a random musing, "which is neither restrained by purpose nor directed by a specific subject of thought" (Auerbach, p.538), his consciousness is engaged in an intense process of intellection. Molly Bloom's thoughts flow effortlessly from one subject, one predication, to the next, and apparently without her becoming aware of their linkage to each other, while the discourse of the Unnamable strains with the effort to make such connections ("Moreover, that's right link, link, you never know..." p.100), and clatters with the blunted cogs of a frustrated, wheel-spinning, ratiocination. And though the thread is often lost, and the specific direction or purpose of such efforts may be unclear or unstable, that there is some such goal, however little value may be attached to it at any particular moment, is inherent in that very effort. Like many of the Shakespearean soliloquies, the discourse displays a mind in the act of seeking understanding, clarity, resolution, a mind ferreting this way and that like a mouse around the smooth marble plinth of some Big Question: Who am I? What am I? What is my nature? Do I have a function? The consciousness at work here is intensely active, however alienated it feels itself to be from the origin of the thoughts it entertains, not, as in the case of Joyce's heroine, a passive reflector, content simply to note its own drift on a sea of already formed opinions, incurious speculations, and well-fondled reminiscences.

It is not only in this - that the mind portrayed, or rather, given voice to, is consciously engaged in a problem-solving mode of cerebration - that the discourse of the Unnamable bears a greater resemblance to a dramatic or lyrical monologue than

it does to a novelistic *monologue intérieur*. One of the three "characteristic and distinctively new features of the technique" identified by Auerbach is the "elaboration of the contrast between 'exterior' and 'interior' time" (op. cit., p.538). Discussing a passage from Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse in which an "excursus" of two pages gives "a representation...of what goes on in Mrs Ramsay's mind while she measures the stocking" that she is knitting against her son's leg, Auerbach remarks on the contrast between the duration of the "exterior event" (which "cannot have taken up more than a few seconds") and that of the representation of the "inner event", "which takes a greater number of seconds and even minutes than the measuring - the reason being that the road taken by consciousness is sometimes traversed far more quickly than language is able to render it, if we want to make ourselves intelligible to a third person" (p.537). In The Unnamable, by contrast, because the words offered to the reader are (or pretend to be) actually the words uttered or experienced by the character himself, no such distinction between *erzählte Zeit* and *Erzählzeit* is possible. And there can be no contrast between objective time and subjective time simply because there is no objective time, no minutes, hours, weeks, years, no day and no night, no seasons, no heavenly bodies, nothing at all to measure or even to indicate the passing of time except for the temporal succession of the utterances themselves.

Because of this, and the lack of any external action, the expressive qualities of these verbal structures as temporal entities - the musical aspect of the text, its syntactic rhythms and intonational tunes - are raised to a higher level of importance in the total aesthetic of the work than is generally the case in narrative fiction. Like verse, or the truly dramatic *monologue*, The Unnamable needs to be *performed*. All written discourse consists of verbal, phrasal and syntactic "codes" which, sensitively "decoded" in the act of reading, produce what may be called "voice tunes". "A given syntax demands its own proper intonation curve, rises and falls in the pitch of the voice appropriate to the structure and meaning of what is

written" (R. Fowler, p.62). And these intonational structures may be organized or related to each other in temporally dynamic patterns, giving "a palpable rhythm...of voice tunes" (ibid., p.63)* which may, in the hands of a skilful writer, span and stress the whole of the work, shaping as it does so our impression of the "speaker's" state of mind. The monstrous distortions of normal syntactic and intonational patterns which cover pages and pages of The Unnamable in massive unbroken periods, which exhaust and strain to its limits the reader's faculty of syntactic apperception, are but the most obvious feature of the total rhythmic structuring of the text, which, given its dramatic context, is a major aspect of the work's expressive power, and one which has not received the critical attention it merits. Many commentators have referred to the general effect of an "accelerated forward progression" as Fletcher puts it (The Novels, p.192), but very little has been done to investigate in any detail the temporal shape of the monologue, and the general impression of a formless effusion needs to be eradicated. Porter Abbot, for instance, claiming that the work has no "appearance of beginning and ending" (p.124), deems the effort to "discern patterns or discover some overall shape" misguided, as the discourse is "solely a matter of voices", whose "formal achievements occur at the molecular level of [its] prose" (p.134). But speech, like music, has always some temporal shape, even if it is a chaotic one. And there is an added need for a temporal "map" of the text as a critical instrument when we consider how its imagery functions, how succeeding images arise, are elaborated, criticized, then abandoned, only to reappear later in distorted echoes and multiple variations as the Unnamable attempts to formulate some coherent picture of his predicament or as he relates his absurd, surrealist tales. Whereas in the earlier volumes certain images rear themselves from the ground of their context as archetypes of summative or central importance (Molloy's

* Fowler goes on to point out that such rhythm is "literally palpable only in reading aloud....But the silent reader also may be said to experience the intonational structure of the text, in so far as he grasps the structure of the surface syntax in his decoding - he experiences an imaginative apperception of pitch and tune" (p.63).

ruins, for example, or Malone's twin piles of sand), in The Unnamable such images become at once more numerous and less durable or conclusive, displacing each other constantly. Thus the disposition of such images within the stream of discourse becomes in itself an important element of the book's rhythmic structure, the tonality or relative significance of each being in turn modified by its place in that structure, and "shadow" and "babble" are no longer usefully analyzed as separate or ultimately separable dimensions. I shall attempt then, in a more or less diachronic study of the work, a simultaneous or rather an intercalative treatment of these two primary aspects.

It is, of course, not feasible to analyse The Unnamable into the traditional novelistic components of parts and chapters, nor into units of narrative action which such textual divisions usually serve to emphasize. Of the eighteen paragraphs of which the writing consists only the first seventeen really function as paragraphs, where changes of topic or view-point are reinforced by typographical breaks in the text, and these occur only in the first twenty pages - what the Unnamable calls a "preamble". What follows, the "statement", is a formidable chunk of unbroken prose, wherein we may distinguish two major sections: first that in which the three main narrative efforts are made, and then "the core of the eddy", the frantic outpouring of the last forty odd pages. This tripartite schema must not be regarded as reflecting a clear-cut textual partition, as there is a great deal of overlapping and interspersing of themes and moods, but it is convenient to identify these three major shifts.

The preamble or exordium serves not only to introduce the basic elements of the speaker's situation and the chief questions that his subsequent discourse will return to worry at again and again, but also, to some extent, as a kind of illustration *en abîme* of the form of the whole work. The book opens with a groan of lassitude, the stuttering, staccato syntax emphasizing the bitter weariness of the effort

to drag the mind into consciousness. There is no wonder in the emergence of the first words of this awakening, no freshness or élan, but a dazed and disabused anxiety, and a tedious, nagging sense that this beginning is not really a beginning at all, but some kind of continuation, that "I" have been somewhere else, someone else, at some other time. Self-critical afterthoughts short-circuit the syntactic energy of the incipient sentences before it has a chance to establish any momentum, either sarcastically ("Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on" p.7) or in flat self-contradiction ("Otherwise it would be quite hopeless. But it is quite hopeless" p.7), giving a nauseating choppiness to the periods, and where the syntax aspires to something more ambitious in the way of a connected statement it loses its way amid parenthetical emendations and collapses into confusion, as in this example: "The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter" (p.8).

Gradually a more resourceful, philosophical tone emerges as the speaker, in more manageable, regular, shortish sentences, attempts to gather his wits and what he may affirm about his situation. No longer is it merely a matter of ejaculated "Questions, hypotheses, call them that" (p.7), but an effort is made to link observation and judgement in a rational fashion ("let us try and see where these considerations lead" p.10), and the coherence of inter-sentence connection is strengthened as initial But's, For's and So's litter the pages, the assurance of his tone and syntactic control firming sufficiently to allow for moments of an almost declamatory rhetoric, as in, "The fact that Prometheus was delivered twenty-nine thousand nine hundred and seventy years after having purged his offence leaves me naturally as cold as camphor. For between me and that miscreant who mocked the gods, invented fire, denatured clay and domesticated the horse, in a word obliged humanity, I trust there is nothing in common" (p.19).

In this mid-section of the exordium (c. pp.9-19), as the speaker traces tentative tracks of thought, picking his way hesitantly between the contradictory avenues of advance that are engendered by his maieutic interrogatives, the chief themes of the book are mooted in the form of dyadic contraries. Interspersing the descriptions of his "surroundings", the Unnamable launches shafts of speculation into the questions of his origins, his past experience, if he has had any, and his future prospects. These two threads of the discourse - an "empirical" examination of his present circumstances and a contemplation of his being in a broader temporal and metaphysical perspective - are dialectically interwoven to some degree as the speaker attempts to draw inferences from the former (the "empirical" component) to the latter (for instance, "from the unexceptionable order which has prevailed here up to date may I infer that such will always be the case?" p.10), and moves back to check his hypotheses against the former (for example, "The next time they enter the field ...I shall know they they are going to collide...and this will perhaps enable me to observe them better. Wrong. I continue to see Malone as darkly as the first time" p.13). The two chief concerns of his metaphysical inquiries are the nature of time and the nature of his own being as an autonomous self. From the polar oscillations that dominate these speculations - time is static or circular / time is dynamic or linear; the self is active, has power over itself / the self is passive, impotent, determined by something outside it - emerge the essence of the book's "intrigue" in a dialectic of doubt.

The Unnamable's conception of time, and his extension in it, stresses initially a need for order, permanence and eternity: "Nothing has ever changed since I have been here....All has proceeded, all this time, in the utmost calm, the most perfect order, apart from one or two manifestations the meaning of which escapes me" (p.10). "All change," in this apparent haven from the ravages of time's hunger, is "to be feared" because any change "would be fatal and land me back, there and then, in all the fun of the fair" (p.12); back, that is, in the temporal realm where the

stability or simply the continuity of the self is threatened by the deformations of experience. The speaker must, "if only for the sake of clarity," assign a beginning to himself and his abode, preferably at the same instant, but, in the absence of evidence for any entropic process, does not foresee his end. "Hell itself, although eternal, dates from the revolt of Lucifer. It is therefore permissible, in the light of this distant analogy, to think of myself as being here forever, but not as having been here forever" (p.12). And within this "forever", whatever happens seems bound simply to go on recurring, like the orbit of Malone, "with the punctuality of clockwork" (p.10). The only phenomena which might escape this rigorous pattern of repetition are the lights, "shining strong one minute and weak the next" in a "truly unpredictable" fashion, and the collision and disappearance of two figures, "oblong like men," "an event that has only occurred once, so far" (p.13). Neither of these however presents any very strong evidence of a principle of disorder in the system, as the lights "are perhaps unwavering and fixed and my fitful perceiving the cause of their inconstancy" (p.10), while the collision is confidently expected to recur.

This predisposition towards a state of absolute changelessness, where experience is confined to the endlessly reiterated manifestations of a closed and predetermined system, is extended "inwards" to apply also to the speaker's mind. Taking up and completing an aborted notion ("Here all things, no, I shall not say it" p.10) five pages after having abandoned it ("I have said that all things here recur sooner or later, no, I was going to say it, then thought better of it" p.15), is in itself a suggestion that the Unnamable's thoughts tend themselves to recur cyclically, being mere permutations of a closed universe, an idea which he articulates elsewhere with particular satisfaction: "What I say, what I may say...has already been said since, having always been here, I am here still. At last a piece of reasoning that pleases me, and worthy of my situation. So I have no cause for anxiety....I am not heading for disaster, I am not heading anywhere, my adventures are over, my say said" (p.18). This is the haven the Unnamable would ascribe to himself, an eddying

backwater of time, where nothing can go wrong, since everything has in effect already taken place, and the self, being as predetermined as the clockwork universe it discerns (or projects) around it, is absolved of all responsibility and worry. And yet the speaker is unable, despite his reasoning, to still his "incomprehensible uneasiness" (p.11). Having "no cause for anxiety" (p.18) he remains anxious; his closed universe of reiterated experience is not as secure as he would convince himself it is. The prospect of change in a temporally dynamic system is typically Janus-faced. On the one hand the speaker is "afraid of what my words will do to me, my refuge" (p.19). This fear, taking up a notion that intrudes late in Malone's chronicle ("my notes have a curious tendency, as I realize at last, to annihilate all they purport to record" p.89), seems to stem not so much from the prospect of extinction (in fact, "to end would be wonderful, no matter who I am, no matter where I am" p.18) as from the prospect of finding himself still enmeshed in a different kind of cycle from that of the safe reiterations he envisions, an endless cycle of an exhausting ascent to a little pinnacle of spurious self-knowledge, to be followed by an inevitable fall into ignorance and self-exile: if his present "story" should prove no more valid than those of his "vice-existers", it will eventually have to be abandoned, like its predecessors, entailing the "obligation...to begin again, to start from nowhere, from no one and from nothing and win to me again...a stranger first, then little by little the same as always, in another place, where I shall say I have always been" (p.18). This gives rise to the idea of speaking without saying anything, of a self-annulling discourse that will make no claims to be subverted, erect no edifice of belief to collapse about his ears. But "it seems impossible to speak and yet say nothing, you think you have succeeded, but you always overlook something, a little yes, a little no, enough to exterminate a regiment of dragoons" (p.19). On the other hand, the Unnamable does not despair "while saying who I am, where I am, of not losing me, of not going from here, of ending here" (p.19). But this hope of attaining "the living rest" (p.22) where consciousness might be totally

at one with the totality of the self, beyond the need for language in an endless, changeless moment of self-embrace, necessitates the acceptance of change, and its accompanying anxiety, of going from "here", from safety, into the unknown. And so the Unnamable vacillates between two ambivalent conceptions of time, each with its consolations and its pitfalls: if nothing can change, time merely repeating itself, nothing can threaten what I am now, but there is no possibility of escaping the cycle, of ending; if, on the contrary, time really is passing, I might be able to come to rest, but I might also lose myself and have to start all over again, and again, and again.

The question of the autonomy of the self is subject to a cognate ambiguity. For most of the "preamble" the Unnamable adopts a stance of complete passivity, absenting himself from the proceedings: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me" (p.7). Some other party is responsible for the whole business, filling his mind with baseless ideas about the world, mankind and God, implanting false memories, and foisting false identities upon him, whose carcasses (Malone, etc.) now litter his environment. This denial of involvement has, paradoxically, a self-preservative or narcissistic component too: a total disinvestment from experience leaves the self blameless; unengaged, it remains beyond judgement, potentially perfect. Nevertheless, the Unnamable rails bitterly against those "gentlemen" he accuses of usurping his self-determination and corrupting his nature: "One in particular, Basil I think he was called, filled me with hatred. Without opening his mouth, fastening on me his eyes like cinders with all their seeing, he changed me a little more each time into what he wanted me to be" (p.14). Suddenly however, in the vehemence that closes the preamble, erasing in a burst of irritation almost everything that has been asserted so far, the Unnamable sweeps aside his oppressors and adopts an antithetic position to that of helpless victimization - solipsism. He is the creator, the source both of "all these Murphys, Molloyes and Malones" (p.19) whom he has taken himself to be, and of "Basil and his gang", the "prompters" whom he now

claims were "invented", along with "God and man, nature and the light of day, the heart's outpourings and the means of understanding, all invented, basely, by me alone, with the help of no one, since there is no one, to put off the hour when I must speak of me" (p.20).

The other major thematic component of the exordium, interwoven with both the nature of time and the self, and similarly cast in the terms of an irresolvable ambivalence, is the subject of the discourse itself. The most basic, unquestionable condition of the Unnamable's existence, the *sine qua non* of his being, is the act of speech, the "obligation" to "manifest" himself in words and sentences (p.12). But is this an innate compulsion, an essential aspect of his being that could cease only if he did, or is it an obligation imposed upon him by some other party, which might have its term, leaving him in the quiescence of non-verbal consciousness? And if the obligation, whether inner or outer, is teleological rather than simply phenomenal, what exactly is its end, and how is it to be achieved? Is it a case of simply uttering, with the least mental effort (p.16), until some process is completed, or is there something specific to be said, something to be repeated, or invented, or confessed? And if so, can the speaker, through his own efforts, hasten his deliverance from this task? As the preamble closes in its systolic spasm, each of these perspectives has been endorsed with varying degrees of conviction, but the only lasting intuition the Unnamable has about the discourse that issues from him, or sounds within him, is that in the final analysis, which he feels has now been made, its only subject is himself: "Nothing then but me....That then is what, since I have to speak, I shall speak of, until I need speak no more" (p.20).

The "statement" makes something of a false start. Having thrust aside all the carefully elaborated vestiges of a phenomenal world, the constituents of which clearly serve to ensconce an ontologically vulnerable ego in a safe and unchanging haven - locating himself at the centre of a "charmed circle" in which his lifeless

figments revolve in fixed and regular orbits about him, or approach him with imploring eyes,* but have no power to move or disturb him (p.15) - the speaker reverts momentarily to a corporeal empiricism in describing his posture and his tactile sensations. Soon however, this "distant testimony" of embodiedness is "quashed" (p.21), and he ascribes to himself the simplest, most primal three dimensional form, and the sphere, long a symbol of perfection, becomes for him a kind of lived mandala, an atom of selfhood, smooth, self-enclosing, inviolable, presenting the least possible surface for contact with whatever may be outside it. Size is unimportant, "all that matters is that I am round and hard...rather than of some irregular shape and subject to the dents and bulges incident to shock" (p.21-22). The symbol of the circle or sphere features somewhere in almost all of Beckett's works, but it is in Malone Dies that it starts to become specifically linked to the idea of an ideal form or "shape" for the spirit or psyche. In addition to the roundening of Malone's room, which we discussed, Macmann dreams of being "a great cylinder endowed with the faculties of cognition and volition" (p.75). And in the third of the "Texts for Nothing" the speaker imagines being merely a "head, nice and round, nice and smooth, no need of lineaments...almost a pure spirit" (No's Knife, p.85).

Unfortunately, the billiard ball of perfect integrity as which the Unnamable pictures himself does not find a corresponding self-sufficiency at his dianoetic level of being. It is just after having described himself thus that he launches his first major hypothesis on what prevents him from being or from attaining a state of finished a-seity, in terms of what is demanded of him by some one else: "between me and the right to silence, the living rest, stretches the same old lesson, the one I knew by heart and would not say, I don't know why, perhaps for fear of silence, or thinking any old thing would do, and so for preference lies, in order to remain hidden" (p.22). The "lesson" to be repeated is "my life I used to know and would not

* This particular figure, though never identified by the Unnamable, is suggestive of Molloy, who, as envisioned by Moran, "hastened incessantly on, as if in despair, towards extremely close objectives," seeking "refuge near the centre" (p.121).

confess" (p.22) - but he is simply unable to link his present state to an authentic memory of a "life" in the world, and turns instead to examine "this voice that speaks" (p.23).

The subject of the voice is accompanied by the first flurry of syntactic panic, a gasping accumulation of loosely anaphoric clauses in which the mind's focus is reduced to a series of asyndetically joined atoms of utterance:

It issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my walls, it is not mine, I can't stop it, I can't prevent it from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know, it's round that I must revolve, of that I must speak, with this voice that is not mine, but can only be mine, since there is no one but me... (p.23)

The inner voice, towards which Moran turned his hopes of becoming his own man, and which Molloy regarded as having the authority of an "imperative", has now become an agent of torture, the very means of an invasion of the self by some tyrannical "Other" who continuously ruptures the Unnamable's longing for wholeness and silence. And yet, with typical ambivalence, this voice is also a source of hope, for a page later the Unnamable speaks of a "murmur" that, while his attention was occupied with one of his "fairy-tales", told of "another and less unpleasant method of ending my troubles" (p.24), presenting "a certain number of highly promising formulae" which, if recalled, might "engender others and finally, in an irresistible torrent, banish from my vile mouth all other utterance, form my mouth spent in vain with vain inventions all other utterance but theirs, the true at last, the last at last" (p.24). Unfortunately however, "All is forgotten," and the "highly promising formulae" being apparently unsusceptible to rational reconstruction, the speaker's situation in respect of this hope is reduced to that of waiting, and the present function of speech

merely a means of passing the time.

Having reached such a view, and weary of questions and reasoning, the Unnamable "goes silent" for a period of time designated initially as "years", during which he makes the disconcerting discovery that even though he has stopped talking, speech of some kind continues: "I listened. One might as well speak and have done with it....I strained my ear towards what must have been my voice still, so weak, so far, that it was like the sea, a far calm sea dying..." (p.25). This break is given no typographical emphasis (the French original at least has a full stop after "Assez de questions, de raisonnements" (p.36), marking the pause syntactically; the comma in the English is quite probably a misprint (it would certainly not be the only one of its kind in the book, which, admittedly, must be a proof-reader's nightmare), and the eye races on to the resumption without pausing.

The mention of a unit of earthly time brings Basil to mind ("Years is one of Basil's ideas" p.25), Basil who, despite his dismissal as a fable "invented to explain I forget what" (p.20) some five pages earlier, is now "decidedly...becoming important." Immediately the Unnamable resolves to call him Mahood instead, an alteration that is not merely an expression of disrespect towards this arch-usurper who has "lived in my stead, issued forth from me, came back to me, entered into me, heaped stories on my head" (p.25), as the imposing "Basil" (from the Greek word meaning "king") is changed into one of the generic Irish M-names that designate the series of the Unnamable's "vice-existers", prefiguring the shift he (Basil/Mahood) will soon undergo, from "prompter" to character. The theme of the usurpation of the speaker's voice, and hence of his identity, here brings fresh purpose to, and a new justification for, the continued act of speaking. Mahood's voice has been "woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I was, what I was, so as to have done with saying, done with listening" (p.25). Such being the case, a possible solution is to wear out the false voice of this insidious pedagogue who will not let the Unnamable rest in ignorance ("I always liked not knowing, but Mahood said it wasn't right. He

didn't know either, but it worried him" p.25). The motif of voiding, emptying or excreting the false or the adventitious by expressing it (also in the sense of "pressing or squeezing it out") recurs frequently in the last movement of the book, and is fundamental to the speaker's spirit of "negativism".* This project gives rise to a mood of determination, and to a clearer re-statement of the Unnamable's goal: "I want to go silent. Not as just now, the better to listen, but peacefully, victorious, without ulterior object. Then it would be a life worth having, a life at last. My speech-parched voice at rest would fill with spittle, I'd let it flow over and over, happy at last, dribbling with life, my pensum ended, in the silence" (p.26).

The notion of a "pensum", unconsciously substituted for that of a "lesson" to be recited, sets off a new train of thought in which Mahood is for the moment forgotten, and the idea of there being something specific to be said regains dominance over that of simply speaking until the foreign influence is exhausted. "Yes, I have a pensum to discharge, before I can be free, free to dribble, free to speak no more, listen no more, and I've forgotten what it is. There at last is a fair picture of my situation" (p.26). The Unnamable takes a real interest in investigating this hypothesis ("Squeeze, squeeze, not too hard, but squeeze a little longer, this is per-

* Wolheim, in his stimulating and cogently argued essay, "The Mind and the Mind's Image of Itself", summarizes Freud's theory on the "Two Principles of Mental Functioning" with these words: "the two modes of thought - the acceptance of a thought present to the mind, or its rejection, that is, affirmation or denial - can be seen as a development out of the two ways in which the earlier ego, acting uniquely under the pleasure principle, deals with elements in its immediate environment, either introducing them into itself or expelling them...[And] if libidinal attachments once decline in significance and destructiveness becomes predominant, denial asserts itself as the natural attitude of the intellect" (p.42). The spatial or positional implications of such a conception of how we deal with the thoughts that present themselves to us are more vividly expressed in Wilfred Bion's account of the origins of thinking, according to which (again in Wolheim's words) "the processes [of introjection and expulsion of mental stimuli] are themselves grounded in the biological processes of feeding and excretion or rather in their psychic representation - the experiences, that is, of feeding and excretionIn its own terms Bion's account closely parallels Freud when it depicts the schizophrenic as so overwhelmingly assimilating a thought to a bit of the body, a bad and persecuting bit, that the only course feasible to him is to evacuate the thought, conceived of now either as faeces or as totally fragmented and dissolved into a stream of urine" (op. cit., pp.42-43).

haps about you, and your goal at hand"), but, as ever, investigation merely serves to turn up manifold obscurities, multiplying rather than reducing doubt. First he wonders whether the pensum is a punishment, and if so, for what transgression, before asking himself how it might be related to the lesson which, even were he to "hit upon the right pensum, somewhere in this churn of words at last" (p.27), might still lie between him and the right to silence, "unless of course the two are one and the same, which obviously is not impossible either." And moving backwards to question a much earlier assumption, he comes to doubt whether what he is required to say is something about himself after all, and not, for instance, "rather...the praise of my master, intoned, in order to obtain his forgiveness" (p.27). The prose gathers momentum here as the possibilities multiply, and a tone of sardonic relish makes itself felt in the comments the speaker makes about having suddenly so much to talk about: "So many prospects in so short a time, it's too much....Rich matter there, to be exploited, fatten you up, suck it to the core, keep you going for years, tasty into the bargain, I quiver at the thought, give you my word, spoken in jest, quiver and hurry on, all life before me, on and forget, what I was saying, just now, something important, it's gone, it'll come back, no regrets, as good as new, unrecognisable, let's hope so..." (pp.27-28). This jaunty, flippant energy is maintained, combined with a more vitriolic note of sarcasm, as the Unnamable goes on to the next subject: the master himself, he who has imposed the pensum. Here the humour of mock-seriousness has a very obvious butt - the notion of a bevevolent Creator:

My master then, assuming he is solitary, in my image, wishes me well, poor devil, wishes my good, and if he does not seem to do very much in order not to be disappointed it is because there is not very much to be done, otherwise he would have done it, my great and good master, that must be it, long ago, poor devil....There he is, ever since I came into

the world, possibly at his instigation, I wouldn't put it past him, commanding me to be well, you know, in every way, no complaints at all, with as much success as if he were shouting at a lump of inanimate matter*.... I want all to be well with you, that's what he keeps on dinning at me. To which I reply, in a respectful attitude, I too, your Lordship. I say that to cheer him up, he sounds so unhappy. (pp.28-29)

Suddenly however, the mood dissipates, and the whole notion of a teleological purpose to the discourse, having tumbled into absurdity, is thrust bitterly aside, repeating the pattern of the preamble, in a despairing vision of a pointless eternity:

Idle talk, idle talk, I am free, abandoned. All for nothing again....All this business of a labour to accomplish, before I can end, of words to say, a truth to recover, in order to say it, before I can end, of an imposed task...to perform, before I can be done with speaking, done with listening, I invented it all, in the hope that it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end....All lies. I have nothing to do, that is to say nothing in particular....Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak. No one compels me to, there is no one, it's an accident, a fact. Nothing can ever exempt me from it, there is nothing, nothing to discover, nothing to recover, nothing that can lessen what remains to say... (p.30)

His composure threatened as never before by this utterly bleak picture of an endless

* A clear prefiguration of Worm's situation, naturally, and an illustration of how, in the Unnamable's discourse as in Malone's, seemingly inconsequential "seeds" of thought come to germinate much later on, with no explicit connection being made.

and senseless damnation, the Unnamable calls for the "next instalment, quick", and must rein in his hopelessness curtly: "No cries, above all no cries, be urbane, a credit to the art and code of dying..." (p.30).

The "next instalment" turns out to be one of Mahood's stories that, like "gob-bets in a vomit" (p.41), interlard the Unnamable's treadmill lucubrations. There are three major "narratives", two about Mahood and one pertaining to Worm, in addition to various "micro-récits" which range from what is really an elaborated image (like the parable of the task, pp.115-16) to the fully plotted short-hand novella that illustrates the nature of emotion (pp.124-25). These stories, however poor, barren or drab they may be in themselves, are imbued with a dramatic interest because of the light they cast upon the mind of him who relates them. Thus the manner of their telling, their discours, including commentary by the narrator on the nature and specific function of the act of narration, must be seen in relation to the overall diegetic situation. And, because of this setting or framework, the constituent matter of the histoire, the existents (people, things, places) and the actions of the narrated world are heightened in their propensity for symbolic suggestiveness, yielding images that pulse and resonate in the reticulum of the narrator's metaphysical associations and obsessions.

The Unnamable's sense of involvement in the tales he relates is highly variable. Before actually commencing the first story, that of Mahood and the rotunda, he considers the prospect of being obliged, "in order not to peter out, to invent another fairy-tale, yet another, with heads, arms, legs and all that follows..." (p. 23; my emphasis), accepting his part as author of his own "facetiae". But less than two pages later, it is to the chief tormentor, Basil/Mahood, that the stories are attributed, the Unnamable's role in the narration being reduced to that of a sort of ventriloquist's doll (p.25), and the stories themselves are seen as insidious attempts on the part of Mahood the pedagogue to dupe the Unnamable into an acceptance of his identity as the character Mahood. And so it is in a mood of mocking irony

that the Unnamable opens the first story, making clear his alienation from the adopted first person of the *erzältes Ich*: "This time I am short of a leg. And yet it appears I have rejuvenated....Having brought me to death's door, senile gangrene, they whip off a leg and yip off I go again....A single leg and other distinctive stigmata to go with it, human to be sure, but not exaggeratedly, lest I take fright and refuse to nibble" (p.31). In the last sentence, "I" refers again to the Unnamable in *propria persona*, and for the most part the ironic disjunction, marked explicitly at times by such parenthetical locutions as "Still Mahood speaking" (p.37) and "Mahood dixit" (p.38), between the narrated I and the narrating I is clearly maintained, though there are moments of hypothetical convergence, such as when, in an undeveloped and not altogether serious rumination, the Unnamable wonders whether he may not presently be located in the basement of the rotunda towards which the one-legged, wedge-headed Odysseus is making his way at the *in media res* inception of the narrative.

Actually there are two narrated selves in the pages that follow, and two superimposed narrative levels: the primary narrative substratum is that of the uniped globe-trotter, while, embedded in brief episodes within this story is that which relates how it was originally told by Mahood the prompter to the Unnamable. This secondary narrative, taking the form of a colloquy with only one speaker (Mahood the prompter), interacts with the primary narrative in such moments as, "Mahood must have remarked that I remained sceptical, for he casually let fall that I was lacking not only a leg, but an arm also" (p.37). Its plot is simple: Mahood is telling a story, and at the same time trying to convince the Unnamable that he (the Unnamable) is Mahood, the hero of that story. At a certain point in his narration, "the particular moment I am referring to, I mean when I took myself for Mahood" (p.33), he has temporary success in doing this. Then he says something which shocks his listener "profoundly", with the effect that he is "assailed by insuperable doubts" (p.38), and can no longer accept what Mahood says he did; to abandon the course of his "in-

verted spiral" on account of the sudden demise of his whole family, waiting impatiently in the rotunda for his arrival, is simply "incompatible with the creature I might just conceivably have been" (p.40). And so the Unnamable reasserts his autonomy in altering the story, giving it what is in his opinion a more vraisemblant ending.

The points at which the Unnamable affirms and then cancels his "adhesion" to the identity that is offered him in this tale are significant. The temporary coincidence of identities occurs at a moment of congruency of situation and attitude between the hero and the speaker. The decrepit traveller is crutching his way with agonizing slowness in ever diminishing circles round and round a rotunda that stands in the centre of a "kind of vast yard or campus, surrounded by high walls" (p.34). Being within this enclosure, its smooth surface "an amalgam of dirt and ashes" which "seemed sweet to me after the vast and heaving wastes I had traversed" (p.34), obviously appeals to the claustrophiliac in the Unnamable ("I almost felt out of danger!" he remarks), as much as the prospect of a gradual, inexorable winding in to the centre seems to answer to his need to locate himself at the very hub of his surroundings, such as they are. In addition, the Unnamable's dilemma about the finitude of time finds an emblematic embodiment in the possibilities that offer themselves to Mahood once having reached the mythic point of the epicentre: either his gyres will cease "for lack of room" and, "faced with the material impossibility of going any further" (p.33) his journeyings end in the middle of the circular room that occupies the whole of the ground-floor (hinting, of course, at a more serious autobiographical attempt to locate his present situation in terms of the narrative), or else, "by virtue of a supreme spasm", he will be "catapulted in the opposite direction and gradually leave backwards" (p.37), to retrace his voyage in reverse. If this were to happen, "once beyond the equator you would start turning inwards again, out of sheer necessity" (p.33), so that eventually the course of the return journey would concentrate itself around a point exactly opposite on the globe to the centre

of the rotunda, before reversing the process again on the same principle, to take Mahood home once more. Ultimately then, the pattern revealed is one of an endless shuttling back and forth between opposite poles, echoing not only the Unnamable's vision of temporal circularity but also his antithetical vacillations on this very question.

The other major "adhesive" force that leads the Unnamable to identify with Mahood is the latter's *état d'âme* as he circles the rotunda, being a state of slit-eyed concentration on the purely practical problems of his wayfaring which banishes all metaphysical problems and makes him totally oblivious to the world of human relations: "I was entirely absorbed in the business on hand and not at all concerned to know precisely, or even approximately what it consisted in. The only problem for me was how to continue...to the best of my declining powers, in the motion which had been imparted to me. This obligation...engrossed me in a purely mechanical way, excluding notably the free play of intelligence and sensibility" (p.36). The Unnamable likens the situation of this benighted creature to that of "an old broken-down cart-or bat-horse unable to receive the least information...as to whether it is moving towards the stable or away from it, and not greatly caring either way" (an image that is to recur some eighty pages later, re-worked as a metaphor for his own plight), stressing the passive, non-volitional nature of this determined "gression". The temptation of an apathetic release from desire and responsibility is such that "This touching picture of my situation I found by no means unattractive and as I recall it I find myself wondering again if I was not in fact the creature revolving in that yard, as Mahood assured me" (p.36).

It is when Mahood suggests that this creature abandons his helicoidal course on account of "the misfortune experienced by my family and brought to my notice first by the noise of their agony, then by smell of their corpses" (p.38), that the Unnamable rescinds any semblance of identification with the character of the story. Even though Mahood hurriedly tries to explain that this is not due to "a shrinking

of the spirit", but to "a purely physiological commotion, followed by a simple desire to vomit" that compelled him to "beat in retreat under penalty of losing consciousness entirely" (p.39), the Unnamable refuses to accept that such a humanly contingent impulsion could force him to disfigure the geometric purity of his journeying, causing him "to turn and set off in the other direction, before I had exhausted the possibilities of the one I was pursuing" (p.39). He rejects out of hand any consideration which would link him in the least way to his family and in his own, rewritten version of the tale is completely indifferent about whether it is "mother's entrails,...Isolde's breast...papa's privates or the heart of one of the little bastards" that he tramples underfoot in his last spirals, his only feeling being "one of annoyance at having to flounder in such muck just at the moment when my closing contortions called for a firm and level surface" (p.40). The point of Mahood's attempted deception in this matter becomes clear when we recall that what the pedagogues of the preamble (including Basil) were "most determined to make me swallow was my fellow-creatures. In this they were without mercy" (p.14). The Unnamable is prepared to acknowledge, for the moment, his having "floundered however briefly, however feebly, in the great life torrent streaming from the earliest protozoa to the very latest humans" and thus to accept the existence of a biological family, but "only on condition that my personal behaviour had not to suffer by it" (p.38). He will brook no challenge to his emotional solipsism, and Mahood's gaffe - "this story...in which I appear as upset at having been delivered so economically of a pack of blood relations" (p.39) - is treated with ridicule. The presence of the family, mercilessly lampooned in their idiotically ritualized conversations and their pathetic hymning, has in fact nothing to do with his approach to the rotunda: "Having set forth from that place, it was only natural that I should return to it, given the accuracy of my navigation" (p.38).

Having wrested authorship from his prompter, the Unnamable finds its responsibilities and decisions too onerous for him, and his assurance in discriminating the

vraisemblant from the invraisemblant is quickly shaken by the manifold possibilities of his newly acquired autonomy: "But is it certain?" he pauses to ask himself about his version of events, "would I have not been more likely, in a sudden access of independence to devour what remained of the fatal corned beef?" (p.40). This and other uncertainties result in a disgusted dismissal of the whole project, and another undertaking to eschew the putative world of "bodies and trajectories, sky and earth" (p.40), which re-introduces the subject of the provenance of this suspect knowledge, the anonymous preceptors: "What I speak of, what I speak with, all comes from them" (p.40). This time the desperate, panicky note that accompanies the paranoid theme of alienation and impotence is countered with renewed determination to attend to himself, his real self, at last: "It's of me now I must speak, even if I have to do it with their language, it will be a start, a step towards silence and the end of madness..." (p.40). His efforts, however, never really get under way, for the best he can manage is to speak about himself in terms of what has been done to him by "them", and the discussion keeps sliding back to its dominant topic - their motivation and methods in trying to make him "their creature" (p.41), until, after two pages, the Unnamable gives up again: there is "no use harping on the same old thing I know so well...which simply amounts in the end to speaking yet again in the way they intend me to speak, that is to say about them, even with execration and disbelief" (p.42). Under these conditions, being unable to control the discourse, the Unnamable decides to resort once more to the tactic of feigned acquiescence in reciting another of "their" stories purportedly about himself: "That's an idea. To heighten my disgust....I'll try and look as if I was telling it willingly, to keep them quiet in case they should feel like refreshing my memory" (p.43).

During the failed rebellion of this interlude between narrative episodes, the Unnamable's attempts to think and speak about himself display a tendency that is to become more marked in the later stages of the book, as his struggles towards self-knowledge increasingly take the form of a search for an apposite image, a concrete

conceptualization, rather than an historical or narrative explanation, of his situation. Perhaps Porter Abbot's most astonishing conclusion in his chapter on The Unnamable is that of the "two essential aspects of fiction" he finds the work to lack, one is "the presence of visual imagery" (p.124). (One must suppose that he is attempting to refer to the "worldlessness" of the narrative instance.) In fact part of the book's difficulty is that it is so replete with visual imagery, as David Albright stresses in his study of the "evanescent image" chez Beckett, Kafka and Nabokov. He writes of The Unnamable's

welter of brief, rigid images that dissolve, that disappear as soon as they are stated, images scarcely distinguishable from the commentary that connects them, images that are found as inadequate as quickly as they are configured....It is like a film strip in which each frame shows a different picture, so that the eye can seize nothing coherent. The Unnamable describes himself with such a ceaseless abundance of images...that no single image is held longer than an instant; each image drives out the image before it, as if the imagination's perfection consisted not in creating images but in extinguishing them. (p.170)

Actually, Albright over-emphasizes the lack of coherence in the imagery of the work. Granted, the images are volatile, and within the subjective spate of the Unnamable's thought, jostle, jar, contradict and displace each other dizzyingly as the pace quickens towards the end. But they also tend to recur, if not as exact duplicates, as cognate or isomorphic replicas, forming clusters or groupings. In the passage between the first and second Mahood stories (pp.40-43), for instance, as the Unnamable tries to formulate exactly how he has been denatured by his supposed educators, the individual figures group themselves around two main ideas: (i) "they" ve put something (or some things) into me which prevents me from being myself; and

(ii) "they" have put me into something, with the same result. Thus he speaks of having been "crammed full" of false or irrelevant "things", of having had "a set of words" rammed down his gullet, of having been "blown up with their voices, like a balloon" and, shifting the focus towards the redemptive possibility of expelling these foreign elements, of their stories as "gobbets in a vomit" and of how in the end he might purge himself, "as a starveling belches his odourless wind, before the bliss of coma." Interspersed among these images are others in which the Unnamable describes himself as being "so plastered with their rubbish" that extrication seems impossible, of being immured in a "cast" so close-fitting that his least gesture must move it, as if it were alive in his place, of having a "monster's carapace", being incarcerated in a dungeon, and of being "walled round with their vociferations." As we explore further illustrations of these image clusters it will become clear that the examples quoted above are not merely local congruencies or varieties of the extended metaphor, but take their place in an obsessive deployment of certain isomorphic motifs, forms or shapes which seem to gesture in frustrated, jangling concert towards some absent master image or archetype, thus evoking through a kind of multiple exposure a constellation of psychic forces, rather than symbolizing or representing it by any single realized figure.

Mahood's second story, a later episode from the life of the one-legged traveler, is prefaced by an emendation of the first tale which serves to dismiss the fantastic geometricity of his globe-trotting, re-immersing him in the bog of physical and psychological contingency: "I was under the impression I spent my life in spirals around the earth. Wrong, it's on the island I wind my endless ways....And my course is not helicoidal, I got that wrong too, but a succession of irregular loops, now sharp and short as in the waltz, now of a parabolic sweep...now between the two ...and invariably unpredictable in direction, that is to say determined by the panic of the moment" (p.43). This revision signals a shift of approach to the treatment of narrative setting in the second story of Mahood, whose remains, still breathing, but

of which "only the trunk remains (in sorry trim), surmounted by the head with which we are already familiar" (p.43), is now situated, "stuck like a sheaf of flowers in a deep jar," outside a restaurant in the Rue Brancion, opposite a statue that is apparently actually to be found in Paris, that of the "hippophagist" who promoted the consumption of horse-meat in that city. Predictably, the "chop-house" is close to the "shambles", in an area swarming with bluebottles and rats, through which the cattle "fat and fresh from their pastures, troop towards the humane killer" (p.44). Both of Mahood's stories lay grisly emphasis upon the more repulsive aspects of life (and death) in the flesh, and in both a comical absurdist tone results from the incongruously matter-of-fact banality of the social and narratorial response to these grotesqueries of existence, a tone which is heightened in the second "yarn" by the more realistically detailed background.

The mythical or archetypal resonance of the tale is somewhat muted by this use of an historical setting, especially when compared to that of the dauntless wayfarer, sweeping in his inexorable pattern across land and sea, but is manifested in essentially the same way, through the absurd predicament of the hero. Here, in direct antithesis to a life of perpetual vagabondage, is presented a human condition of almost total stasis. In the unnarrated interval between these two "phases" of Mahood's existence, his "carnal envelope" has lost all its remaining members, "with the exception of the one-time virile" (p.44), and in the course of the story the last two possibilities of voluntary motion (retracting his head into the jar, and jerking himself around to face in another direction) are annulled when his "benefactress", she who has assumed responsibility for feeding and cleaning Mahood, fixes around his neck a collar or cang of cement. This "billy in the bowl", prefigured at the start of the first story as "my next vice-exister" (p.31), represents an obvious step of mimetic convergence between the paralyzed and effectively disembodied speaker and his character, in respect of both corporeal stillness and "memberlessness". "Mutilate, mutilate, and perhaps some day, fifteen generations hence, you'll succeed in

looking like yourself" (p.31) is the programme. This speechless stump of humanity, for whom the old problem of "What shall I do?" (Molloy, p.10) has been restricted to an entirely mental field, represents a condition of the very least possible degree of autonomous conatory interaction with the material world.

In addition to this aspect of enforced corporeal passivity, and stressing the narrator's implicit attitude of consenting for the moment to be in the world, but not of it, is the motif of incarceration. The urn in which the amputee has been placed is a source of comfort rather than frustration, insulating its inhabitant from and defining his boundaries with his environment, acting in the context of the woman who tends him as a sort of artificial womb, an image which obviously appeals strongly to the Unnamable's need for enclosure. The jar's only drawback is in fact its incompleteness, and when, in snowy weather, Mahood's protruding head is shrouded by his protectress (significantly, the only act which he attributes to her "maternal instinct", p.46), it is not so much the benefits of warmth and dryness that move his stony heart to tears, nor a feeling of gratitude, but, we may surmise, the relief of being entirely enveloped once more, as in the days of the caul. And so it is that, as in the first story, a picture of grotesque human wretchedness and deprivation is invested with a symbolic allure in the ambivalent coils of the Unnamable's imagination.

This "story" is told in two major efforts (pp.43-50 & 56-62), divided by a passage in which the Unnamable returns to an explicit assault on his own problems, and broaches the prospect of a new story, that of Worm. The first narrative thrust covers a considerable period of *erzählte Zeit*, several years at least, during which the only two events worthy of the name, both actions on the part of Marguerite/Madeleine, serve to counter Mahood's tendency to withdraw into his jar. First the natural shrinkage of his trunk is offset by the addition of a layer of sawdust beneath his stumps, and then his habit of pulling in his head is quashed by the fastening of the collar about his neck. All the other "actions" of the story are either

routine, regular, "non-punctual" events, like the weekly cleaning and feeding, or are really descriptions of ongoing states of affairs. Although this "story" has a setting that complies with the conventions of realist fiction, its temporal agencement is not merely unusual but actually incoherent, echoing the narrator's ambivalent relation towards his tale: is he recounting a half-forgotten story told him by someone else, or is he improvising his own narrative? An act of narration generally deploys two temporal levels in a definite and fixed relationship to each other, classically, narrative time present ("I am telling you now...") to narrated time past (...what happened then"). Here the dominant temporal modes are the iterative and the durative present tenses, the conventional modes of background description. However, not only are there sudden lapses into the past imperfect (prompting a meta-narrative comment which highlights the narrator's alienation from his own narrative act - "Ah yes, sometimes it's in the past, sometimes in the present", p.44), but the two major, non-iterative events referred to above are related in a temporal perspective which could only be logical if narrative time and story time were co-terminous - like a "running commentary" - which is obviously not the case. On page forty-seven, the narrator describes how he is dwindling in size, so that, "Soon, at [his] present rate of decrease" he will be spared the effort of drawing in his head and shoulders and of closing his eyes to exclude the world, as his head will be permanently below the lip of his receptacle. But just a few sentences further on this happy prospect is shattered: "Wrong again, wrong again, this effort and this trouble will not be spared me. For the woman, displeased at seeing me sink lower and lower, has raised me up by filling the bottom of the jar with sawdust..." (p.48). Logically, the perfective aspect of the verbal phrase, "has raised me up", implies that the action has taken place after the time when the speaker mentions his dwindling, that is, while he has been speaking, which is manifestly implausible. The second "event" of the "episode" takes place in a similar "hole" in the temporal fabric: several sentences after recording, in the timeless present tense of habitual action, that despite the

addition of the sawdust, Mahood continues to move his head in and out of his jar, he mentions that "My little game...has cost me dear....And today, if I can still open and close my eyes, as in the past, I can no longer...move my head in and out, as in the good old days. For a collar, fixed to the mouth of the jar, now encircles my neck, just below the chin" (p.48). These contradictions in temporal structuring, undermining the consistency of the relation between the time told of and the time of the telling, have the effect of devaluing the proposed reality of what is related, and, in combination with the frequent, ironical meta-narrative comments by which the narrator distances himself from the story that he is telling, stress the Unnamable's growing inability to handle narrative form at all.

The interlude between the two parts of Mahood's second story begins with the discussion of a familiar failure - the failure to "cling" or "adhere" to a particular story, to endorse an identity and a location in earthly time and space - and returns to the theme of what is required of him by "them" before "they" will leave him "in peace at last" (p.51). And now it occurs to the Unnamable that he has not only to find the right words to satisfy them, but also to say them "in the right manner": "warmth, ease, conviction...as if it were my own voice, pronouncing my own words, words pronouncing me, alive" (p.52). Only then, having spoken of "the creature I am not, as if I were he," will the Unnamable be free "to do what I have to do, namely try and please the other...so that he may be pleased with me, and leave me in peace at last, and give me quittance, and the right to rest, and silence" (p.51). All of which is to be achieved, apparently, by "speaking...as if I were he, of the creature I am" (p.51). This "other", associated with "the master", he who "does not share this passion for the animal kingdom" (p.51), seems to demand not a biography but some kind of essentialist spiritual affirmation of identity. In terms of the extended metaphor of angling by which the Unnamable represents the relationship between himself and his indefatigable confessors, determined that he should "swallow" an identity, what this partially deified "other" hopes to land, his line falling

"plumb from the skies", is "her majesty, my soul" (p.56). His hook is baited with some pre-verbal, pre-rational psychic entity which the Unnamable derisively baptizes ("nothing doing without proper names" p.54) "Worm". Worm is to be a new kind of "vice-exister". His voice, or rather the voice that tells his story, has been heard thus far, according to the Unnamable, only as an unintelligible murmur, drowned out by the discourse of Mahood and his predecessors. To articulate this murmur becomes the new task of the Unnamable, one subject more than ever to his tendency to procrastinate. First he decides to go back to "another of Mahood's yarns...to perfect my besotment" (p.54-55), before becoming embroiled in a digression of the relations that might subsist between Mahood and Worm, during which emerges an important motif: that of being between two contrary possibilities: "The essential is never to arrive anywhere, neither where Mahood is, nor where Worm is....The essential is to go on squirming forever at the end of the line..." (p.55). Twice more the Unnamable clears his narratorial throat to begin telling Worm's story (pp.55 & 56), but each time his attention swings back to Mahood, a dialectic ("That's it, weave, weave") that highlights his incorrigible inability to carry out his intentions: "I knew I had only to try and talk of Worm to begin talking of Mahood, with more felicity and understanding than ever" (p.56). And so we return to the story of the figure in the urn.

This second narrative treatment of the memberless Mahood is rendered in rather a different approach to that which precedes it, perhaps in accordance with the thought that has just occurred to him, that it is not just the story that matters, but the tone in which it is told. The ironical meta-narrative comments are here much less prominent, and there is on the whole a far more engrossed narratorial tone. Instead of the failed attempt to relate two temporal orders with an unstable diegetic focussing-point, the narrator now adopts a much firmer temporal agencement in which the instantaneous or immediate present denotes a running commentary, an absolute alignment of *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit* in a particular scene: "It is the hour of the apéritif, already people pause, to read the menu....Soon Marguerite will come

and light me up. She is late....The evening is still young..." (pp.57-58). This part of Mahood's story, which, unlike the first, is not premeditated but intrudes itself unbidden upon the speaker's attention, with typical perversity just as he is trying to get started with Worm, allows for a far more radical coalescence of the perspectives of character and narrator than heretofore (for instance, in the attempt to solve a puzzle thrown up by the narrative - "How is it the people do not notice me?" p.58 - a distinction between the thought-processes of *erzählendes Ich* and those of the *erzähltes Ich* cannot be made; there is no cognitive distance between the two), and the hypothesis that the "story" might offer an historical explanation of the speaker's situation is raised much more seriously than before, as the Unnamable wonders whether he is perhaps really Mahood after all, in his urn on the Rue Brancion, and the absence of sights and sounds due merely to the silence and the darkness of the night. He even pauses in suspense, on the lookout for some sensory evidence to prove that "nothing has changed," reassuring himself that "It is not the first time I have strained my ears in vain for the stables' muffled sounds. All of a sudden a horse will neigh....Or I'll see the lantern of the watchman, swinging knee-high in the yard. I must be patient" (p.61). But "hours" pass and nothing happens, and even the tactile modality, upon examination, turns out to be void: "The sawdust no longer presses against my stumps, I don't know where I end" (p.62). This, combined with the fact that no one besides Marguerite seems to perceive his presence in the jar, is too much for the Unnamable's credence, and in a strangely lyrical tone the Unnamable takes his leave of the world in which his presence has never been established to his complete satisfaction; perhaps the figure in the urn was after all merely a figment of the woman's need to have something to look after. And so the deceiver is defeated: "The stories of Mahood are ended. He has realised that they could not be about me, it is I who win, who tried so hard to lose, in order to please him and be left in peace" (p.62).

In addition to the implied image of the fish that cannot swallow the bait that

dangles before him, the intervening passage between the two scenes from the life of the incarcerated Mahood sees a spate of other images as the speaker attempts to form a generalized, summative picture of his situation, raised above the vicissitudes of the instant. These images are elaborated in varying degrees, from the one-liner, such as, "A parrot, that's what they're up against" (p.52), to the dramatized scene of the geriatric dunce in the schoolroom, unable to master the rudiments (p.53). And the tone ranges between such ludicrous pictures, often with a strong scatological tinge to them, including those equating dianoetic processes with vomiting (p.52) and excretion (p.54), to images of an almost mythic or visionary quality, most notably that of "the galley-man, bound for the Pillars of Hercules, who drops his sweep under cover of night and crawls between the thwarts, towards the rising sun, unseen by the guard, praying for storm" (p.53). This image, taken from Geulincx's arguments concerning free will and determinism (in Annotatum ad Ethicam - the work given to the narrator of "The End" by his tutor), and referred to by Molloy in his discussion of the subject (p.54), here occurs twice in the space of two pages, straddling, but not explicitly related to, mention of the debate it was originally coined to illustrate - "the problem of liberty", which, as the Unnamable wryly remarks, "as sure as fate, will come up for consideration at the pre-established moment" (p.55). This spontaneously generated or regurgitated image marks something of a fresh trend in the pattern of the speaker's thinking, which in its synthetic structure - holding together in a single conception two contrary and apparently irreconcilable notions - forms part of a grouping of images and ideas in which the motival theme of inter-jacence predominates. In other words, his thought, in this section of the work, begins to turn recurrently to the possibility of an idea that will, if not reconcile thesis and antithesis, which have up till now dominated turn by turn in a dialectic of tergiversation, at least search for a third possibility in what appears to be a situation of an ineluctable either/or dilemma. Here the particular quandary is that over the autonomy of the self, and, instead of seeing himself either as a pure vic-

tim, totally impotent and passive, his consciousness consisting solely of a garbled repetition of what has been fed into it by other minds, or as being totally, permanently, solipsistically alone, and therefore solely responsible for own being, the Unnamable here makes recourse to a complex image which denies the absolute nature of the dilemma between being free and being determined. Instead, to quote from his second, more explicit re-statement of the image, he now conceives himself as "he who will never be caught, never delivered" (p.55). Borne irresistibly westward on the ship, there remains a tiny ambit of freedom in which he may direct his own course, crawling eastward between the thwart.

In similar vein, the Unnamable ferrets for a crack or schism between the concepts of being and non-being, imagining "that peace where he neither is, nor is not, and where language dies that permits of such expressions. Two falsehoods, two trappings, to be borne to the end, before I am to be let loose, alone, in the unthinkable unspeakable, where I have not ceased to be, where they will not let me be" (p.51).

The "story" of Worm may itself be seen as an assault on the surd, an element that will not submit to rational definition or categorization, like Euclid's *alogos*, which, as Hesla points out, may be translated as "the nameless" or "the unnamable" (The Shape of Chaos, p.7). Its hero cannot speak or think in any connected fashion, in fact has barely any conscious life at all, yet his "story" (and what possible experience could accrue in such conditions from which to compile a narrative sequence?) must be told by the Unnamable in the first person, as though he were speaking of himself; he is required to be Worm, and at the same time he must not be Worm, in that he must know and say who and what he is. The irreconcilables here may be likened to the Sartrean notions of *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, or being and self-consciousness, memorably defined by Nabokov as "being aware of being aware of being" (op. cit., p. 142). The one is effectively unextended in time, his experience completely undifferentiated from one moment to the next, not knowing "that there is anything to know" (p.63), whose senses "tell him nothing, nothing about himself, nothing about the

rest" (p.63), and who is indeed incapable of this most fundamental of distinctions between the self and the not-self. In fact he may only be said to be at all in so far as he is the object of consciousness for others: "Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless, but not for himself, for others, others conceive him and say, Worm is, since we conceive him" (p.63). Like Mr Knott in his sublimely indifferent narcissism, Worm is entirely dependent upon witnesses, but is entirely unconscious of this parasitic mode of being.

The other pole of this proposed dyad, he who wields, however tenuously, the first personal pronoun, is the victim of time and change, and a perpetually dissatisfied introspection, his being an exasperated act of self-consciousness that can bring to light nothing substantial, nothing stable to serve as an object of consciousness. How might the two be connected, subsumed under a single identity? Two possibilities are proffered. The more prominent of these is that Worm "has become the thing that I have become" (p.68), that Worm is the Unnamable's "unthinkable ancestor" (p.69), a primal precursor of consciousness which existed originally in a state of innocence just one degree away from non-being itself, but which has been irretrievably denatured by the first stirrings of awareness, corrupted by the "sound that will never stop" - the rumour arising from that original disjunction between self and "the rest" that brings about the death of Worm and the birth of something else, an irredeemable fall from grace, strongly akin to the expulsion from womb-bliss that is birth. As ever, "being" and "being guilty" are inextricably conflated; guilt, in Beckett's work, is virtually a condition of consciousness, an acknowledgment of the schism that separates the self from its matrix, engendering a sense of loss that is inevitably attended by ignorance, confusion and shame.

In the other perspective the demise of Worm is not final: there is a suggestion that "I could become Worm again, if left in peace" (p.68). Here the Worm figure seems closer to the idea of a soul than that of a psychogenetic entity or state out of which the conscious ego will develop. This is the Worm forever beyond time's

reach, "who seems the truest possession, because the most unchanging. The one outside of life we always were in the end, all our vain life long" (p.63), presenting the conception of a self that exists simultaneously in two disjunct modes, one changeless and immortal, needing nothing, knowing nothing, the other time-wracked, scarified by the anxiety of its own inexplicable incompleteness, and subject, possibly, to eventual extinction.

Such are the major strands of the hypothetical, pre-narrative predication of Worm, speculation which the Unnamable, impatient to get on with something more solid in the way of a story, to start speaking at last as if he really were Worm, in the hope that if he can "give a voice to Worm, perhaps I can succeed in making it mine, in a moment of confusion" (p.65), dismisses as "all their balls about being and existing,...college quips" (p.65). The trouble with getting started is not merely the logical difficulty of Worm's aphonia, but that the Unnamable keeps slipping back to worry at his own "story", in which "they" are doing something to him, namely, putting words ceaselessly into his mouth. In some respects Worm's "narration" is closer to the actual, *impromptu*, making up of a story, and further from the makeshift recital of some half-remembered legend than anything the Unnamable has uttered up to this point. The dramatized hesitations, indecisions, deletions and revisions that attend every addition of narrative detail, tentative at first, then becoming brusque and impulsive in irritation, are the motions of a mind fumbling to bring into imaginative being the semblance of a figure, or a situation, in the likeness of some ill-discerned but pre-existent original, a mind captured in the act of shaping and reshaping in dissatisfaction the wet clay of narrative composition. But whatever intimations of narratorial autonomy such evidence of creative effort may have must be set against the fact that the relation is now more than ever shot through with repeated denials by the narrator that he has any part in this composition, for example: "The undertaking is none of mine....Is there a single word of mine in all I say? No, I have no voice, in this matter I have none....these voices are not mine,

nor these thoughts, but the voices and thoughts of the devils who beset me" (p.64). According to the speaker, the only part he has in the narrative act is that of a channel or conduit: "I shall submit, more corpse-obliging than ever. I shall transmit the words as received, by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole, in all their purity, and in the same order, as far as possible" (p.66).

This sense of alienation from the thoughts that arise in his consciousness, here reaching new heights of paranoiac dispossession, is turned by the Unnamable to some advantage in his effort to make his own identity coincide with that of Worm, becoming one of the common traits that he reckons on sharing with his putative "creature" - "I'm like Worm, without voice or reason" (p.64). There is a large area of mimetic overlap between narrator and character as the realization of Worm begins at last, making it often difficult to tell whether the subject of predication is Worm or the Unnamable himself, and sometimes impossible, with the result that, for pages at a time, this very distinction breaks down. For not only does the "narration" veer apparently without principle between homo- and heterodiegesis (and sometimes hovers in between the two, as in the first "event" of this story all but lacking in action, an act of perception recounted in a strange compound person: "Worm then I catch this sound that will never stop..." p.66) - an example of the "vertige pronominal" produced by "une relation variable ou flottante entre narrateur et personnage(s)"* that Genette identifies as one of the characteristics of "le roman contemporain" in its treatment of "une idée plus complexe de la 'personnalité'" (p.254) - but the nature of Worm's situation, the "content" of the story, mirrors that of the narrator's initial self-portrait in such a detailed manner on some points that the mimetic impulse seems almost to give way to that of self-parody. This is particularly evident in the resemblance of the "staffage" of the tale to that of the Un-

* In fact pronominal deixis itself receives an explicit vote of no-confidence from the Unnamable at about this point in his discourse: "I shall not say I again, ever again, it's too farcical. I shall put in its place, whenever I hear it, the third person, if I think of it....It will make no difference" p.72)

namable's early attempts to describe his own setting: both are to be found, frozen in immobility (pp.8 & 75), at the centre ("a clue of the highest interest") of a circular enclosure (pp.11 & 73- 74), lit by unpredictably dimming and brightening lights (pp.9, 10 & 71, 79), in which the eyes, that can not be closed or rolled (pp.17 & 77-78), and that are dimmed by a ceaseless flow of tears (pp.9 & 77), can discern little or nothing in the murky atmosphere compounded of grey, yellow and pink (pp.16-17 & 78). And both, of course, are subject to torture by voices. The narrator even considers furnishing a face to encourage Worm, "passing by at the right distance, the right level, say once a month, that's not exorbitant..." (p.79), and mentions how, in this place, "A man would wonder where his kingdom ended, his eye strive to penetrate the gloom, and he crave for a stick, an arm, fingers to grasp and then release..." (p.78) - exactly recalling his own reactions to the indeterminate space in which he finds himself (see p.16).

The objective characterization of Worm's "place" is subject to an ongoing variation on the theme of the monad, echoing the Unnamable's longing for impenetrable sanctuary. "Quick," he says, desperate now to get his story under way and find shelter himself from the barren but potentially infinite regress in which even the thought that a particular idea is not his is likewise attributable to another party, "a place. With no way in, no way out, a safe place" (p.65), adding wryly, "Not like Eden." This cosy "den" (p.75) becomes a "vast" space, then a "pit", but the dominant image is that of walled surround just like Mahood's rotunda, this time with the hero inside, his witnesses peering in at him through the loop-holes. The viscous constituent matter of the ground and the walls is first that of sargasso, then molasses, then primordial slime, before becoming potter's clay and, finally, shit. This scatological besmirching of all matter, recalling the Manichean teaching that the earth is composed of the ordure of demons (see Hamiltons, p.55), is attended with a moment of serendipitous delight, and related, in a lovely pun, to a variant of the Unnamable's excremental theory of expression: "it's like shit, there we have it at last,

there it is at last, the right word, one only has to seek, seek in vain, to be sure of finding in the end, it's a question of elimination" (p.82).

The narrator's first efforts at placing Worm inside something involve various intra-corporeal locations: a skull (apropos which he remarks lucidly, "it's terror makes me say it, and the longing to be in safety, surrounded on all sides by massive bone" p.67); then, by implication, the heart, when he begins to locate his head, "above and a little to the right" (p.67); then in the stomach, "wondering if [he] couldn't sneak out by the fundament, one morning" (p.69); and lastly, back to a cordial location again - Botal's Foramen, where "all about me palpitates and labours" (p.69). These shifting bodily centres of consciousness help to form the faint outline of the tenuously postulated heap of organs that is Worm, who never really coagulates into a definite and coherent human frame,* and exemplify the weird clash of physics and metaphysics that permeates the tale, giving rise on the following page to a reformulation of what "they" are trying to do to him (and presumably to the Unnamable himself) which adds flesh to the bones of Unamuno's notion of consciousness as a disease (see Robinson, p.42): "They hope...that one day on my wind-pipe, or some other section of the conduit, a nice little abcess will form, with an idea inside, point of departure for a general infection. This would enable me to jubilate like a normal person, knowing why. And in no time I'd be a network of fistulae, bubbling with the blessed pus of reason" (p.70).

This is the proposed focus of the story, the emergence of awareness, the first step towards "affliction and the struggle to withstand it, the starting eye, the labouring mind" (p.66), just as the Mahood tale proposes to examine the end of a life. What the Unnamable seems to be attempting is his own personal creation myth ("We must first, to begin with, go back to his beginnings and then, to go on with, follow him patiently through the various stages, taking care to show their fatal

* Later on the human form disaggregates completely in a nerve-grating vein of imagery reminiscent of Murphy's moment of mania as the Unnamable imagines himself as various grotesquely isolated organs - an eyeball, an ear, or a "vast and cretinous mouth, red, blubber and slobbering, in solitary confinement" (p.108).

concatenation, which have made him what I am" p.69), and as such, its inherent comparability with the creation myth most deeply embedded in the European mind, that of Genesis, is strengthened in a number of parodic allusions. The very notion of the creative potency of the Logos, the power of language to create being, is central to both, though in Worm's story God's majestic jussives* are replaced with an incessant murmuring, a voice babbling "these millions of different sounds, always the same, recurring without pause" which are "all that one requires to sprout a head, a bud to begin with, finally huge" (p.71). And Worm is spoken of as being like the primal stuff of creation, waiting to be given form: "Let the starching begin at last, of this old clout** so patiently pawed in vain, as limp and drooping as the first day" (p.64). (On the same page, in what appears to be a reversal of the mimetic order, author imitating character, or nature art, the Unnamable complains, "I'm tired of being matter, matter, pawed and pummelled endlessly in vain.") Furthermore, God's life-giving breath is replaced with a "corrosive" inspiration, infecting the "dust" or "slime" with putrefaction and decay: "There he is now with breath in his nostrils....The thorax rises and falls, the wear and tear are in full spring, the rot spreads downwards, soon he'll have legs..." (p.72). The idea of the Creator making man in his own image is another correspondence: "they" want Worm to become one of themselves, "like a normal person" (p.70). Scriptural exegetes usually relate this mimetic aspect of the Creation to man's faculties of judgement and free will, and this too has its distorted echo. Worm is situated at the centre of an enclave of freedom, beyond the reach of their "gaffs, hooks, barbs and grapnels" (p.76). The only hope they have of capturing him is to ignite within him some spark of awareness

* The narrator's unconsciously allusive "Let there then be light" is uttered in the hypothetical tone of someone at work on a geometry problem, and is followed immediately by its equally tenable opposite: "Or let there be none, we'll manage without it" (p.79).

** The original meaning of the word, says the O.E.D., taking it back to its pre-Teutonic root, is "lump, piece of stuff", and one of its current, if rare, senses is of course "a clot of earth, or clod".

and volition - be it initially no more than an amoeboid reaction to unpleasant external stimuli - that will cause him to attempt to escape. And the only possible way they have of achieving this is to inflict, with the "miserable means" at their disposal - "a voice, a little light" (p.85) - the precise degree of suffering ("an excess of severity at this stage might darken his understanding forever," while "the dulling effect of habit" must be taken into account, p.84) that will make him leave the centre where he is safe, and bring him eventually, prodded and lured by variations of volume and intensity, to the wall where "they will lay hold of him and gather him into their midst" (p.74).

This however, the single narrative event that could bring a successful end to the story, never takes place; Worm simply continues to suffer where he is, motionless, unable to move because unable to want to move. Whatever touch of heroism there is in the figure of Worm, in his stubborn resistance to his tormentors, his blind refusal to enter the arena of conation, and the society of men, has no moral foundation, being based on this sheer inability. In the context of the creation myth there is something blasphemous about him too, as if God's clay homunculus were to turn up his nose at his Creator's vivifying breath and obstinately decline the whole show of temptation, damnation and redemption, creation and revolt occurring simultaneously as it were, locked in a frozen moment of antagonism that will allow neither to proceed.

Having brought Worm to the point of sentience (that is, of suffering), the narrator can get no further, and as did Malone, faced with the dumb, inert and impenetrable Macmann on the bench, he turns his attention to the "others", examining the plight of the tormentors at several pages length, during which occurs a rare moment of pity for the "poor devils" who must spend their lives at the impossible task of inspiring Worm, "unable to live, unable to bring to life," and who will "die in vain, having done nothing, been nothing" (p.75) - a moment of narratorial sympathy that will be significantly developed later on. And as Worm remains rooted to

the spot, the emphasis shifts to another way of ending the story, in which his persecutors relinquish their task and admit their failure to the "master" to whose "glory" Worm's existence as a "normal person" is lacking (p.85). But even if silence were to fall, and the lights that shine on him go out, there would be no reason to believe that "they" might not return, "having pleaded for years in vain before the master and failed to convince him there is nothing to be done, with Worm, for Worm. Then all will start over again, obviously" (p.83). And even if it does not, for Worm (as for the Unnamable) the damage has been done, an irreparable breach made in his self-boundedness; Worm "will never know...whether [the silence] is final, or whether it is a mere lull, and what a lull, when he must listen, strain his ears for the murmurs of olden silences, hold himself ready for the next instalment....he who has once had to listen will listen always, whether he knows he will never hear anything again, or whether he does not" (p.83). And the passage closes with another of Beckett's striking re-literalizations of dead metaphors - a piece of wit that the Unnamable delivers with a poker face, attributing it too to his prompters: "In other words, they like other words, no doubt about it, silence once broken will never again be whole" (p.83).

In this impasse, this unending unknowing, the "story" of Worm peters out. The Unnamable tries to rise to his subject several times more, but can get no further than to voice desperate encouragements to himself (pp.85, 88 & 97) and to expound a little on the obsessive image of Worm's single eye (pp.85 & 92). Each time the third persons of Worm's narrative merge into those of his own as he returns in increasingly plangent exasperation to the conditions of his own polyphonic dysphoria. And so Worm passes out of the whorls of the Unnamable's attention, and we move on to the book's last movement - the vertiginous accelerando of the last forty-five pages, the "core of the eddy".

Let me be more precise about what I mean by referring to the last movement of The Unnamable as an accelerando, especially in view of E. M. Forster's warning about the vagueness of using musical terms in discussing literary works: "when people apply rhythm...to literature they are apt not to say what they mean and not to finish their sentences: it is 'Oh but surely the rhythm...'" (Aspects of the Novel, p.151). The sense of progressive quickening that is such a striking feature of the book's end is not an effect of narrative pace, such as we encountered in the final pages of Malone Dies, in which the changing ratio between *erzählte Zeit* and *Erzählzeit* is the critical factor - more "story time" in less "narration time", entailing a marked decrease in description and narratorial commentary. Instead, what we are talking about here may be called an effect of "rhythm" in the strictest sense of the word, being the result of the increasing rapidity with which certain periodic elements recur, both at the level of syntactic patterning and at that of the distribution of repeated ideas and motifs. The acceleration at these levels work together to give the impression of something like a whirlpool: as one nears the centre the water whips round more and more rapidly in concentrically decreasing spirals, so that less and less material is moving faster and faster.

At the syntactic level the felt pace of delivery or utterance is greatly increased, suggestive of a general heightening of psychic excitement, which in combination with the semantic purport gives a dramatic quality of urgency, anguish and exhaustion. This quickening is due to several factors, the most obvious of which is a drastic shortening of the intonational cadence and the breath unit of the speech. Although the sentences themselves (if "sentence" is still apposite here) become enormously distended, stretching to more than five pages on occasion, the clausal and phrasal units that constitute such periods are generally very brief, for many lines at a time containing no more than two or three stressed syllables. At the same time there is a drastic reduction of articulated subordination, which, in integrating its clauses into the intonational cadence of the main clause, gives them a rising, prolonging, expectant intonational curve; instead, we encounter a thudding

succession of asyndetically co-ordinated clauses and appositional phrases, flat or dropping in their intonational shape, and often falling into groupings of reiterated stress patterns, verse-like in their local regularity, which drive the momentum onwards, while the need to get to the end of the sentence, to ground the exhaustingly extended period in the tonic of resolving finality compresses and harries these beats. Such are the general features that come to predominate, but not in a steady or uniform fashion; there is another rhythm at work in the way the periods dilate gradually, getting longer as the pitch of anguish is augmented, to be followed by a sudden contraction of syntactic extension and concomitant tempering of tone, a pattern which may be clearly illustrated with the series of abbreviated imperatives with which the speaker deliberately retards the prolix effusions of the first of the really long sentences, starting on page 102 ("No point either, in your thirst...") and ending on page 107 ("... I see nothing whatever, for the time being"). Then, typically, the sentences start to swell again, the resolutions becoming more complex and stained with a sarcastic tone which quite undermines their ameliorist upshot (p.108). The overall effect of this pattern may be likened to mounting waves of hysteria punctuated with progressively less effectual periods of deep breathing and relative calm.

The sentence referred to above (pp.102-107) is also a statement of seminal importance in the equivocal struggle the Unnamable wages (or undergoes) to assert (or accept) his autonomy over his own thought and expression. As we mentioned, the tale of Worm is pervaded with assertions that what is being said is not the product of the speaker's own mind. Such denials of involvement with and responsibility for the discourse continue and intensify after Worm is abandoned, in a series of tail-swallowing statements about the duplicity and cunning of his "prompters". For instance, after the self-assertion implied in his criticism of their methods ("The dirty pack of fake maniacs..."), the Unnamable attributes this too to "them": "This tone, these words, to make me think they come from me" (p.85), and a few pages later, in

similar vein, we find, "They say they, speaking of them, to make me think it is I who am speaking" (p.87). The Unnamable's feeling of powerlessness at this point is emphasized in the current image of his "place" as a dungeon in which he has been incarcerated by his torturers (p.86), and his sense of helplessness leads him to resort to the idea of an arbitrary and aleatory combination of words as his only possible means of deliverance, "those it behoved to say, no need to know which, no means of knowing which, they'll be there somewhere, in the heap, in the torrent" (p.87).

In the scenario extrapolated from this idea, in which a verbatim report of the proceedings must be conveyed to the master so that "judgement" may be made, the attitude of resentment the Unnamable bears towards his prompters begins to alter as he comes to conceive of them as victims just as much as he is himself (another aspect in which his own "story" takes after Worm's); no longer are they sadistic and deceitful interrogators, but the helpless and confused members of some bureaucratic committee, constrained, just as he himself is, to attempt an impossible task. "What can you expect, they don't know who they are either, nor where they are, nor what they're doing, nor why everything is going so abominably badly, that must be it" (p.89). Out of this comes a kind of empathetic solidarity: "Ah a nice mess we're in, the whole pack of us, is it possible we're all in the same boat..." (p.89). And there is a further sense of identification with them as the Unnamable considers their dianoetic malaise: they too, compelled to keep up an unceasing flow of improvised discourse, are not at liberty to bear "free and patient thoughts": "How can you think and speak at the same time, how can you think about what you have said, may say, are saying, and at the same time go on with the last-mentioned, you think any old thing, you say any old thing...that's why they always repeat the same thing, the same old litany..." (p.91). Just after this the Unnamable even acknowledges his debt to his "voluble shades": "It's a lucky thing they are there...to bear the responsibility of this state of affairs, with respect to which if one does not know a great

deal one knows at least this, that one would not care to have it on one's conscience, to have it on one's stomach is enough" (p.92). And a page later, extending the movement towards solidarity, the Unnamable exonerates them too on the grounds of ignorance and impotence, using the inclusive first person plural pronoun repeatedly as he does so. The next extended image of the prompter (now in the singular) is that of a harrassed welfare official, pleading, as he shuffles through his files, with a difficult client, to accept an identity - a scene dramatized in a deliciously ludicrous and masterfully sustained piece of mimicry (pp. 94-95), which gives way to a "broth of a dream": why doesn't the poor man just give up and join me here? This engenders a more sombre metaphysical fantasy, that of an infinite series of agents sent to reclaim the recalcitrant lost sheep who rejects the "life" (caustically characterized as "tales like this of wombs and cribs, diapers bepissed and the first long trousers, love's young dream and life's old lech, blood and tears and skin and bones and the tossing in the grave" p.96) that is offered to him, each missionary eventually succumbing to the temptation of non-being - a series in which the Unnamable must at one point have been the shepherd, and has now only to wait for the moment when his would-be rescuer will abandon his task, the preacher converted, for his turn to join the multitude already at peace in the "dear charnel-house of renegades" (p.98). As usual, the Unnamable's tone in elaborating such a fantasy becomes endowed with an energetic élan, tinged more and more with sarcastic relish, until the bubble bursts and the comedy of fatuous optimism suddenly gives way, here in mid-sentence, to bleak despair: "How all comes right in the end to be sure, it's thanks to patience, thanks to time...you have only to wait, without doing anything...and without understanding, and all comes right, nothing comes right, nothing, nothing, this will never end, this voice will never stop, I'm alone here, the first and the last... they'll never go silent, never depart, they'll never catch me, never stop trying, that's that" (pp.98-99).

The bitterness such a hopeless prospect occasions prompts another outburst of

anger towards "them" ("herd of shites" p.100), and then the cycle of empathetic understanding begins again: "what clowns they are, to keep on saying the same thing when they know it's not the right one, no, they know nothing either, they forget, they think they change and they never change" (pp.100-101). And this is followed by an expression of pitying wisdom that stems from the Unnamable's insight into a common problem: he comprehends, as his prompters apparently do not, the baselessness of the hope arising from the teleological temptation: "if only they'd stop committing reason, on them, on me, on the purpose to be achieved, and simply go on, with no illusion about having begun one day or ever being able to conclude, but it's too difficult, too difficult, for one bereft of purpose, not to look forward to his end, and bereft of all reason to exist, back to a time he did not" (p.102). Then comes the remarkable "sentence" referred to above, in which the Unnamable, making a monumental effort of concentration, dismisses his prompters, since they are no better off than he is, as useless hypothetical constructs ("poor devils, they can't, they don't know, they're like me, more and more, no more need of them, no more need of anyone" p.104), and, accepting his solitude without falling into the easy anti-thesis of monistic solipsism, struggles to establish an image of his being in which the unallayable sense of an "I-Other" duality has its place in a conception of an encompassing or global self, sans recourse to "the consciousness of third parties" (p.107).

The statement opens with a continuation of the theme of futility, the lassitude suggested by the elliptical "No point either..." being taken up in the flaccidly connected clauses like, "stories don't pass the time, nothing passes the time, that doesn't matter, that's how it is" (p.102). The only firm relation between clauses besides this serial substitution is where there is a cancellation or emendation of a preceding statement, as in, "in your thirst, your hunger, no, no need of hunger, thirst is enough" (p.102) or, "for as long as you can remember, no, longer than that" (pp. 102-203). This ever-present habit of self-criticism, fracturing the

development of a normal subject and predicate syntax, is contradictory here where the discourse is repeatedly designated as "blather" or "any old thing", denying the logical foundation of the need to be logical, precise, or relevant. Yet the speaker is debarred from the demerit of pure nonsense by the old constraint to mean. And when, half a page later, the possibility arises of an idea that might just have some significance ("unless perhaps, that's an idea, let's seek over there, one last little effort" p.103), the babbling repetitiousness begins to serve another purpose apart from that of simply keeping the kettle boiling, becoming a kind of padding, a purposeful marking time, while another thought is developed behind it. This results in a kind of dual, intertwined syntax, one strand consisting typically of a reiterative succession of present participles, spluttering away ("talking incessantly, seeking incessantly, in yourself, outside yourself, cursing man, cursing God, stopping cursing, past bearing it, going on bearing it, seeking indefatigably" p.103) or of unanswerable and by now almost automatic questions ("where is nature, where is man, where are you, what are you seeking, who is seeking" p.103), the other making a valiant attempt to turn some vague but possibly valuable idea into an articulate statement. This becomes particularly apparent after the strongest existential assertion, following the dismissal of "them" ("let me now sum up, after this digression, there is I, yes, I feel it, I confess, I give in, there is I, it's essential, it's preferable" p.106), where the "padding" clauses and phrases, in contrast to the earlier, mindlessly repeated permutations of, for instance, "seeking the cause, the cause of talking and never ceasing, finding the cause, losing it again, finding it again, not finding it again, seeking no longer, seeking again, finding again, losing again, finding nothing, finding at last, losing again, talking without ceasing, thirstier than ever, seeking as usual, losing as usual, blathering away" (p.103), distend but sustain the syntactic arc in which they figure, the upward-curving intonational pattern of their hedging qualifications giving the speaker time to search

for the words that might complete that arc in something like a satisfying conclusion:

...I sum up, I and this noise, I see nothing else for the moment, but I have only just taken over my functions, I and this noise, and what about it, don't interrupt me, I'm doing my best, I repeat, I and this noise, on the subject of which, inverting the natural order, we would seem to know for certain, among other things, what follows, namely, on the one hand, that it has not been possible up to date to determine with certainty, or even approximately, what it is, in the way of noise, or how it comes to me, or by what organ it is emitted, or by what perceived, or by what intelligence apprehended, and on the other, that is to say with regard to me, this is going to take a little longer, with regard to me, nice time we're going to have now, with regard to me, that it has not yet been our good fortune to establish with any degree of accuracy what I am, where I am, whether I am words among words, or silence in the midst of silence... (p.106)

Despite the incongruity between the rather pompous complexity of the skeleton of the syntax with its parenthetical asides, as if something truly momentous were about to be delivered, and the vacuity of its referential burden, the overall effect is not predominantly comic, but evocative of a courageous, almost heroic effort, amid countless fleeting loose ends and obscurities, to arrive at some coherent statement about his nature.

The image that dominates the sentence, or rather the pair of images, prepares the way for the Unnamable's acceptance of his absolute isolation. This has been predicted from the beginning, in the second paragraph of the preamble, and is taken up again as the last movement of the book gets under way (p.92). The "puppets" have been scattered, and the "prompters" must also be put to flight. Their function as

the fons et origo of the words that enter the Unnamable's consciousness is now rendered superfluous as he comes to identify himself with the words themselves: "I'm in words, made of words" (p.104), and although he goes on to designate these as "others' words" (my emphasis), they are not, as before, words uttered by these others with some specific intention, not, in fact, words uttered by anyone, but rather the milling potentiality of language itself, taken as the primal stuff of his universe - "the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words" (p.104) - which the Unnamable now comes to claim as being part of himself as well: "I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one" (p.104). And in this vision the "I", the consciousness of each succeeding moment, is no more than a temporary configuration in the swirling totality of language particles that constitute his world and his self:

... everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I'm all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder, wherever I go I find me, leave me, go towards me, come from me, nothing ever but me, a particle of me, retrieved, lost, gone astray, I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing, coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them, those that merge, those that part, those that never meet, and nothing else... (p.104)

But this conception of an atomized plenum of impersonal selfhood is not the whole picture at all, for the Unnamable feels himself to be "a quite different thing" as well, "a wordless thing in an empty place, a hard shut dry cold place, where nothing stirs, nothing speaks," where the "I" is a paralyzed act of unfulfilled listening, of inarticulate attention that "seeks" enlightenment as to its nature and its function. This dual conception, being two different kinds of "thing" at once, may be seen as a development of the theme of interjacence - taken up at the

beginning of the book's last movement in the thought that "between [words and thoughts] would be the place to be" - a "blessed place" in which the Unnamable would "feel nothing, hear nothing, know nothing, say nothing, [be] nothing" (pp.91-92), and again in the speculation that "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'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either" (p.100) - though now the refusal of the either/or dilemma is couched not in terms of "neither" but of "both" - both consisting of words and yet completely deprived of language, both something unitary, if not substantial, trapped within some tiny monad, chafing at its confines, and something that has no substance, and no locality.

Of the two main motifs associated with the usurpation of the self's autonomy - that of being stuffed with falsehoods and that of being incarcerated - the latter persists (in antithetic oscillation with the vision of the self as a formless cloud of dust) while the former is drastically altered here in accordance with the overthrow of the authority of the Other: the false words are not elements that may be finally egested, since it is of them that I am composed. As long as speech persists in me, that is, for as long as the verbal "I" exists, it will be subject to inauthenticity, because the words are not of my making, nor is their combination under my control. So although possession of an egocentric voice is still denied by the Unnamable, it is no longer necessary for him to suppose that he is the lifelong object of torture or manipulation at the hands of a conspiratorial party of third persons. Asking himself "has nothing really changed, all this mortal time...?" (p.116), his answer comes two pages later: "I notice one thing, the others have vanished, completely". And although on three more occasions "they" re-appear as the putative authors or judges of the discourse, it is rather as the product of a recently outmoded habit of thought, which the Unnamable catches himself lapsing into with the exorcis-

ing remark, "there they are again" (pp.118, 120, 128), than as a real intrusion, and the only role that is consistently attributed to them is that of those who, in some long-forgotten past,* imparted to him all the words he knows and their associated images (see p.125) - the double (and imperfectly corresponding) modalities of shadow and babble that form the ground of his consciousness - not as present parties to the discourse, feeding their thoughts into him moment by moment. Thus he determines to "situate" the "common source" of the "thing heard and the thing said" in himself, "without specifying where exactly, no finicking" (p.107) - perhaps the most explicit approach he makes to a concept resembling that of the Freudian Unconscious.

In the remaining pages the two contrary attitudes to spatiality evinced in the pair of antithetic images of page 104 - on the one hand the longing for a form to contain and define the atomized mind, its particles swirling like Murphy's motes in the void, on the other the longing for release from the narrow confines of the monad - alternate with a dizzying rapidity, reminiscent of the quickening pattern of Malone's dilations and contractions as he approaches his crisis. These opposed attitudes, stemming from a vicious pair of contradictory anxieties, resembling the double face of Pascal's metaphysical nausea - represented by the infinite abyss and the dungeon (see Pensées, #'s 163, 199 & 201),** are related to the still unresolved antithesis of the Unnamable's dual conception of time, the claustrophiliac anxiety

* A moment associated at one point with the original fall, the Worm-like fall into an awareness of a universe outside himself, when the voice is tentatively identified as being that of "the devil" (strongly reminiscent of the hypothetical demon of Descartes' scepticism): "who can have come here, the devil perhaps, I can think of no one else, it's he showed me everything, here, in the dark, and how to speak, and what to say, and a little nature, and a few names, and the outside of men, those in my image, whom I might resemble, and their way of living...and who went away and left me, knowing I was tempted, knowing I was lost, whether I succumbed or not...since that day it's not I any more, since that day there is no one any more, I must have succumbed" (p.123-24).

** Interestingly, Tillich, on his large psycho-cultural canvas, represents a cognate pair of "historical" anxieties (which "become general if the accustomed structures of meaning, power, belief and order begin to disintegrate") in exactly the same

corresponding to the notion that Malone came to dread, that the passage of time from future to past has somehow been stopped up, that no change and hence no deliverance is possible: "time doesn't pass, doesn't pass, from you,...it piles up all about you, instant on instant, on all sides, deeper and deeper, thicker and thicker,...it buries you grain by grain neither dead nor alive, with no memory of anything, no hope of anything, no knowledge of anything, no history and no prospects, buried under the seconds" (p.107); while corresponding to the agoraphobic fear attendant on the vision of one's being as a chaos of linguistic particles swirling in the void, is the idea of time as ceaseless flux, or at best as an aimlessly cyclical repetition, as when the Unnamable speaks of his gaseous being as "this slow boundless whirlwind and every particle of its dust...[that] drags on by itself, from word to word, a labouring whirl" (p.119-20). In such a conception of time, the "beginning" and the "end" are arbitrary and ultimately meaningless points in the unending "orbit" of temporal succession: "I feel the end at hand and the beginning likewise, to every man his orbit, that's obvious....I have passed by here, this has passed by me, thousands of times, its turn has come again, it will pass on and something else will be there, another instant of my old instant" (p.116).

The images in which these anxieties crystallize are opposed not only in content but in the "modal" aspect as his "longings and visions", his hopes and dreads, "mingle and merge into one another" (p.114). Some are purely expressive or lyrical, corresponding with the impulse to accept the worst, relinquish the struggle, abandon himself to what is, and some desperately incantatory or "creative", exemplifying the determination to "make", with words, his own sanctuary and salvation. The images

spatial terms, likening the feeling of paralyzed helplessness aroused by the massive unchangeability of the present order and its increasingly ruthless forces of reactionary stasis, and the terror of the perceived chaos that threatens to overthrow that order, to "two types of nightmare", of which "one type is the anxiety of annihilating narrowness, of the impossibility of escape and the horror of being trapped", while the other "is the anxiety of annihilating openness, of infinite, formless space into which one falls without a place to fall upon" (The Courage to Be, p.68).

that arise from the longing for a form and a place in which that form may be located - a "home", set against the anxiety expressed by the "wordy-gurdy" image, are tinged at times with a nostalgic narcissism: striving, in a tone of exhausted regret to say why he would have liked to "go silent" before extinction, "to enter living into the silence, so as to be able to enjoy it" (p.114), one of the formulations he tries is, "I wanted myself, in my own land for a brief space, I didn't want to die a stranger in the midst of strangers, a stranger in my own midst, surrounded by strangers" (p.114). Generally, as here, the desire for "self-possession" is closely bound up with the need for "a place", a "home", and for "silence", a state of quiescent self-embrace that does away with the necessity for language as the medium of consciousness. These strands of desire (for substantiality and enclosure, for home, silence and stasis) are intertwined once more as, returning to the theme of the "place" three pages later, the speaker again bewails his formlessness ("there's no end to me, I don't know what it is, it isn't flesh, it doesn't end, it's like air, now I have it,...like gas"*) before making another effort to imagine a place in which he might be located: "I'll put me in it, a solid lump, in the middle, or in the corner, well propped up on three sides...it's only natural, you want yourself, you want yourself in your own little corner, it's not love, not curiosity, it's because you want to stop, travel no more, seek no more, lie no more, speak no more,...in a word lay hands on yourself" (pp.117-18).

The motif of the desired monad, like Worm's "place", is treated to a series of different manifestations in this passage: a mine would serve ("it could be black dark, I could be motionless and fixed, I'd find a way to explore it, I'd listen to the echo, I'd get to know it, I'd get to remember it, I'd be home" p.117), as would a room, or even a forest ("a roof is not indispensable, an interior, if I could be in a forest, caught in a thicket or wandering round in circles, it would be the end

* The etymological connection between "gas" and "chaos" (the absence of form) is made in Murphy, p.100.

of this blither"* p.117). As the Unnamable's determination to "make" such a place for himself increases, a measure of the heightening pitch of his agoraphobic anxiety ("calm, calm, I'm calm, I'm locked up, I'm in something" p.123), so do the solidity and the sphericity of the imagined monad, giving this archetypal motif its last precise manifestation, that of the gaol: "make a place, a little world, it will be round, this time it will be round,...low of ceiling, thick of wall" (p.123). A few pages later this cell becomes an "enormous prison, like a hundred thousand cathedrals," a "vault" that is "vast enough for a whole people," and in it "somewhere, perhaps, riveted, tiny, [is] the prisoner" (p.127) - an image in which agoraphobic anxiety commingles with the motif of monadic containment. Another compound image of this kind, this time admixing the notion of immobilizing captivity with the fear of agoraphobic exposure to empty space, follows on the next page, when the Unnamable imagines himself as being "on a rock, lashed to a rock, in the midst of silence, its great swell rears towards me, I'm streaming with it" (p.128). Both these images are followed by a contraction in spatial terms, and a retraction which alters the modality of the image by underlining its verbal nature, and thus its tenuous, if not downright spurious, relation to what really is the case. Mention of the huge emptiness of the prison prompts this denial: "how false this space is, what falseness instantly, to want to draw that round you" (p.127), and a few lines further on, the speaker, becoming confused about whether this space is better termed an abyss rather than a vault, reminds himself that "those are words"; the rock in the sea of silence is dismissed with the same reminder of the verbality of the image, followed by the insistence that "I'm not outside, I'm inside, I'm in something, I'm shut up...we must have walls, I need walls, good and thick, I need a prison" (p.128).

* The echo of Molloy's close shave in the forest is unmistakable as the Unnamable goes on to tell of how in such a situation he would "describe the leaves, one by one, at the moment of their growing, at the moment of their giving shade, at the moment of their falling" (see Molloy, pp.91 & 95). In these last pages the Unnamable alludes also, in a pale imitation of Malone's final assembly of personae, to the demise of the narrator of "The End" (p.117), of Belacqua, Murphy and Macmann (p.126).

The final twist of the book's image patterns derives from a similar dialectic recoil, countering this obsessive recurrence of the need to be inside something, and in a way reverses the trend of the whole Trilogy, the tendency to withdraw, to "go within". Stemming from the hard won acceptance both of his solitude and of the ineradicable voice within, the only possible course in order to achieve silence seems now to lie in opening oneself to the void outside. And so it is in the last pages of the Trilogy that the dominant image pertains to neither the inside nor the out exclusively, neither the self nor the not-self, but links the one to the other - the image of the door.

Apart from the entirely conventional "death's door" mentioned early on in the monologue (p.31), there has until the final section of the book been hardly any reference to this image at all, either as a symbolically redolent metaphor in the Unnamable's theoretical discourse on his own situation or even merely as an everyday object in the sparse worlds of his fictions. Now however, not only does "the door" crop up as the only substantive to attract any attention from the narrator in the last of the fragmentary *micro-récits*, the incongruous and telegraphically plotted love-story ("the door, it's the door interests me, a wooden door, who bolted the door..." p.125) but becomes towards the end an obsessional motif, recurring nine times in the final sentence alone, five of which are on the very last page. The functional aspect of the door as the possible link between the inner and outer worlds, first receives attention as an element of the self's defences, protecting it from the threatening forces outside the monad, "which prowl round me, like bodies in torment, the torment of no abode, no repose, no, like hyenas, screeching and laughing, no, no better, no matter, I've shut my doors against them, I'm not at home to anything, my doors are shut against them" (p.109). It occurs to the Unnamable at this point that it may perhaps be only in dropping his defences and letting "them" in to "devour" him that he might achieve peace ("Open up, open up, you'll be all right, you'll see"), but this line of speculation is dropped at the

time with the thought that "Yes, but there it is, I am far from my doors, far from my walls, someone would have to wake the turnkey" (p.109). In the three and a half pages that are covered by the last "sentence" the determination to reach the door, not now with the idea of opening it to let the "others" in, but that of emerging from the monad, and allowing the self to mingle with whatever may lie outside it, becomes hammeringly insistent.

The other two almost mesmerically reiterated motifs of the ultimate sentence are the voice and the silence, and these three elements that are concentrated in the vortex which has swallowed everything else are finally buffeted into a coherent relation, most concisely formulated in this way: "the true last words" of the voice, it is imagined, may "carry" the Unnamable "through the noise, through the door, into the silence" (p.132). And so at this late stage of the Trilogy's course another journey is envisioned: the words must somehow fashion "the way" through the inner world to reach the door to the outside and to the silence. And perhaps the journey is in fact nearly over, and its goal at hand, "perhaps...all this time I've traveled without knowing it, it's I now at the door" (p.132). The curve of rising expectation, the sense of being on the brink of some major transformation is tremendously strong on the last page, as is also a feeling of anguished haste to achieve what has to be achieved before the words run out, leaving him in an eternity of self-exile in the midst of unintelligible rumours: "quick now before there is none left, no voice left, nothing left but the core of murmurs, distant cries, quick now and try again, with the words that remain" (pp.131-32). And so, in the very last moments of the book, just as panic just about obliterates the capacity for articulated thought altogether, the speaker's sense of the possible importance of his words, of the possible consequences of what he is saying, regains its dominance, adding its anxiety to the scrambling, strident urgency of the climax in which hope and despair flicker over the discourse with a manic, stroboscopic rapidity.

The ending of The Unnamable has been construed in various ways. Some critics have denied that it really ends at all, asserting that a kind of *etcetera ad infinitum* is implied; the representation comes to an end, but not the thing represented. This is the kind of interpretation that Vivian Mercier offers in his essay "The Mathematical Limit": "The Unnamable's interior monologue may go on to infinity, for all we know" (p.145), suggesting that the notation of the discourse has simply stopped, quite possibly at some entirely arbitrary point, for the simple reason that no literary discourse can maintain a directly mimetic relationship to eternity. Other critics have suggested, as does Hesla for instance, that the whole Trilogy is cyclical, in the manner of Finnegans Wake, so that the words the Unnamable "goes on" with are those that commence Molloy, trapping the arch-narrator in an endlessly repeating loop (see The Shape of Chaos, p.122). I do not think the text really warrants either of these readings. The latter is too neat an effect for a work as ramshackle and convulsive as the Trilogy, and moreover the cyclical patterns in the monologues are combined with the linear effect of diminution to produce a spiralling inwards or downwards rather than a vicious circle in the precise sense of the term. And that the writing simply gives up the effort of setting down the "speaking" of the discourse does not sit easily, in my view, with the climactic augmenting of psychic pitch in the last few pages; something is about to happen, the intimation of some imminent and fundamental change is irresistibly strong. But even assuming then that the book ends with the Unnamable going silent at last, the nature of that silence remains forked with uncertainties.

Firstly, we cannot say whether the silence he is about to enter is the kind of silence with which he is already familiar, "the usual silence, spent listening, spent waiting" (p.131), the voice having simply now dropped permanently below the threshold of intelligibility. (The Unnamable refers to a gradual "softening" of the voice on more than one occasion, most notably on page 111, in one of the piano passages of relative calm and syntactic composure: "My voice. The voice. I hardly hear

it any more. I'm going silent. Hearing this voice no more, that's what I call going silent. That is to say I'll hear it still, if I listen hard, broken, faint, unintelligible....Hearing it still, without hearing what it says, that's what I call going silent.") And if there is a definite and radical change in the quality of silence, is it the sudden silence of non-being ("yes, phut, just like that, just like one of the living, then I'll be dead" p.114), represented in the last sentence in the figures of execution and the vertiginous "drop" into the abyss (p.130), or is it the "living silence" - the silence of a mind, at one with itself at long last, that simply no longer requires to go on talking to itself, the silence of achieved selfhood, characterized on the second-last page of the book as the reunification of the conscious self with the immortal self, the "I" with the "absentee" who "must be somewhere...in the silence, he's the one to be sought, the one to be, the one to be spoken of, the one to speak...then I could stop, I'd be he, I'd be the silence, I'd be back in the silence, we'd be reunited" (p.131)? Whether in the silence the Unnamable knows or does not know anything at all, we do not. The ambiguities are irresolvable; their alternatives, after teetering first this way and then the other for a hundred and thirty-two pages, remain finally perfectly balanced against each other, neither more likely than the other, just as they are in that inscrutable double injunction of St. Augustine which Beckett considered to have "a wonderful shape": "Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned" (in conversation with Harold Hobson, quoted in Kenner's Critical Study, p.100).

To what end, then, if indeed to any, the unnamable spirit comes in his dark night of the soul, we cannot say; but it is in the baleful glare of this ignorance that we are moved to admire the courage that, in a state of the most extreme exhaustion, urges him to "go on" until there is absolutely nowhere left to go. And it is this quality of relentless determination not to give up or to compromise, this refusal to avert his eyes from the facts of man's metaphysical penury - his eminently

fallible and inevitably failing sensory contact with a world, his equally fallible sense of reason, cogitating in an arbitrary and inexpressive linguistic medium, and his baffled sense of purposelessness - that stamps Beckett's work as a whole, and gives it its distinctive power to disturb, to challenge, and to inspire. For it is a quality manifested not only within a single book like The Unnamable, but in the unwritten trajectory that links one book to another, each distending and extending the formal limits of fiction a little further with a deeply original imagination - a course that will see him go on to fashion in minutely imbricated syntactic detail the vast systole and diastole of the monstrous myths of How It Is, and to pursue the very faintest echoes of affective harmonics in his sparse, minimalist prose-poems.

Lionel Trilling cites as one example of "the specific developments in our contemporary arts by which the preoccupation with authenticity expresses itself" the "drastic reduction in the status of narration, of telling stories" (Sincerity and Authenticity, p.134). He goes on to observe about the modern novel that "we cannot fail to see how uneasy it is with the narrative mode, which once made its vital principle, and how its practitioners seek by one device or another to evade or obscure or palliate the act of telling" (p.134; original emphasis). Beckett's work seems to take such uneasiness as its first premise, and proceeds in the Trilogy via the narrative incompetence of his progressively mind-ensconced eirons, involving, as we have seen, a garrulous expansion of the extra-narrative narratorial functions, and leading eventually to an obsessive foregrounding of an impredicable narrative instance and a self-reflective discourse, that takes itself as its prime subject, wondering what it is and what it is for. And with remorseless logic, Beckett traces the consequences of the failure of the narrative to bear meaning, to grant to its hero an identity: he who cannot tell his story, cannot say who he is, and is therefore utterly isolated, not merely from others but from himself, for how then is he to endow his subjectivity with form and with meaning? And the images that language

offers him, severed from a coherent narrative world, lose their power to formulate and stabilize abstract ideas, and become reduced to fleeting scraps to which the mind must clutch in frantic battology - shadows in a stream of babble. But if he has not the means to narrate his anguish, he may perhaps enact it, staining time with a record of his writhing that he himself is never able to apprehend in its entirety. And in a series of such dramatic portraits Beckett has achieved, perhaps quite unintentionally, another kind of portraiture, creating the image-by-implication of the mind behind the "mask-voices", a mind that has stared unflinchingly down the years at the conditions of man's unhappiness and ignorance, from which unlikely material it has fashioned for its "companions in distress" literary objects that are powerfully funny and grimly beautiful.

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