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A DISSERTATION  
ON  
THE TRILOGY OF SAMUEL BECKETT:  
MOLLOY; MALONE DIES; THE UNNAMABLE

SUBMITTED TO  
THE UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS  
IN ENGLISH

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**PART ONE: THE NARRATIVE**

## PART ONE: THE NARRATIVE

The relationship between life and art is either so simple that nothing should be said or so complicated that nothing can be said. (W. H. Auden on the Dick Cavett Show, Channel 5 TV, 31 March 1972).

The distinction drawn above between life and art may serve to illustrate an essential difficulty faced by the reader of the trilogy--specifically, that of attempting to interpret the meaning of events in the narrative. Through the experience of living we are able to recognize certain recurrent phenomena, and by empirical learning thus increase our knowledge of such phenomena. The greater our ability to understand the circumstances of our lives, the better our potential for survival. The possibility of inaccurate perception of phenomena, however must be attributed to the fallibility of human sensory apparatus. It is precisely this fallibility which precludes us from possessing omnipotence, from the possibility of total control over our environment.

For the playwright or the novelist, however, there is an occasion to create a limited world of which all

the elements are under his control. His characters become the puppets of his own volition and he directs their actions. There are, in short, no phenomena within this limited world which the writer must confront with hands tied as he would during his own life. The narrative circumstance is limited by its description in the text.

In his Introduction to a Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, Hugh Kenner begins by stating that "the reader of Samuel Beckett may want a guide chiefly to fortify him against irrelevant habits of attention, in particular the habit of reading 'for the story.'"<sup>1</sup> If the story, the events of the narrative, can be considered irrelevant to the essential value of the writing, then we must first attempt to understand the reason for any narrative at all. In a situation over which one has total control there is no possibility of error, and consequently the outcome of the situation can be developed to greatest advantage. Day-to-day existence, however, is a sequence of phenomena in which we only participate, and the degree to which we can direct our lives is never absolute. The magnitude of our successes, and of our failures, depends

upon upon our ability to learn from previous experience.

Realizing that man cannot maintain absolute control over his life, Samuel Beckett, in his own artistic creation, seems to opt for the veracity of a life system which is open to the probability of misconception, and to the possibility of human failure. Although his art manifests a strict creative methodology, his objective is to develop a statement of the chaos in which survival is paramount--the chaos of which his characters become increasingly aware in the course of their stories.

It follows, then, that the events of the narrative, like real phenomena, are not subject to perfect or total interpretation. Beckett's intent, on the other hand, seems to be the insinuation of a familiarity which misleads us and in so doing emphasizes for us our own perceptual weaknesses. These insinuations of familiarity cause us to see similarities between places, characters and events which often lead to false or too literal conclusions. Physical and psychological likenesses cause us to imagine connections between characters which may not exist beyond the universal human qualities. The

implications of names and identifications throughout the trilogy suggest the possibility of a complex riddle which is a constant challenge. Whether or not the riddle exists, it is impractical, and perhaps even misleading, to pursue a solution which is not essential to the meaning of the trilogy.

Although the actual events of the trilogy are relatively unimportant, the psychological states of the characters resulting from these events are the framework for Beckett's thematic development. The following accounts of the novels, therefore, may serve as useful references in understanding Beckett's more subtle statement.

### Molloy

In the first novel, Molloy is in his mother's room writing a manuscript which is being collected in installments by a man who leaves money in exchange. Molloy tells us that this arrangement is not his primary inclination-- "What I'd like now is to speak of the things that are left, say my goodbyes, finish dying."<sup>2</sup> He is, nevertheless, to continue the manuscript, a story into which we move

almost immediately.

Molloy begins his account with the description of a meeting between two men, A and C, which he observes "not far from town." The meeting is brief and several words are exchanged about which Molloy can only surmise. The two men had left the town separately and the first turned back and met the other.

Then each went on his way, A back towards the town, C on by-ways he seemed hardly to know, or not at all, for he went with an uncertain step and often stopped to look about him, like someone trying to fix landmarks in his mind, for one day perhaps he may have to retrace his steps, you never know.<sup>3</sup>

As Molloy watches C recede into the darkness of the approaching night, he speculates at length about the man's character and his life. Almost in spite of the austerity of his observation, Molloy senses a fear about C, whom he believes to be innocent, "greatly innocent."

Yes, he saw himself threatened, his body threatened, his reason threatened, and perhaps he was, perhaps, they were, in spite of his innocence.<sup>4</sup>

Although he soon forgets whether this man is A or C, Molloy maintains a strong sense of detail which seems to attend more to the man's humanity than to his personal

quality. He feels a communication with this man who is unaware of his presence, and even the desire to catch up with him some day, "so as to know him better, be myself less lonely." There is however, a sense of inadequacy about this relationship which seems to spring from Molloy's incomplete knowledge of the man, and perhaps of all men.

But in spite of my soul's leap out to him, at the end of its elastic, I saw him only darkly, because of the dark and because of the terrain, in the folds of which he disappeared from time to time, to reemerge further on, but most of all I think because of other things calling me and towards which too one after the other my soul was straining, wildly.<sup>5</sup>

The other man returning to town also receives considerable speculation. Molloy finds something "particularly urban in his aspect," presumably due to the nature of his attire, his cigar, and his wretched little dog which Molloy guesses to be a pomeranian. The easy manner of A, for whom there is little sympathy, seems to offend Molloy.

Did he not seem rather to have issued from the ramparts, after a good dinner, to take his dog and himself for a walk, like so many citizens, dreaming and farting, when

the weather is fine.<sup>6</sup>

From the mysterious lyricism of this encounter which begins to assume the dimensions of an archetype of human social interaction, Molloy sets out to find his mother. His resolution to see her is predicated more upon involvement in the process than upon actually being with her, whom he admits to hating. With his bicycle for transportation, he finally arrives in town where he gets in trouble with the police. It is interesting to note the similarity between Molloy's reaction to the urban aspect of A and his inability to deal with the police to whose authority and bureaucratic procedures he cannot relate.

After leaving the police station, Molloy's bicycle runs over a dog belonging to a Mrs. Lousse. As a result of this accident, Molloy spends a period of time at the house of Mrs. Lousse. The reason for his stay is unclear, and Molloy escapes from the woman and the town on crutches. Once outside the town, Molloy remembers his search for his mother and again attempts to return. His progress is progressively impeded by the gradual disintegration of his motor abilities. After his legs

fail him, he loses his crutches and eventually is forced to drag himself along on his stomach. At the end of his story Molloy lies immobilized in a ditch, and the first half of the first novel is terminated. "Molloy could stay where he happened to be."<sup>7</sup>

Part II of Molloy is the story of a Jacques Moran who is engaged, much in the manner of a private detective, to find Molloy by Gaber, a messenger from Youdi who is the supreme authority of an organization about which very little is disclosed. Once again, it is helpful to avoid the temptation to interpret what appears to be a symbology of names. The events of Part II are important mainly because they reflect a sequence similar to those in Part I. The haunting similarities between the characters of Molloy and Moran at the beginnings of their stories foretell the gradual undoing of Moran during the course of his story. With his son, he departs on his quest for Molloy, during which he loses his son, his bicycle and his possessions. While alone he meets two men, one of whom he disposes of summarily. "I do not know what happened then. But a little later, perhaps a long time later, I found him stretched on the ground, his head in

a pulp."<sup>8</sup> Finally Moran returns to find his house deserted and his pets (hens and bees) dead.

The physical incapacitation of Moran begins early in the trip with leg pains which develop finally into acute paraplegia, forcing him to crawl in much the same manner as Molloy. It is interesting to note that when Moran obtains crutches at the end of his story, he is then in about the same physical condition as Molloy at the beginning of his story. This seems to support the most plausible hypothesis for understanding the whole novel--specifically that Part I and Part II are chronologically reversed. Since Molloy is older than Moran, it is logical that they might indeed be the same person depicted at two different times in his life.

At the end of Part II, Moran is considering leaving his home again and he remarks, "Perhaps I shall meet Molloy. My knee is no better. It is no worse either. I have crutches now."<sup>9</sup> Moran then speaks of the voice which tells him things, a voice which he has often heard. Whether or not this voice is a direct communication from Youdi or some inner command, or both, its language is not

the same as that which Moran had learned as a child. But he is learning to understand the new form and to realize what it demands.

But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understood it, all wrong perhaps. That is not what matters. It told me to write the report. Does this mean that I am freer now than I was? I do not know. I shall learn. 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.<sup>10</sup>

A different language to be sure, expressing a logic which permits direct contradiction. Moran had indeed learned this language during his story, which began at the beginning of Part II: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows." Is Moran in fact "freer" now, or is this freedom merely the lack of all constraint whatsoever? The answer, if one accepts the hypothesis that Parts I and II of Molloy are chronologically reversed segments in the life of one man, is immediately irrelevant. For whether Moran is free or not, freer or less free, "Molloy could stay, where he happened to be."<sup>11</sup>

### Malone Dies

The transition from the first to the second novel of the trilogy is easy. Malone begins, "I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all." The Beckettian hero, immobilized by escalating physical decay at the end of Molloy, has been institutionalized and will remain bed-ridden throughout the second novel. He is an old man now, about eighty he implies. His name tempts one to interpret the symbology of names suggested in the first novel--is Malone a contraction of Molloy/Moran-alone? He recalls having spent most of his life walking. From this point on, however, Malone is confined to his room, and his activities are now limited to the bare necessities of subsistence: "What matters is to eat and excrete. Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles."<sup>12</sup> He misses his former mobility. "My body is what is called, inadvisedly perhaps, impotent. There is virtually nothing it can do. Sometimes I miss not being able to crawl around any more."<sup>13</sup>

Malone's plan for waiting out the remainder of his life is to play a game which consists mainly of telling

stories and taking his inventory--"to speak of the things that are left," as Molloy had put it.<sup>14</sup> Moran's game now begins;

So first of all my stories and then, last of all, if all goes well, my inventory. And I shall begin, that they may plague me no more, with the man and the woman. That will be the first story, there is not matter there for two. There will therefore be only three stories after all, that one, then the one about the animal, then the one about the thing, a stone probably. That is all very clear. Then I shall deal with my possessions.<sup>15</sup>

But this plan, clear though it may be, is never realized. There are stories which overlap and at times seem to be only the poorly connected segments of a greater narrative. This greater narrative is, of course, Malone's story which will close with his supposed death at the end of the second novel. The inventory, which constantly bothers Malone during his narrative, finally occurs out of schedule, before his stories are finished. Midway through a sentence during one of the episodes, he interrupts himself, "Quick quick my possessions. Quiet, quiet, twice, I have time, lots of time, as usual." Malone find this inventory rather difficult due to the

arbitrary nature of ownership as he perceives it. He is, however, able to include these items: two pencils (one of which must be under his bed); an exercise-book; the stick ("which I did not have either when I came here, but which I consider mine..."); a needle stuck into two corks; the bowl of a pipe. Gradually Malone becomes bogged down with his inventory, and he states, "I shall not finish this inventory either, a little bird tells me so, the paraclete perhaps, psittaceously named. Be it so."<sup>17</sup> Malone's puns, clear and witty as they are, are confusing because they detract from the sense of importance with which he formerly referred to his inventory. The facts, moreover, indicate that Malone is still capable of completing his inventory, were he so inclined.

Malone's first story begins with the account of a man named Saposcat, called Sapo by his friends. Almost immediately we are told that Sapo was precocious as a boy, but performed poorly at his lessons.

He attended his classes with his mind elsewhere. He liked sums, but not the way they were taught. What he liked was the manipulation of concrete numbers. All calculation

seemed to him idle in which the nature of the unit was not specified. He made a practice, alone and in company, of mental arithmetic. And the figures then marshalling in his mind thronged it with colours and with forms.<sup>18</sup>

Already we begin to recognize similarities between Sapo and the other characters of the trilogy. Sapo's mental exercise with arithmetic affords an appeal much like Malone's desire for inventory, in which the unit is to be "specified." In much the same spirit, Malone later remarks, "The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness."<sup>19</sup>

Sapo's story resumes with a description of his "poor and sickly parents," the poverty of their home, and their plans for the future which seem predicated more upon impotence than strength. All attempts made by the Saposcats to better their lot involve an initial setback. When Mr. Sapocat ponders growing his own vegetables, his wife informs him that they are cheaper to buy. And the expense of private lessons for young Sapo is almost prohibitive, causing his family difficult financial pressures.

Malone's account of Sapo reminds him constantly of his own life, and although he remarks "Nothing is less like me than this patient, reasonable child..."<sup>20</sup> their mutual qualities are overwhelming. Malone recalls his own childhood difficulties...

I couldn't play. I turned till I was dizzy, clapped my hands, ran, shouted, saw myself losing, rejoicing lamenting. Then suddenly I threw myself on the playthings, if there were any, or on a child, to change his joy to howling, or I fled, to hiding. The grown-ups pursued me, the just, caught me, beat me, hounded me back into the round, the game, the jollity.<sup>21</sup>

Malone continues to describe Sapo's visits with the Lambert family. "There was the man, the woman and two children, a boy and a girl."<sup>22</sup> Big Lambert, we are told, "had married his young cousin and was still with her..."--this was his third or fourth marriage. "He was highly thought of as a bleeder and disjoiner of pigs and highly sought after, I exaggerate, in this capacity."<sup>23</sup> The joy with which Lambert carried out his profession and the occasional near-gratuity which he extended (only a pig's cheek in return for services),

indicate an almost perverted savageness about this man.

Lambert was feared and in a position to do as he pleased. And even his young wife had abandoned all hope of bringing him to heel, by means of her cunt, that trump card of young wives.<sup>24</sup>

During the narrative, Malone is frequently overcome by the "tedium" of the story-game. Or perhaps he cannot remain adequately absorbed in the stories to forget his own greater objective--to finish dying. This recurrent awareness causes Malone a terrifying skepticism:

There is naturally another possibility that does not escape me, though it would be a great disappointment to have it confirmed, and that is that I am dead already and that all continues more or less as when I was not. Perhaps I expired in the forest, or even earlier. In which case all the trouble I have been taking for some time past, for what purpose I do not clearly recall except that it was in some way connected with the feeling that my troubles were nearly over, has been to no purpose whatsoever.<sup>25</sup>

The utter futility of waiting which Malone must endure leads to a persistent questioning of his situation. Trapped now by the four white walls of his room, "in a kind of leaden light that makes no shadow," he senses

the extension of his own life force, his vitality, out to the perimeters of his chamber. He even feels as if the "grey incandescence" of the room emanates from his body.

And softly my little space begins to throb again. You may say it is all in my head, and indeed sometimes it seems to me I am in a head and that these eight, no six, these six planes that enclose me are of solid bone.<sup>26</sup>

Malone's sense of his own enlargement within the room gradually shifts emphasis from the cerebral to the physical. Imagined initially as a larger skull, the chamber takes on the characteristics of a womb in which Malone is expanding.

Yes, an old foetus. That's what I am now, hoar and impotent, mother is done for, I've rotted her, she'll drop me with the help of gangrene, perhaps papa is at the party too, I'll land headforemost mewling in the charnel-house, not that I'll mewl, not worth it.<sup>27</sup>

Malone's humor is at his own expense--"perhaps papa is at the party too..." These childish references to the parents emphasize the dichotomy between the purity of an infant and Malone's condition, "hoar and impotent."

Unlike the child, he is to face birth into death, and his feeling of dilation begins to obsess him.

All strains towards the nearest deeps, and notably my feet, which even in the ordinary way are so much further from me than all the rest, from my head I mean, for that is where I am fled, my feet are leagues away.<sup>28</sup>

For Malone, containment of the consciousness within the head ("me") has become a physical containment ("me" again) within the perimeters of the room. But the process is not checked here, for once outside his own skull there can be no stopping:

For my arse for example, which can hardly be accused of being the end of anything, if my arse suddenly started to shit at the present moment, which God forbid, I firmly believe the lumps would fall out in Australia. And if I were to stand up again, from which God preserve me, I fancy I would fill up a considerable part of the universe.<sup>29</sup>

The process of existence is seen as a series of greater and greater chambers which one must fill as he grows. Expansion, then, is to be arrested simultaneously with the cessation of existence. Malone imagines the removal of his body from his room after death:

... how often I have seen this old head swing out through the door, low, for my big old bones weigh heavy, and the door is low, lower and lower in my opinion. And each time it bangs against the jam, my head does, for I am tall, and the landing is small, and the man carrying my feet cannot wait, before he starts down the stairs, for the whole of me to be out, on the landing I mean, but he has to start turning before that, so as not to bang into the wall, of the landing I mean.<sup>30</sup>

Obviously the evacuation is accomplished in the head-first manner of a normal childbirth, and the difficulty with which Malone describes the event seems appropriate. His ultimate statement of birth into death comes with striking clarity near the end of the novel....

I am being given, if I may venture the expression, birth into death, such is my impression. The feet are clear already, of the great cunt of existence. Favorable presentation I trust. My head will be the last to die.<sup>31</sup>

Malone's perspective is reversed here. To be born out of existence is definitely a feet-first type of operation, unlike the previous description of the evacuation of his chamber, out of which he was manoeuvred head-first.

An essential question raised by Malone's uncertainty about his own status quo--is he already dead, is he still alive, will he always go on as he does now-- concerns the justification for telling stories if their function (i.e., to pass the remaining time until death) no longer applies. If Malone is already dead, the stories may never end. After a long digression from the Sapo story, Malone attempts a resolution to this problem:

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 where I am, nor if I am. Yes, a little creature, I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say.<sup>32</sup>

Malone's decision is to continue as he has always done. We learn that he "will try and make a little creature," and his equation becomes clear: story-telling = creation. In his own act Malone reflects the nature of Biblical creation--in His own image. The implication is that God created man out of his need for a companion or at least for some object of his attention, to be himself

less lonely as Molloy put it. But there is another implication in Malone's decision which becomes clearer in his next statement about his creature:

And seeing what a poor thing I have made, or how like myself, I shall eat it. Then be alone a long time, unhappy, not knowing what my prayer should be nor to whom.<sup>33</sup>

Like his own small creature, Malone has been created to fill God's need, and it is at God's will that he will be destroyed. Malone's resentment at being the unfortunate victim of this impulsive Omnipotence demonstrates his awareness of a game greater than his own and over which he has no control.

Malone's need for a little creature serves to recall Sapo, from whom he digressed earlier.

I have taken a long time to find him again, but I have found him. How did I know it was he, I don't know. And what can have changed him so?<sup>34</sup>

And indeed Sapo must have changed, for Malone no longer accepts his name:

For Sapo--no, I can't call him that anymore, and I even wonder how I was able to stomach such a name till now. So then for, let me see, for Macmann, that's not much better but there's no time to

lose, for Macmann might be stark staring naked under this surtout for all anyone would be any the wiser.<sup>35</sup>

Again the symbology of names is strongly suggested. Saposcat, probably a contraction of Sapo from "homo sapiens" and of the Greek word "skatos" meaning feces, becomes Macmann suggesting son-of-man. In addition to this consistency of nomenclature, we recognize other similarities between Macmann and previous characters of the trilogy. Macmann too, for example, must tolerate the vanity of waiting:

... he who has waited long enough will wait for ever. And there comes an hour when nothing more can happen and nobody can come and all is ended but the waiting that knows itself in vain.<sup>36</sup>

Macmann soon develops problems in locomotion which are largely due to over-exposure in a cold and violent rain storm during which he remains at times supine and at times prostrate under the illusory pretext of protection. His condition seems to ignite a humorous sympathy in Malone who ventures,

... it is perhaps not inappropriate to wish Macmann, since wishing costs nothing, sooner or later a general paralysis sparing at a pinch the arms if that is conceivable,

in a place impermeable as far as possible to wind, rain, sound, cold, great heat (as in the seventh century) and daylight, with one or two eiderdowns just in case and a charitable soul say once a week bearing eating-apples and sardines in oil for the purpose of postponing as long as possible the fatal hour, it would be wonderful.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps as a result of growing infirmity, Macmann is then institutionalized. Malone describes the event as follows:

One day, much later, to judge by his appearance, Macmann came to again, once again, in a kind of asylum. At first he did not know it was one, being plunged within it, but he was told so as soon as he was in a condition to receive news. They said in substance, You are now in the house of Saint John of God, with the number one hundred and sixty-six.<sup>38</sup>

Is this the same place to which Malone is confined? Perhaps, but no matter--the necessary qualities for the archetypal institution are present in each.

Immediately upon arriving at Saint John of God, Macmann meets Moll, "a little old woman, immoderately ill-favored of both face and body."

The thin yellow arms contorted by some kind of bone deformation, the lips so broad and thick that they seemed to devour half the

face, were at first sight her most revolting features.<sup>39</sup>

Malone tells us that Moll had applied for the responsibility of caring for number one hundred and sixty-six, and consequently Macmann was her charge. The relationship which develops between Moll and Macmann is more explicit sexually than any other in the trilogy, deriving the greatest part of its success out of the impotence of the participants.

There sprang up gradually between them a kind of intimacy which, at a given moment, led them to lie together and copulate as best they could. For given their age and scant experience of carnal love, it was only natural that they should not succeed, at the first shot, in giving each other the impression they were made for each other. The spectacle was then offered of Macmann trying to bundle his sex into his partner's like a pillow into a pillow-slip, folding it in two, and stuffing it in with his fingers.<sup>40</sup>

With all the difficulty of igniting damp tinder with a flint, they finally achieved "a kind of sombre gratification." The experience caused Moll to wish "Oh would we had but met sixty years ago!" and afforded Macmann "some insight into the meaning of the expression. Two is company."<sup>41</sup>

As the second novel of the Trilogy draws to a close, Malone's story begins to accelerate, almost in desperation. Malone decides he is going to kill Moll, something within his power as narrator. The relationship between Macmann and Moll begins to deteriorate, and Moll is replaced by Lemuel who tells Macmann, "it is in my charge you are from now on."<sup>42</sup> Lemuel appears as an extremely violent man who, by venting some inner frustration in general hyperactivity, seemed to diminish his "moral anguish."

Physical pain ... seemed to help him greatly. And one day rolling up the leg of his trousers, he showed Macmann his shin covered with bruises, scars and abrasions. Then producing smartly a hammer from an inner pocket he dealt himself right in the middle of his ancient wounds, so violent a blow that he fell down backwards, or perhaps I should say forwards. But the part he struck most readily, with his hammer, was the head, and that is understandable, for it too is a bony part, and sensitive, and difficult to miss, and the seat of all the shit and misery, so you rain blows upon it, with more pleasure than on the leg for example, which never did you any harm, it's only human.<sup>43</sup>

Lemuel's super-masochistic behavior indicates a high degree of psychological instability, and it is difficult

to believe him capable of any responsibility whatsoever. Nevertheless, Lemuel eventually is entrusted with the assignment of leading, accompanied by Lady Pedal, a picnic expedition to the islands. This excursion had been organized as an Easter affair and paid for by Lady Pedal whom, we are told, "was well off and lived for doing good and bringing a little happiness into the lives of those less fortunate than herself..."<sup>44</sup>

Once the party has landed on the island, Lemuel begins dispatching the members of his party with a hatchet. These killings are described in a matter-of-fact manner, and rather hastily because Malone, it seems, is running out of time. He even remembers his plan for an inventory, although the words "my possessions" are all he can manage. Malone concludes his story, and presumably his life, with semi-conscious muttering to the effect that nothing will happen there anymore. With half of this party butchered on the island and Lady Pedal swooning on the shore, probably with a broken hip, Malone leaves Lemuel adrift in the

boat, standing with hatchet raised over the heads of the remaining five men. As he suggested earlier, Malone has destroyed his little creatures, his personal creations, affording to them, if they are indeed capable of appreciating it, a security of life-purpose which he was never able to find for himself.

Thus concludes the second novel of the Trilogy. "The book has not a dull page, not even when its subject is dullness, and we nearly do not notice how the lethal rages that shake the man before us bespeak a quiescent monster who was long ago otherwise."<sup>45</sup>

### The Unnamable

Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. Can it be that one day, off it goes on, that one day I simply stayed in, in where, instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible, it wasn't far. Perhaps that is how it began.<sup>46</sup>

So begins the last novel of the trilogy. After all the previously identified characters of Molloy and Malone

Dies, not to mention the horde of pre-Trilogy characters, the persona of The Unnamable is unable to establish the credibility of his own name. Perhaps due to some austere set of requirements, this new persona feels the necessity of orienting his words to some starting point, some origin for reference ... "A few general remarks to begin with," as we are told. But the orientation provided by the Unnamable at the outset involves very little in the way of fact, and we share in his confusion.

While trying to decide how to proceed, the Unnamable wonders,

By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?

and he adds,

I should mention before going further, any further on, that I say<sup>4</sup> aporia without knowing what it means.

"Aporia" is derived from the Greek word "poros" meaning a passage or a strait (viz. Bosphoros), and the prefix indicates a negative condition, hence literally "without passage." As used in the text,

therefore, *aporia* means "with greatest difficulty," if indeed this can be viewed as a plan of procedure.

Like Malone in the beginning of the second novel, the Unnamable tries to lay out his situation. He is required to speak. He is alone, although he plans on company. "In the beginning. A few puppets. Then I'll scatter them to the winds, if I can."<sup>48</sup> Like the ashes of cremation, the Unnamable will scatter the characters of his stories, his own creations, to the winds. The implication, once again, is that these puppets will somehow validate the existence of the Unnamable himself.

At first the Unnamable tells us that Malone is there with him. But since there is some distance between them and also due to the strange quality of light--"There are no days here"<sup>49</sup>--the Unnamable wonders if it is not Molloy he is watching. "Perhaps it is Molloy, wearing Malone's hat."<sup>50</sup> The Unnamable cannot be sure because the place is so vast. He tries constantly to visualize the geography of his netherworld, but since he is "not so good at topography"<sup>51</sup>

he is unable to produce one. As an alternative, the Unnamable proposes two hypotheses. The first postulates that he and the others--"at least from Murphy on"--are located individually in vertically aligned pits. As to which level he occupies, the Unnamable is unclear--he wonders, "Are there other pits, deeper down? To which one accedes by mine?"<sup>52</sup> The second hypothesis postulates that the Unnamable and the others are located on concentric orbits revolving about a fixed point, like planets around the sun. Here the Unnamable's orientation is as follows:

I like to think I occupy the centre, but nothing is less certain. In a sense I would be better off at the circumference, since my eyes are always fixed in the same direction. But I am certainly not at the circumference. For if I were it would follow that Malone, wheeling about me as he does, would issue from the enceinte at every revolution, which is manifestly impossible.<sup>53</sup>

With only one point of reference, Malone, the Unnamable is justified in assuming that he is the center since Malone passes before him at regular intervals and he sees him only in profile. Whether or not the Unnamable is, in fact, at the center requires at least one more

reference point to determine. For it well may be that he too is "in perpetual motion, accompanied by Malone, as the earth by its moon."<sup>54</sup> Since the Unnamable recognizes the fallibility of his powers of perception, he tries to afford himself at least the security of a conclusion:

But the best is to think of myself as fixed and at the centre of this place, whatever its shape and extent may be. This is also probably the most pleasing to me.<sup>55</sup>

When presenting his hypothesis of the pits, the Unnamable remarks upon his "stupid obsession with depth." Later in the novel, he returns to the concept of a pit, this time as an image of silence.

... what is it, a little hole, you go down into it, into the silence, it's worse than the noise, you listen, it's worse than talking, no, not worse, no worse, you wait, in anguish, have they forgotten me, no, yes, no, someone calls me, I crawl out again, what is it, a little hole, in the wilderness.<sup>56</sup>

This little hole in the wilderness, symbolic of the fetal chamber like Malone's room, manifests the potential of pre-natal silence. But the continuation of

the anguish of self-awareness after birth into death, here represented merely as a change in location, becomes a terrifying possibility. The Unnamable's uncertainty about his release from the life-struggle is increased by his inability to prove his own existence. Using the "esse est percipi" principle as suggested by Berkeley, the Unnamable can affirm the existences of the others--Murphy, Molloy, Moran, Malone, etc.--none of whom seem to be aware of him. Death, the cessation of existence and the salvation (relief) of the living, may have nothing to do with the Unnamable.

Obviously, it is not Beckett's intention to solve the dilemmas of reality and existence, but rather to examine the psychological processes activated by such dilemmas. One must realize that the philosophical complexities which confront the Beckettian heroes result not from the intricacies of their lives, but on the other hand from sheer routine and basically simple circumstances. In The Unnamable, the monotonous routine of the hero's existence has virtually supplanted the sequence of events found in the first and second

novels. The Unnamable tells his stories, but they are fragmented and his characters constantly shift from the third to the first person in the narrative. As this last novel progresses, therefore, it is increasingly difficult to determine whether or not the Unnamable is referring to one of his surrogates or to himself. His characters, moreover, seem to be his representatives "up there in the world." Basil is the first to represent the Unnamable, and he is later replaced by Mahood. The last to be introduced is Worm, representing the Unnamable in the future.

As he begins the first story, the Unnamable summons what inspiration is available to him: "Air, the air, is there anything to be squeezed from that old chestnut?"<sup>57</sup> Not much to go on! Nevertheless, he begins by making rather obscure statements about his own physical condition--statements based upon the testimony of "Basil and his crew," who evidently report to him periodically.

There were four or five of them at me, they called that presenting their report. 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. Is he still glaring at me from the shadows?<sup>58</sup>

The Unnamable's paranoia concerning Basil continues to increase, and consequently he asserts and reasserts his superiority as creator.

And Basil and his gang? Inexistent, invented to explain I forget what. Ah yes, all lies, 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, too put off the hour when I must speak of me. There will be no more about them.<sup>59</sup>

Even in the admission of his own lies invented "basely" (perhaps a pun on Basil), the Unnamable finds some power over the others. And yet it is not sufficient, for Basil seems inextricably bound up in the Unnamable's sense of his own identity. He later admits,

Decidedly Basil is becoming important, I'll call him Mahood instead, I prefer that, I'm queer. It was he told me stories about me, lived in my stead, issued forth from me, entered back into me, heaped stories on my head.<sup>60</sup>

Although the Unnamable may derive some sense of authority from changing Basil's name to Mahood, he is unable to diminish his paranoia.

But his voice continued to testify for me, as though woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I was, what I was, so as to have done with saying, done with listening.<sup>61</sup>

And shortly thereafter the Unnamable admits the awesome possibility ...

And what if Mahood were my master? I'll leave that for the time being, So many prospects in so short a time, it's too much.<sup>62</sup>

In spite of his fears, the Unnamable must resign himself to his need of Mahood and his stories. Therefore, before "executing his portrait" of Mahood, "this caricature," the Unnamable admits that "Mahood is no worse than his predecessors."<sup>63</sup>

During the first Mahood story, the Unnamable appears open to the possibility that he and Mahood might be the same person. He asks himself, "What if we were one and the same after all, as he affirms, and I deny?"<sup>64</sup> Again, the confusion over this issue helps to explain

the Unnamable's use of the first person while ostensibly referring to Mahood.

This time I am short a leg. And yet it appears I have rejuvenated. That's part of the programme.<sup>65</sup>

The story moves into a description of Mahood's family-- "grandpa, grandma, little mother and the eight or nine brats."<sup>66</sup> It is not surprising that a favorite pastime of this family is none other than telling stories.

In the evening, after supper, while my wife kept her eye on me, gaffer and grammer related my life history, to the sleepy children. Bedtime story atmosphere. That's one of Mahood's favorite tricks, to produce ostensibly independent testimony in support of my historical existence.<sup>67</sup>

Mahood's story moves on to a description of himself moving with greatest difficulty in a circle around the members of his family who express pleasure at his progress. The Unnamable is constantly bothered by the identity which he feels tricked into sharing with Mahood. Whenever there is room for doubt concerning the veracity of the account, the Unnamable cites Mahood as the source of information. Consequently, there are

many phrases like "still Mahood speaking" and "Mahood dixit" interjected throughout the narrative. But Mahood takes issue with the Unnamable's skepticism:

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.<sup>68</sup>

It is interesting that Mahood assumes that the greater the physical incapacity of his main character, the more likely the Unnamable is to identify with him.

After the first account trails off, the Unnamable decides to tell another of Mahood's stories. Now missing both arms and legs, "only the trunk remains (in sorry trim), surmounted by the head with which we are already familiar." In this condition, Mahood is "stuck like a sheaf of flowers in a deep jar, its neck flush with my mouth ..." Located in town near a chop-house (restaurant), Mahood is at rest, he is tolerated by the police (being incapable of any "gestures liable to be construed as inciting to alms"<sup>69</sup>), and he has a function in the professional sense--he not only provides fertilizer for a kitchen-garden of the proprietress of

the chop-house, whose duty it is to empty his receptacle, but also becomes for her establishment "a kind of landmark, not to say an advertisement, far more effective than for example a chef in cardboard, potbellied in profile and full face wafer thin."<sup>70</sup>

Mahood's only real problem now, not to count small nuisances like the flies that bite his head and the rats which threaten him, is his gradual sinking lower into his jar. Although the proprietress tries to correct this tendency by adding more sawdust (Mahood's toilet), the prospect of being throttled remains.

Asphyxia! I who was always the respiratory type, witness this thorax still mine, together with the abdomen. I who murmured, each time I breathed in, Here comes more oxygen, and each time I breathed out, There go the impurities, the blood is bright red again. The blue face! The obscene protrusion of the tongue! The tumefaction of the penis!<sup>71</sup>

In much the same manner as Basil was renamed Mahood.

Mahood is now renamed Worm:

But it's time I gave this solitary a name, nothing doing without proper names. I therefore baptise him Worm. It was high time. Worm. I don't like it, but I haven't much choice. It will

be my name too when the time comes,  
 when I needn't be called Mahood any-  
 more, if that happy time ever comes.<sup>72</sup>

We are told that Worm is "the first of his kind," different from all the others. Worm has survived them all. And what better name could there be for this human trunk, immobile, hiding in his hole in the wilderness?

His senses tell him nothing, nothing about himself, nothing about the rest, and this distinction is beyond him. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless, but not for himself, for others, others conceive him and say, Worm is, since we conceive him, as if there could be no being but being conceived, if only by the beer.<sup>73</sup>

Worm is, although he doesn't know it. And it is precisely for this reason that he can exist for others, by their choice. Worm will not encroach upon the identity of the Unnamable because he has no sense of his own identity. Like Christ, Worm is there for others who want nothing more than to conceive him who requires nothing in return. He is in a place "With no way in, no way out, a safe place. Not like Eden. And Worm inside. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, capable of

nothing, wanting nothing."<sup>74</sup> This place is not like Eden because there is no chance of error, no forbidden fruit, no possibility of expulsion.

As the third novel draws to a close only the persona "I" remains, although he refers constantly to the stories of his cast of moribunds. The Unnamable is now truly unnamable. He ponders the fate of Worm whom he fears may be in for a change, another birth. Worm could not choose this change for himself, "wanting nothing" as he does, but he is subject to the envy of those who conceive him and realize his avoidance of the suffering they must endure. It is they who wish him torn from the silence of his hole. "They could set a dog on him perhaps, with the instructions to drag him out.... With a long pole perhaps, with a hook at the end."<sup>75</sup>

Midway through Malone Dies we are told that the ideas of cause and effect are often confused together "in the minds of those who continue to think."<sup>76</sup> As the end of the last novel approaches, it is in precisely this predicament that we find the Unnamable

with regard to the incessant voice. At first he questions the origin of the voice, "Where do these words come from that pour out of my mouth..."<sup>76</sup> Is the Unnamable the source? Does he hear the voice of someone else? Or is he forced merely to repeat another's words, as has been suggested earlier?

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.<sup>77</sup>

Although the paradox of the voice remains unresolved, it directs us toward the crux of the artistic experience. If, as Beckett says, we are to accept "the possibility of assuming anything whatever,"<sup>78</sup> then indeed we must admit that the existence of the voice, of internal or external origin, becomes of great importance because of its effect upon the Unnamable. Is he the artist (creator) of his own words? Even the extreme possibility that the Unnamable may be merely a division between two halves of a world, existing only as a vibrating membrane, demonstrates a cause-and-effect relationship from which he cannot escape involvement.

... perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum ...<sup>79</sup>

The tympanum is indeed the perfect image, for sound can either be the cause or the effect of its vibration.

But the sounds which comprise "this long sin against the silence that enfolds us"<sup>80</sup> are not only sounds, they are language. Language is the means of expressing thoughts, of communicating, and yet the Unnamable tells us, "there is no great difference here between one expression and the next, when you've grasped one you've grasped them all ..."<sup>81</sup> The limitations of the language is the source of his persecution. Being unnamable, he cannot even refer to himself ... "it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that ..."<sup>82</sup> At another point he becomes thoroughly overwhelmed because he has forgotten his apodosis,<sup>83</sup> and he later prophesies, "the comma will come when I'll drown for

good, then the silence...."<sup>84</sup> And he is right, for there are fewer and fewer periods and more and more commas as the novel draws to a close. The next sentence is in fact the last, and it runs for more than six pages, ending with the final period. The Unnamable tells us, "I can't go on, I'll go on." <sup>85</sup> There is no difference.

PART TWO: THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

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The Voyage of the Trilogy

In The Novels of Samuel Beckett, John Fletcher describes what he considers to be a central theme in the development of the Beckettian hero--that of the dichotomy of mind and body, a radical split,

which causes the former to retreat into itself, into an isolated life of its own... Murphy tries, however unsuccessfully, to achieve final liberation from his body; but the later heroes prefer to give up the struggle, to accept the fact of a "mésalliance" which cannot be dissolved and which leaves the body to break down like a worn-out machine, whilst the mind, terrified of ceasing, chatters on, turning over continually its never-changing futilities.<sup>86</sup>

The characters of the trilogy seem resigned to the inevitability of this "mésalliance" until the time of long-awaited death, in which they hope to find liberation from the pain of existence. Maurice Nadeau describes this death wish as a longing toward "un néant qui serait réalité la plus certaine de l'homme."<sup>87</sup> For the Beckettian hero, pain begins with the legacy of his own birth--original sin (a sin attributed to the

engendered and not the engenderers, as will be shown later). With this initial transgression, the hero embarks upon a life which he soon realizes to be a constant insult to the silence from which he came and into which he will eventually return. He must only wait out his own physical decay.

The life process of the Beckettian hero is a process of increasing subjectivity, eventually occluding the awareness of all other things. In his book Pour Samuel Beckett, Ludovic Janvier describes this process as follows:

Cela est clair: le voyage se fait bien  
de l'extérieur à l'intérieur: il ramène au  
centre de soi.<sup>88</sup>

The objectivity of a child gradually develops into a sense of subjectivity as he begins to understand his impact on other objects, and to see those objects in terms of his own presence. Molloy's ability to accept the existence of others (his recognition of A and C as individuals, for example) is replaced by Malone's obsession with his possessions (all of his characters are fictional) which in turn is replaced by the per-

spective of the Unnamable who sees everything in his world as a creation of his own fantasy. The world of Molloy, consequently, is one of open territory--a town, houses, forests, plains, etc.--over which the characters travel freely at first. But in a manner which parallels the gradual shift from objectivity to subjectivity, the hero undergoes a process of increasing physical impediment, culminating finally in the total immobility of Worm in The Unnamable.

To complicate the dying process of the hero, there is always a supreme authority, an imperative, imposing upon him a life-pattern to which he must adhere as best he can. In the first novel, Molloy's quest originates in some obscure force which demands that he find his mother, and Moran is authorized by Youdi,<sup>89</sup> the head of an organization in which he is employed. Malone's impetus is the result of an internal obsession which demands that he continue to play the game of story-telling. For the Unnamable, the imperative exists as a voice of indeterminable origin--possibly his own, he is not sure.

It is perhaps the omnipresence of the imperative

throughout the trilogy which gives credence to the idea that all of the characters are to be synthesized into the Unnamable, whose "name" becomes the only common denominator for all the other surrogate titles. The development of this universal character depicts a process of increasing introspection and intellectuality. For Molloy and Moran, the life-pattern is designated clearly and maintained largely without question throughout their quests. Their terminal condition, that of acute paraplegia, accounts for the end of their searching. In other words, the need for the search ends when the ability to do so no longer exists. Accordingly, Molloy is dismissed merely as a matter of physical presence at the end of his story: "Molloy could stay where he happened to be."

Physically incapacitated, there is nothing left for Molloy and Moran but to await death, and it is in exactly this predicament that we find Malone. "I shall soon be quite dead in spite of it all." Now divested of any significant motor ability, Malone becomes more aware of his function as writer and intellect. The once-present terror in the Beckettian mind of imprisonment within a

dying body now becomes anxious resignation. Premortem escape is impossible, and the human condition persists. Malone must have a life-pattern, even in the process of dying, and this is to be the game of telling stories.

The Unnamable's desire to be free of his creator becomes accentuated to the extreme, evoking the humor of radical irony, as described by Hassan<sup>90</sup> who provides the example of Tinguely's machine of which the sole purpose is self-destruction. Trapped in both space and time, the Unnamable is faced with only "a pensum to discharge." He becomes what he creates, and yet longs to be free of his creator. As Hassan writes,

It is as if Beckett were saying that art and artist long to be free of one another; yet it is only in their mutual bondage that both exist<sup>91</sup> to will their reciprocal destruction.

The Unnamable tells us, "the thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of the system."<sup>92</sup> Systems, like the Unnamable himself, are self-perpetuating, circular--they feed back into themselves. To be free of his creator, he creates and becomes his creation.

Of The Unnamable Hassan writes,

The narrator proceeds by statements, like the trilogy itself, that spiral toward zero and erase themselves semantically...<sup>93</sup>

The trilogy has indeed run the gamut from the nothingness of utter objectivity (with the narration of Molloy in the third person) to the nothingness of utter subjectivity (with the narration of The Unnamable in the first person). It is important that the Unnamable's inability to differentiate between exterior and interior, especially in relation to the voice, renders the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity meaningless in application to himself. The metamorphosis of the Beckettian hero is complete. "Thesis and antithesis are perpetrated under the maximum conditions of tension. When the tension breaks, and the Unnamable ceases to speak, Beckett will cease to write."<sup>94</sup>

The cyclical nature of the trilogy is supported by the seasonal sequence of the novels as well. The allegory of rebirth symbolized by springtime parallels the Beckettian hero's hope of salvation at death, implied only as the cessation of torment, and is symbolically represented in the trilogy as rebirth, or more accurately, birth into

death. Accordingly, the time of year when each of the novels ends is either stated or implied to be about springtime. As Molloy sinks into a ditch at the end of his story, he tells us, "It must have been spring, a morning in spring. I thought I heard birds, skylarks perhaps."<sup>95</sup> At the end of his story, Moran describes early summer days: "They were lovely days. The winter had been exceptionally rigorous, everybody said so. We had therefore a right to expect this superb summer."<sup>96</sup>

At the end of Malone Dies, Lady Pedal sings to the patients on their Easter picnic ...

Oh the jolly spring  
 Blue sun and nexts and flowers  
 Alleluiah Christ is King  
 Oh the happy happy hours  
 Oh the jolly jolly--<sup>97</sup>

And finally at the end, the Unnamable remarks, "the seasons must be very similar, perhaps it's springtime now."<sup>98</sup>

On every level possible, the trilogy has returned to its starting point, with the implication of continual repetition. Beckett's dismissal of Molloy in his ditch like a stone depicts an impasse similar to the consequences

of the Unnamable's solipsism: that of unending isolation. From the relatively coherent sequence of events depicted in Molloy, Beckett has achieved a statement of total negation by the end of The Unnamable. In his book entitled Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self, Frederick Hoffman observes,

The Unnamable is the extreme form of the "un-novel"; facts established in paragraph one of the traditional novel are here still in doubt at the end.<sup>99</sup>

And Hassan adds, "content zero, length infinity--these are the mathematical limits of the novel."

### The Heroic Function

... he who has waited long enough will wait forever. And there comes an hour when nothing more can happen and nobody can come and all is ended but the waiting that knows itself in vain.<sup>100</sup>

The process of waiting becomes absurd when he who waits realizes that he has no alternative and consequently that he is powerless to effect his own situation. From the first awareness of absurdity, the characters of the trilogy must endure the utter passivity of waiting. To make an effort in this situation, any effort at all,

is to accept the inevitable. Heroism, then, is a function of acceptance with the awareness of absurdity. The Beckettian hero struggles to go on, to continue in spite of the futility.

In Molloy, physical immobility renders Molloy and Moran incapable of performing their functions--Molloy's search for his mother and Moran's search for Molloy--or of changing the conditions of their lives. For Malone and the Unnamable, however, the absurdity of physical immobility is compounded with the absurdity of cerebral impotence. As discussed earlier, the Unnamable creates in order to escape the condition imposed upon him by his creator, and yet he becomes his creation. The irony, of which he is painfully aware, exists in the imperative of his creator, compelling him to create, to speak, to tell stories about himself so that he may escape himself. If the artist were the creator, he must be permitted to create without prerequisite form, but the medium has been predetermined for the Unnamable. This impasse, and the anguish resulting from it, is obviously due to the impossibility of "pure" communication. The Unnamable,

therefore, is only an agent of repetition.

And it all pours out unchanged, I have only to belch to be sure of hearing them, the same old sour teachings I can't change a tittle of. A parrot, that's what they're up against, a parrot.<sup>101</sup>

Throughout the trilogy, Beckett implies that man's original sin is his own birth which resulted from a de-  
sire to be born. The fault, then, is not of the engenderers but of the engendered, as if the pre-nate were able by choice to remain within the womb. And yet it is only after birth that the anguish of living becomes evident. Beckett exposes this dilemma beautifully in a jingle which transforms ironically into a Christmas carol:

A dog crawled into the kitchen and stole a crust of bread, then cook up with I've forgotten what and walloped him till he was dead, second verse, Then all the dogs came crawling and dug the dog a tomb and wrote upon the tombstone for dogs and bitches to come, third verse as the first, fourth, as the second, fifth, as the third, give us time, give us time. and we'll be a multitude, a thousand, ten thousand, there's no lack of room, adeste, adeste, all ye living bastards,<sup>102</sup> you'll be all right, you'll see ...

With the fifth verse the same as the third, and the third in turn as the first, there will indeed be a multitude,

of verses that is. And the dogs, crawling faithfully toward their destruction, maintain the "spirit of the system" of which the Unnamable warned us. They are unaware of the absurdity.

It is the human lot to be deceived into anguish, and the agent of this deception must be God since only he creates without prerequisite. God is, consequently, the only true artist, and it is like him the Unnamable must become to escape the anguish. As stated earlier, God created man to satisfy his own need for an object of his attention. Man was deceived into going along with this arrangement. One wonders if God too is subject to the same sense of impotence that is forced upon the Beckettian hero. For as Hassan writes, "Cruelty in word or deed is a Beckettian correlative of impotence." 103 And in a novel written prior to the trilogy, Beckett tells us, "By killing birds and feeding rats Watt and Arthur agree that they come closest to God." 104

The subtitle of Chapter 6 of Murphy reads, "Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat." As Fletcher points out, this is a humorous transformation of

Spinoza's phrase from Ethics V: "Amor intellectualis quo Deus se ipsum amat." Especially in relation to the trilogy, Beckett's alteration of Spinoza's phrase implies that self-love for mankind is impossible because of this sin imposed through the deception of God. In the Biblical context, the legacy which humanity must accept is the original sin of Adam and Eve, of whom the Unnamaale sarcastically remarks,

What puzzles me is the thought of being indebted for this information to persons without whom I can never have been in contact. Can it be innate knowledge? Like that of good and evil.<sup>105</sup>

And we are later told that Worm is to have "a safe place. Not like Eden." Worm is a fine representative of pre-sin humanity, "knowing nothing, capable of nothing ...". How then is the concept of sin possible? Without a doubt, man's torment is undeserved--imposed by the cruelty of God.

The nature of the acceptance of absurdity in the trilogy is remarkably consistent with the concept of existential acceptance as described by Camus in Le Mythe de Sisyphe. Throughout the trilogy, Beckett describes

many situations similar to that of Sisyphus, even mentioning him in Molloy:

... I do not even think Sisyphus is required to scratch himself, or to groan, or to rejoice, as the fashion is now, always at the same appointed places. And it may even be they are not too particular about the route he takes, provided it gets him to his destination safely and on time. And perhaps he thinks each journey is the first. This would keep hope alive, would it not, hellish hope. Whereas to see yourself doing the same thing endlessly over and over again fills you with satisfaction.<sup>106</sup>

Satisfaction can be derived from involvement in a repetitive act only if "hellish hope" of change has been totally obliterated. In this case, each repetition reinforces the assurance of a tomorrow and provides a security of reaffirmation, fulfilling a function similar to Molloy's sucking stones, the pebbles which Malone loves to feel in his pockets, and the counting of tiles on the toilet floor.

In his criticism of Camus, John Cruickshank writes that a man who faces the absurdity of life "must accept the painful paradox it entails. The existence of the dilemma must be realized, and also the fact that no

system or creed can eradicate it."<sup>107</sup> If "no system or creed" can provide salvation, as Cruickshank maintains, then Christ must be incapable of redemption. This hypothesis seems to be consistent with the image of Christ suggested in the trilogy. In Malone Dies, for example, there is a gratifying sarcasm about the description of the carving of Christ on Moll's one remaining tooth:

Then parting her jaws and pulling down her blobber-lip she discovered, breaking with its solitary fang the monotony of the gums, a long yellow canine bared to the roots and carved, with the drill probably, to represent the celebrated sacrifice.<sup>107</sup>

Hassan points out an irony in Malone's words near the end of the novel: "Echoes of childhood songs call forth ironic thoughts of Easter and the Resurrection of Christ who saved him 'twenty centuries in advance.'"<sup>108</sup> In The Unnamable, there is a reference to the thorns which were stuck into the "unfortunate Jesus," and shortly thereafter a comparison between the coming of Christ and the birth of Worm, with "song and dance of thanksgiving by victim, to celebrate his nativity."<sup>109</sup> Beckett's implication is indeed that Christ has been duped in a

manner similar to the deception of man. He is unfortunate, moreover, since he never realized the vanity of his death. In short, the image of Christ can provide little comfort for the Beckettian hero.

Suicide, the logical alternative to the anguish of waiting, is dismissed curtly in the trilogy. It is helpful to examine the rationale for the rejection of suicide developed at length by Camus in the beginning of Le Mythe de Sisyphe. Admitting his opinions to be more those of a moralist than a philosopher, Camus makes the distinction between mental suicide, "le suicide philosophique," and physical suicide, with the implication that the avoidance of physical suicide is accomplished only by mental suicide." In this sense, we might agree that the Beckettian hero has committed mental suicide, but one wonders if the Beckettian hero ever realized the option of physical suicide. For as Hassan points out,

Suicide thus appears as a rational decision which should have been undertaken after the very first awareness of the absurdity of life. Once caught up in the "waiting," however, no instant of time can ever be decisive again.<sup>110</sup>

### Language as Medium

In his essay on Proust, Beckett speaks of true art as the "non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect ..."<sup>111</sup> The inherent spontaneity which Beckett attributes to artistic creation is consistent with his conception of the role of the critic, specifically "to contemplate, not solve or explain, works of art."<sup>112</sup> The products of both the artist and the critic, then, must exalt the value of man's perception of phenomena as indicative of the quality of self and as separate from the distortions of logical interpretation. Whether or not the artist's perceptions are accurate, they are the stamp of his individuality as an artist and they are the means by which he makes the objects of his world the subjects of his art.

At another point in the Proust essay, Beckett writes,

The individual is the seat of a constant process of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past

time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours.<sup>113</sup>

To which Martin Esslin adds, "And the artist, to be true to his vocation, must confine himself to the faithful reflection of his changing self."<sup>114</sup>

In his discussion of Beckett's essays on Joyce, Hoffman states that "The quality of self is contained within the quality of the language it uses."<sup>115</sup> This concept is indeed applicable to the characters of the trilogy, for whom language is to be the medium of creation, as designated by the imperative voice. Realizing that anything they might say has been said before, they become mere agents of repetition, and their stories sham-creations.<sup>3</sup> What quality of self remains for the Beckettian hero in a language which is not his own? Identity becomes impossible for the Unnamable who tells us, "To have no identity, it's a scandal, I assure you... His prison, the mechanism of his isolation, is defined by the limitation of the language in which he is forced to speak of himself. He cannot even refer to himself-- "there's no name for me, no pronoun for me ..." Obviously, the pronoun without its antecedent is meaningless.

Phenomena in the trilogy occur only in the narration of the hero, and exist therefore solely as creations of his fantasy. Depending as he must upon his own creation to substantiate his existence, the hero is forced to speculate with doubt upon the phenomena he "perceives." "The fact that doubt has become a central means of speculation does not rule out the utility of logic or rational language practices."<sup>116</sup> The Unnamable, then, must utilize the traditional rules of logic and expression to communicate a mode of perception which he cannot trust.

The process of perceiving is one in which the brain demands signal complexity, which, if not available in certain stimuli, is provided by the brain itself. For this reason, the constant repetition of a monotone may be heard as varied groupings of different sounds, as in the classic example of the sounds a train makes when passing over the tracks. In relatively simple situations, the Beckettian hero becomes involved in a process of thinkingandthinkingandthinkingandthinking ... during which the necessary complexity is developed. As Malone

tells us, "The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness." In Watt, signal complexity occurs in permutations of the grammatical structure--Watt is eventually forced into inversions of sentences in a paragraph, words in a sentence, and even letters in a word. In The Unnamable, Beckett expresses this phenomenon clearly, distinguishing language as the direct reflection of perception:

Here all is clear. No, all is not clear.  
But the discourse must go on. So one in-  
vents obscurities. Rhetoric.<sup>117</sup>

The complexities of perception with which Beckett deals, therefore, are expressed as semantic complexities, formulated to display the various modes in which stimuli are received by the sensory apparatus and transmitted to the brain. Beckett's treatment of this phenomenon is strikingly similar to Joyce's concept of perception as expressed in Stephen's thoughts while wandering along Sandymount Strand. Stephen becomes involved in the idea that he is there to read the "signatures of all things"<sup>118</sup> through visual and auditory sensations--in the former case within the dimensions of the "nebeneinander" (one

thing next to another), and in the latter within the dimensions of the "nacheinander" (one thing after another). He expresses the nature of visual perception as "the ineluctable modality of the visible," enabling him to recognize objects by association with previous visual observations. Accordingly, auditory perception is expressed as "the ineluctable modality of the audible," which Stephen demonstrates by closing his eyes and tapping with a stick to determine the nature of things about him. He realizes immediately that sounds, like visual patterns, arrange themselves into familiar sequences ... "Rhythm begins, you see. I hear. A catalectic tetrameter of iambs marching."<sup>119</sup>

The epistemology of the trilogy indicates that nothing exists with absolute certainty. As Hassan states,

Nothing is ontologically whole in Beckett's world; objects and persons are predetermined to be partial, and events can be more accurately described as near-events.<sup>120</sup>

When Malone sarcastically utters, "Nothing is more real than nothing ...," he is addressing the dilemma of the tautology from which there is no escape.

In the first novel of the trilogy, Moran seeks to find his creator in *Communion*, with the expectation that he will find Molloy and write his report as ordered. In the end of the trilogy, however, the Unnamable, now painfully aware of the joke perpetrated upon him, realizes more accurately the nature of his search:

... it's like shit, there we have it at last, there it is at last, the right word, one has only to seek, seek in vain, to be sure of finding in the end, it's a question of elimination.<sup>121</sup>

In the search for his creator, the Beckettian hero has progressed from the sacramental to the excremental, from the concept of salvation in the blood and the body of Christ to the epiphany of his own physiology. Mayoux recognizes the organic nature of progress in the trilogy, describing the great originality of Beckett's work as,

its organic quality, its immediacy, its transcriptions at once direct and yet imaginative of psycho-physiological states, an extraordinary symbolization, an auto-symbolism, to borrow from him the expression that fits so aptly, that is perhaps unequalled except by Michaux, miming in some vision the slowed-down rhythms of its own heart.<sup>122</sup>

The paradox of creator and creature which remains unresolved throughout the trilogy closely parallels that

of the perceiver and the perceived. In accordance with this approach, Esslin describes one of Beckett's central themes regarding the nature of the self, "its inevitable split into perceiver and perceived, an ear that listens and a voice that issues forth from the depths ..."123

As discussed earlier, the proof of existence throughout the trilogy is essentially predicated upon Berkeley's principle of "esse est percipi." The uncertainty of the Unnamable's perception of the voice--specifically regarding the nature of its source--is inextricably bound up in his uncertainty about the fact of his own existence. To escape the anguish of his condition, he must somehow rid himself of the threat of being perceived. Since his own perceptions are limited to the phenomena of his fantasy, the possibility of being perceived suggests that he may indeed "exist" only as the fantasy of another.

Further clarification of this theme is afforded by Beckett's work Film, which he co-directed with Alan Schneider in 1964. To summarize quickly, the hero of the film, Buster Keaton, is obsessed with escaping "the anguish of perceivedness." In his general commentary

preceding the scenerio, Beckett states, "Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception."<sup>124</sup> The eradication of extraneous perception takes place as Keaton removes a dog and a cat from his room, covers the mirror on the wall, places a veil over the parrot's cage and the fish bowl, tears up an image of God nailed to the wall, destroys photographs taken in his past, and even turns a folder he is holding ninety degrees so that the two horizontal fasteners which look like eyes become vertical. To distinguish between the quality of perceiving and that of being perceived, two cameras were employed in the production; one representing the perceptions of O, Keaton as object, and another representing the perceiving eye, designated as E. In the actual film, the perceptions of O are always blurred and never include any part of himself, and the perceptions of E are clear and always include O. The anguish of perceivedness occurs three times in the film, and only when E, who is at all other times behind O, exceeds the angle of immunity (i.e., greater than forty-five degrees from a point

directly behind O). In other words, as soon as E enters O's range of vision, the possibility of anguish becomes immediate. The first two times the angle of immunity is exceeded, it is by mistake, and O, aware of his vulnerability, cringes away from E. At the end of Film, E exceeds the angle intentionally when O dozes off in his rocking chair. This is the "final investment of O by E,"<sup>125</sup> and after the initial look of anguish from O as he starts from his fitful dozing, "denouement" occurs. Now in the blurred vision of O we see E.

Cut to E, of whom this very first image (face only, against ground of tattered wall). It's O's face (with patch) but with a very different expression, impossible to describe, neither severity nor benignity, but rather acute intentness. A big nail is visible near left temple (patch side). Long image of unblinking gaze.<sup>126</sup>

The nail is the same upon which the image of God was hanging before O destroyed it. He cannot escape the anguish of self-perception in spite of his methodical elimination of all extraneous perception.

In the same way that O becomes his own perceiver, the Unnamable becomes his own creator--escape is impossible while perception is a possibility. The anguish

of perceivedness evokes an anger from O, who destroys anything which suggests the possibility of perception, including the image of God with "the eyes staring at him severely."<sup>127</sup> In the "denouement," E's replacement of the image of God, supported by the symbolism of the nail, suggests a reversal of the most basic doctrine of the Old Testament, that God created man in his own image. The subtle implication of Beckett's art is that Man created God in his own image. To accept this implication is to realize the possibility of authentic artistic creation, reversing the explicit perspective of the trilogy. Is it possible that Worm's state of utter isolation is also a state of universality and total perception? Is Murphy's quest for total psychic liberation, to become a "mote in the dark of absolute freedom,"<sup>128</sup> leading into what "constitutes for Molloy," as Fletcher suggests, "the mystical possibility of nirvana, when the self will expand to infinity ...."<sup>129</sup>

In his search for self, the Beckettian hero has come full cycle, only to face the perpetual possibility of self-perception. In its course, from narration in

the third person in Molloy to narration in the first person in The Unnamable, the trilogy maintains a reflexive quality in the language which parallels the reflexive quality of perception; for as was noted earlier, the quality of self is contained in the quality of the language it uses. The tautology of Unnamable now appears as a source of solace, simply stated, Man is what he is, and there's an end.

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