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TRANS-LATING MODERNISM: LANGUAGES OF PASSAGE IN THE FICTION OF JOYCE, FLANN O'BRIEN, BECKETT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

JAMES JOYCE

(D)	–	*Dubliners*
(*SH*)	–	*Stephen Hero*
(P)	–	*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
(U)	–	*Ulysses*
(FW)	–	*Finnegans Wake*
(LJJ)	–	*Letters of James Joyce*
(*OCPW*)	–	*Occasional, Critical and Political Writing*

FLANN O'BRIEN

(ASTB)	–	*At Swim-Two-Birds*
(TP)	–	*The Third Policeman*
(ABB)	–	*An Beal Bocht/ The Poor Mouth*
(HL)	–	*The Hard Life*
(DA)	–	*The Dalkey Archive*

SAMUEL BECKETT

(Proust)	–	*Proust*
(DFMW)	–	*Dream of Fair to Middling Women*
(MPTK)	–	*More Pricks than Kicks*
(Mu)	–	*Murphy*
(W)	–	*Watt*
(M)	–	*Molloy*
(MD)	–	*Malone Dies*
(UNN)	–	*The Unnamable*
(Disjecta)	–	*Disjecta: Miscellaneous writings and dramatic fragments*
(CSP)	–	*The Complete Short Prose*
(NO)	–	*Nohow On*: *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho*.

BECKETT
THE 'ILLSTARRED PUNSTER':
SELF-EFFACING LITERATURE

'Fail again. Fail better': Towards a delineation of Beckett's poetics of utterance

> I take no sides. I am interested in the shape of ideas. There is a wonderful sentence in St. Augustine: 'Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned.' That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters.[356]
> …nothing ever but me, a particle of me, retrieved, lost, gone astray, I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words… (*UNN* 354)

Beckett is probably unique among the emblematic figures of 20th-century literature in his exemplary diffidence in speaking or writing, directly, about his aims and ideals as a writer: his tongue-in-cheek answers to formal questions about his poetic creed and 'philosophy' are well-known. His few critical writings, early reviews, as well as his first ambitious venture into scholarship, *Proust* (1931) throw, nevertheless, some oblique light on his vision of what his own art was attempting to achieve. The most revealing, in this sense, are probably his *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, published in 1949 in the avant-garde *Transition* magazine, on the subject of three abstract painters, Tal-Coat, André Masson and Beckett's lifelong friend, Abraham (Bram) van Velde.[357] The almost telegraphic *Dialogues* – where the interlocutors, 'B' and 'D' are not to be simply equated with Beckett and the art critic Duthuit[358] –

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[356] Beckett to Alan Schneider, the American producer of his plays, when asked about his interest in philosophy. Quoted in Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Becket: The Last Modernist* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 231.

[357] Included in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous writings and dramatic fragments.* Foreword and introduction by Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983): 138-145.

[358] The author of the *Dialogues*, strictly speaking, is Beckett, who wrote the text on the basis of a series of free conversations with Duthuit, then editor of the revived, postwar *Transition*; on the other hand, the reduction of the names to initials, together with some of the dramatized gestures of the two parties (for instance, 'B exits weeping' when confronted with a conclusion formulated by 'D') implies a somewhat ironic

deal with the abstract painting of the 1940s and are possibly Beckett's clearest statement on an exigency for non-representational art, as well as on the impotence of language in dealing with visual images and the resulting lack of foundation, philosophical, conceptual and otherwise, of all the claims of art criticism.

Whereas pure abstraction means a liberation for 'D', since the work of art is freed from the tyranny of the object (called 'occasion' by 'B'), seen at all times as arbitrary ('the landscape seen at a certain age, a certain season, a certain hour'), 'B' sees in abstraction but the ultimate degree of naturalism or 'realism' – a realism which includes the unseen as well as the seen, the artist and his/her inner world as well as the canvas, 'total object, complete with missing parts, instead of partial object. Question of degree' (*D* 138). According to Beckett, in traditional representational art the artist seeks to 'express' the object or occasion of his vision – to express it, that is, in order the more fully to possess it; to petrify an instant of awareness into eternal immobility, to transmute it into a durable material object (his vision, his landscape, his dream), now a piece of property. Western artists have always struggled to make representation work and thereby to 'gain' something: their concerns have been with the possibilities of art. Some, like Tal-Coat, may have 'disturbed a certain order on the plane of the feasible' and yet 'never stirred from the field of the possible' (*D* 139). In this sense, he concludes, art has always been bourgeois.

'Bourgeois' art and the 'bourgeois' world was the reflexion of a certain order of values and beliefs, among which paramount the faith in the meaning-fulness and importance of man, his existence, his visions – the material objects, the property with which he defines himself. The new awareness of the infinite, established by science and philosophy, tends to cancel the importance given, previously, to man and his circumstances: in such a context where the universal ultimate is the Void, all normal concepts of significance, including 'art' itself, become meaningless, irrelevant, impossible, unless there were to be discovered an art which could (literally) express nothing. 'B' relapses into 'my dream of an art unresentful of its insuperable indigence and too proud for the farce of giving and receiving':

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distance from the aesthetic theories formulated. Cf. Rupert Wood, 'Beckett as Essayist': '*Three Dialogues* is a kind of endgame of aesthetic theorizing; it is a drama which is neither entirely serious nor entirely playful, but one where playfulness and seriousness continuously infect one another', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 12.

It is obvious that for the artist obsessed with his expressive vocation, anything and everything is doomed to become occasion, including, as is apparently to some extent the case with Masson, the pursuit of occasion, and the every man his own wife experiments of the spiritual Kandinsky. No painting is more replete than Mondrian's. But if the occasion appears as an unstable term of relation, the artist, who is the other term, is hardly less so, thanks to his warren of modes and attitudes…All that should concern us is the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it excludes, and that it blinds to. The history of painting, and here we go again, is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee, in a kind of tropism towards a light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature…I know that all that is required now, in order to bring even this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation. (*Disjecta* 144-145)

In Masson's art 'D' identifies an intention to 'paint the void… in fear and trembling' and concludes that the function of art is to immortalise 'the things and creatures of spring,… in order that what is tolerable and radiant in the world may continue.' Yet to 'B' the willingness to paint the Void is nothing else but the reaffirmation of the old idealism: 'Two old maladies… the malady of wanting to know what to do, and the malady of wanting to be able to do it' (*D* 139-140). The artist who 'desires to express' the Void has in reality no concept of what the Void is. It is not simply a negative entity; it is not 'the obliteration of an unbearable presence'; it is not defined by being simply indefinable; both the 'impossibility of statement' and the 'anguish of helplessness' are assertions about the mentality of the artist and tell nothing about the Void. The Void is that about which no statement can be formulated, about which no statement tells anything. The Buddhist cannot desire Nirvana because Nirvana, by definition, cannot be desired.

As against the essentially positive utopian creed of abstract art as uttered by 'D', 'B' offers, as illustration of his thesis, the works of his little-known painter friend, Bram van Velde, seen as an example of a 'nihilistic' style in which any (objective, that is, representational) image remotely suggested at one instant is brutally cancelled out in the next. The resulting impression is very much that of a void – not expressed, but violently and actively *created*,

enacted by the act of painting. Bram van Velde's painting pushes not only the subject-object relationship to its limits: according to 'B' he has accepted, apparently unknowingly, the impossibility of any degree of adequacy of expression in art and yet his painting is not about that impossibility either. He doesn't even possess the certitude of the impossibility of expression (seen as appropriation, a means of possession). The situation of Bram van Velde, as interpreted by 'B', is

> …of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint. The act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event paints, since he is obliged to paint.
> D: Why is he obliged to paint?
> B: I don't know.
> D: Why is he helpless to paint?
> B: Because there is nothing to paint and nothing to paint with. (*Disjecta* 142)

Being an artist, it is his condition, his obligation to create, to realise in art that which is not, which cannot be because, as soon as it is realised in concrete (material, representational) terms, it ceases to exist, ceases to be itself. The artist/ the art must, thus, fail. 'B' here defines a poetics of *an art of failure* – an art which is forced, by definition, to do something that it cannot do and an artist whose whole way of being is as much in his failing as in his painting. As a painter he is obliged to paint as much/as little as a human is obliged to live. 'To be an artist is to fail… as no other dare fail. Failure is his world' (*Disjecta* 145).

The noncompromising radicalism of a poetics based on the recognition of its own ontological impossibility, of necessary and inescapable failure as its defining term, the space from where it speaks/acts and to which it seeks to arrive – the poetics of 'not-knowing' and 'non-can-ing' – must, in effect, abandon all representational intention. An art of failure is an act of (de)monstration, of showing, indicating the impossibility of know-ing and of can-ing, as the condition of man; it will duly indicate the failure of all representation by frustrating the (viewer's/ reader's) inherent expectation, exigency of know-ing:

> B: I speak of an art turning from it [i.e., traditional as well as abstract art's claim to representation] in disgust, weary of puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing…
> D: And preferring what?
> B: The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (*Disjecta* 139)

As one cannot simply equate 'B' with Beckett/'D' with Duthuit, the Bram van Velde of the *Three Dialogues* cannot be equated with the painter Bram van Velde either: for the *Dialogues* are as much concerned with the total inaccessibility of van Velde's vision (or any artist's vision, for that matter) to criticism and discursive language (indeed, to language) as with that vision itself. Communication between word and image, criticism and art is seen as impossible; the critic (and, one may add, the writer) remains forever imprisoned in words and 'B' concludes that he can no more than offer a picture of what he is 'pleased to fancy [Bram van Velde] does.' Whereas in Beckett's earlier essays art appeared as one of the 'exits' from inevitable subjectivity, that which provided access to a space where the subject could step outside itself,[359] the *Dialogues* cancel even this claim: every subject is trapped inside its own world and art/writing (Beckett's later shorter fiction eminently, from *Textes pour rien/Texts for Nothing* down to *Bing/Ping, Mal vu mal dit/Ill Seen Ill Said, Imagination morte imaginez/Imagination Dead Imagine, Worstward Ho*) is in the condition of continuously attempting to construct, provide or reaffirm a stable ground from where to speak for itself, as well as a stable self-containment, and continuously failing in the attempt.

> Whose words? Ask in vain. Or not in vain if say no knowing. No saying. No words *for him* whose words. *Him*? *One*. No words *for one* whose words. *One*? *It*. No words *for it* whose words. Better worse so. (*Worstward Ho*, *NO* 98)
> On. Say on … Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid... Try again. Fail again. Fail better. (*Worstward Ho*, *NO* 89)

At the same time the passage also affirms that the 'obligation to express', deconstructed as 'nothing...nothing with which...nothing from which... no

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[359] The central argument of Beckett's 1931 essay, *Proust*, is that *Á la recherche* abandons the stance adopted by classical writers who raise themselves artificially out of time to provide an order to their work: in Proust's novel writing itself is *in* time and *is* the search itself, the excavation beneath surface experience/perception of the self. Here Beckett allows for two 'exits' from the prison of the self as existing in time/perception: involuntary memory and art. Both provide access to another space outside/beyond the self (*Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, 85-88). This interpretation, conditioned by a reading of Schopenhauer, in effect equates representation (*Vorstellung*) with the self's boundedness in the will-to-live; from it the only escape is the aesthetic experience (and, arguably, involuntary memory), when the veil that disguises the object is pulled aside and the subject is able to contemplate the timeless, pure essences, the Platonic Ideas. The central problematic of the writer, with Beckett, turns out to be the continuous attempt, doomed to failure, to recall and put into words the images of involuntary memory (as well as of aesthetic experience) that elude appropriation through language: writing, to them, is no more than a record of 'ill seen, ill said'.

power…, no desire to express', apart being a predicament and the ethical stake in all art, is the mark of an inbuilt given – an 'obligation' to represent that is inherent in human language and understanding. It is this representation that Beckett's late theatre and short prose texts take issue with, virtually demonstrating that figuration/representation cannot be eliminated from language, however much single images and figures of representation may be divorced from direct mimetic equivalents of life. These late short pieces testify that 'the impetus toward meaning destroys the experience of the word.'[360] Beckett's critique of the linguistic sign heightens the awareness of the irreducibly representational nature of any 'experience of the word', while also drawing attention to the word surface, resisting the urge towards meaning.

Long before the emergence of the cryptic *Three Dialogues*, after his seven-months Wanderjahre through Germany (1936-37) and following the completion of *Murphy*, Beckett wrote a veritable poetic 'programme' in a German letter to art critic Axel Kaun (1937). Highly influenced by his reading of Schopenhauer, this 'programme' is still safely anchored in a Modernist aesthetics. It postulates an essential difference between representation – to which ordinary language and literariness corresponds – and poetic language understood as a radical baring of language to the bone; only the latter is able to pull aside the veil of the former and reveal words for what they are: a veil. The 'beyond', however, may remain impenetrable; it may be nothingness, the Void, and thus poetic language may only achieve a pointing at the non-transparent, opaque nature of representation/of language. Beckett claims that the only art form able to penetrate its own surface is music – *a string of silences*; literature, on the other hand, has been unsuccessful in achieving this pointing at the beyond – except, maybe, for the 'logographs' of Gertude Stein that make readers aware of a 'porous' nature in language:

> Or is literature alone to remain behind in the old lazy ways that have been so long ago abandoned by music and painting? Is there something paralysingly holy in the vicious nature of the word that is not found in the elements of the other arts? *Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence*? An answer is requested… On the way

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[360] Wolfgang Iser, 'When is the End not the End?', in *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 269.

to this *literature of the unword*, which is so desirable to me, some form enough for the game to lose some of its sacred seriousness. *It should stop*. Let us therefore act like that mad (?) mathematician who used a different principle of measurement at each step of his calculation. *An assault against words in the name of beauty*. [361]

Underway to what he calls the 'literature of the unword', Beckett chooses to leave behind any starting point, whether self-imposed (a personal style) or imposed from without (by linguistic 'common usage'), proceeding by linguistic reductions, by laying bare language and the lurking silence within/beyond. The inescapability of self-perception points to language: Beckett's tortured and tortuous texts will go to any pains to show the reader that experience is achieved through language and can only be made accessible as linguistic experience. In language, it is only in relation to silence as an (invisible, unattainable) limit, that the compact surface of (imposed, attached) meaning can break down and uncover porosities, lines of flight, seen as a desirable relativization. The solution, if there can be talk about any, is drawing attention to the closed nature of language, (ironically) undermining old forms of representational, mimetic writing. However, this may be a partial achievement only; characteristically, Beckett toys with giving up the irredeemably corrupted 'old game' altogether, leaving behind all the forms of knowledge that lead to the certainties which can produce order; the ethical overtones are ever-present. The Axel Kaun letter proposes a quest for a method by which one can represent the mocking attitude towards the word *through words*; the 'old game' should not only lose its sacred seriousness, but stop altogether, an objective which Beckett envisages through adopting the approach of the 'mad mathematician'

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[361] English translation by Martin Esslin in *Disjecta*, 172-173, *my emphases*. In Beckett's German original: „Oder soll die Literatur auf jenem alten faulen von Musik und Malerei längst verlassenen Wege allein hinterbleiben? Steckt etwas lähmend Heiliges in der Unnatur des Wortes, was zu den Elementen der anderen Künste nicht gehört? *Gibt es irgendeinen Grund, warum jene fürchterlich willkürliche Materialität der Wortfläche nicht aufgelöst werden sollte, wie z.B. die von grossen schwarzen Pausen gefressene Tonfläche in der siebten Symphonie von Beethoven, so dass wir sie ganze Seiten durch nicht anders wahrnehmen können als etwa einen schwindelnden unergründliche Schlünde von Stillschweigen verknüpfenden Pfad von Lauten*? Um Antwort wird gebeten... Auf dem Wege *nach dieser für mich sehr wünschenswerten Literatur des Unworts*, kann freilich irgendeine Form der nominalistischen Ironie ein notwendiges Stadium sein. Es genügt aber nicht, wenn das Spiel etwas von seinem heiligen Ernst verliert. *Aufhören soll es*. Machen wir es also wie jener verrückter (?) Mathematiker, der auf jeder einzelnen Stufe des Kalküls ein neues Messprinzip anzuwenden pflegte. *Eine Wörterstürmerei im Namen der Schönheit*", *Disjecta* 52-54.

who used a different principle of measurement at each step of his calculation, 'an assault against words in the name of beauty'. Beckett's programme of linguistic struggle against language culminates in the envisioned 'Literatur des Unworts', a radical verbal art that leaves nothing undone in its effort at deconstructing language and the unity of saying. In order to arrive at a self-effacing *'Literatur des Unworts'* that can penetrate the veil of words, any form of nominalist irony may be a necessary in-between station (*Disjecta* 54).

This poetic 'programme' shows interesting intersections with Paul Celan's *ars poetica*: *Meridian*, a reading Celan, another exponent of a literature that runs counter to language gave in Brehmen on October 22, 1960, when awarded the Georg Büchner Prize. Celan distinguishes between 'art' (*Kunst*) – the language of representation and literariness which functions, similarly to Beckett's 'words', as a veil, distracting our attention from the speaker and from that which is being said, making us forget about ourselves, *forget our being* – and 'poetry' (*Dichtung*) that *happens* as a breach in the obliterating texture of *Kunst*, revealing it for what it is: a veil, and making us aware of our being. The act of poetry, for Celan, is an act of freedom: it blocks the functioning of 'art', suspends representational language and in the resulting empty space or breach, makes possible one's becoming aware of one's being. The linguistic gaps and ellipses in his late poetry, *Sprachgitter*, *Atemwende*, *Lichtzwang*, stripping German of all idioms, style and the secondary assets of 'literariness', in effect force the reader to reconsider his/her mode of reading (essentially of the *Kunst* type) and, by continually frustrating his/her attempts at linguistic substitution and identification, create a 'grate of words' that is, in Celan's formulation, always halfway towards 'the profoundest mystery of encounter'. Encounter, that is, between the subject and the 'you' whose presence can only be revealed in the space of freedom, of suspended language – the space of the poem.[362]

The recognition of 'can't' together with that of 'must' becomes the only starting point to utterance, however deficient, and the only morally acceptable one; the only possible starting point to a poetic utterance that runs counter to representation (*Kunst*, in Celan's terms) and that points at that which lies beyond – be it the Void, the inexpressible. Perhaps the most frequently quoted passage in Beckett that speaks of this recognition-revelation is from *Krapp's Last Tape*:

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[362] Paul Celan, *Meridian*, in *Collected Prose*, trans. Rosemarie Waldrop (New York: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1986) 45, 47-48.

> Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision at last. This I fancy is what I have chiefly to record this evening… What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely [Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again] – great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propeller, clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most [Krapp curses, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again] – unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire (*Krapp's Last Tape*, *CDW* 220).[363]

The darkness of an inner world, the darkness revealed, as well as the missing centre that could have radiated meaning (as in the case of Godot in *En attendant Godot*, or that of Mr. Knott in *Watt*) are central tenets of Beckett's art. His lifelong friend and editor, James Knowlson quotes how Beckett himself 'filled in the gaps' in the above-reproduced passage from *Krapp's Last Tape*, writing that the dark was '"in reality my most" – Lost: "my most precious ally"', that is, his true element and key to understanding his work.[364] The recognition that the source of revelation, the clue to knowledge and the means and the starting point from where, with which to repossess one's personal history is the dark, i.e., the lack of knowledge, the lack of ability, echoes in Beckett's self-identification as a 'non-can-er' and 'non-know-er'. In his 1956 interview with Israel Shenker – one of the most comprehensive statements Beckett was ever to make on his art – he identified the difference between Joyce's and his own writing as, essentially, a neat opposition in their attitude to 'knowing':

> ...the difference is that Joyce was a superb manipulator of material, perhaps the greatest. He was making words do the absolute maximum of the work. There isn't a syllable that's superfluous. The kind of work I do is one in which I am not master of my material. The more Joyce knew the more he could. His tendency is toward omniscience and omnipotence as an artist. I'm working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think that impotence has been exploited in the past. There seems to be a kind of aesthetic axiom that expression is an achievement – must be an achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has

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[363] In an interview with Gabriel d'Aubaréde Beckett made the following confession of a revelation that came to him: '*Molloy* and the others came to me the day I became aware of my own folly. Only then did I begin to write the things I feel', in *Nouvelles litteraires*, 16 February 1961: quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame. The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 352.

[364] *Damned to Fame*, 352.

always been set aside by artists as something unusable – as something by definition incompatible with art.[365]

The exploitation of impotence is the furthest point to which verbal art can critically explore its relationship to the experience of truth. If verbal excess, as epitomized by Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Work in Progress*, multiply the ambivalences of the role of language in the experience of truth, verbal poverty would, on the contrary, reduce them, laying bare the ineliminable residua of the implications between language and truth. If Joyce's purpose was transforming the word into reality, if the founding myth of Joycean texts was the transubstantiation of the verb into reality – as thematized throughout *A Portrait*, *Ulysses* ('Oxen') and played out in the 'apotheosis of the word' in *Finnegans Wake* –, Beckett's pursuit was to analyze and eventually acknowledge the reality of the word itself.[366] A reformulation of the idea was uttered in an interview made by James Knowlson with Beckett on 27 October 1989 where the aged Beckett traces the evolution of his own work along the path of self-induced impoverishment, diminishing, taking away – a truly minimalist 'less is more' poetics, already signalled in his letter to Axel Kaun where he quotes Goethe: *Lieber NICHTS zu schreiben, als nicht zu schreiben* (*D* 52):

> I realised that Joyce had gone as far as one could in the direction of knowing more, [being] in control of one's material. He was always adding to it; you only have to look at his proofs to see that. I realised that my own way was in impoverishment, in lack of knowledge and in taking away, in subtracting rather than in adding.[367]

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[365] Israel Shenker, 'A Portrait of Samuel Beckett, the Author of the Puzzling *Waiting for Godot*', *New York Times* (May 6, 1956), quoted in S.E. Gontarski, 'Samuel Beckett, James Joyce's "Illstarred Punster", in *The Seventh of Joyce*, ed. B. Bernstock (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 32.

[366] Georges Bataille, in his seminal 1951 essay 'The Silence of *Molloy*' writes on the 'exercise in subtraction' and 'progress toward ruin' that animate *Molloy*, a type of literature that 'wants to make language into a façade, eroded by the wind, and full of holes, that would possess the authority of ruins', suggests that the motive behind this writing is 'a parody of meaning, perhaps, but finally a distinct meaning, which is to obscure within us the world of signification. Such in fact is the blind purpose of this brisk narrative.' This type of literature, continues Bataille, 'necessarily gnaws away at existence and the world, reducing to nothing (but this nothing is horror) these steps by which we go along confidently from one result to another, from one success, to another.' Georges Bataille, Review article on *Molloy*, *Critique* (May 15, 1951), 387-96; English translation in *Samuel Beckett. The Critical Heritage,* eds. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 59, 63.

[367] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 352.

In reading Beckett one witnesses very likely the closest anyone has come to eradicating figuration/representation within literary language; still, there is always the awareness that language figures/represents despite itself. Beckett's difficulty with writing is, in fact, the inescapable failure of resisting the process of figuration; in addition to the ultimate obligation to express (to figuration), there is an obligation to resist that expression throughout the work, and this anti-figuration turns out to be a kind of figuration in itself. In the late shorter prose, written after the 1960s, one finds an exploration of the means of tackling (as well as withstanding) this figuration, producing texts which read each other, start from each other and return into each other, translate each other – ultimately, are always on the way of becoming solidified in a state of further untranslatability, dis- or re-figuring. Read retrospectively, from the perspective of the *Nohow On* and *Still* trilogies, an often-cited passage from his earliest 'stirring' in criticism, *Dante…Bruno.Vico…Joyce* (1929), on Joyce's then *Work-in-Progress* on the unity, in Joyce's language, of form and content, reveals yet another resistance – the resistance of the text to being written.[368] In addition to the impossibility of communication between word and image, the impossibility of expression through language and the obligation to express, there arises a third in the list of *cannots*, the impossibility (or failure) of the author to control, and perceive, his own work:

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

Read retrospectively, from the direction of late short prose and the last completed 'novel', *Worstward Ho*, the statement 'it is not written at all/it is not to be read' seems a strange prefiguration of Beckett's own creative pursuits in/*against* language and figuration. The late output seems to resist reading and the act of writing equally, forcing the reader, as Maurice Blanchot argued in *L'Entretien infini* (1969), to reconsider the act of reading, becoming a co-participant in the act of writing. The fragment below from *Worstward Ho* can be read as an exercise in conceiving in language of 'place' *per se*, without the props of direction(ality), the out of/into, without presence – a 'thenceless thitherless there':

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[368] Cf. Andrew Renton, 'From the *Residua* to *Stirrings Still*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, 168-171.

> A place. Where none. A time when try see. Try say. How small. How vast. How if not boundless bounded. Whence the dim. Not now. Know better now. Unknow better now. Know only no out of. No knowing how know only no out of. Into only. Hence another. Another place where none. Whither once whence no return. No. No place but the one. None but the one where none. Whence never once in. Somehow in. Beyondless. Thenceless there. Thitherless there. Thenceless thitherless there. (*Worstward Ho, NO* 92)

Beckett's statements on the impossibility of representation and on the compulsion to fail come conspicuously close to Lyotard's interpretation of the (Kantian) notion of the sublime. Lyotard re-examines the sentiment of the sublime in Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* where it is approached in terms of an aesthetic that exposes the fundamental and irresolvable difference between the realms of cognition and feeling – its *locus* being the *differend* between knowing and feeling that is perceived as the pain of thinking coming up against its limits. In the sublime sentiment the faculty of presentation approaches the limits of its capacity to present the facts of the real. Its source is the failure to present, a failure which Lyotard extends to the experiments of modern art and literature that approach the sublime when they strain to disclose the Idea, where the object of representation is absent not because it has yet to materialize, but because it cannot be rendered materially. The sublime sentiment in Kantian philosophy lies at the limit both of cognitive knowledge, of aesthetics and of ethics, where thought runs into its own limit and seeks to present the unpresentable; imagination engages in presenting an event, occurrence that resists being rendered sensibly by its sheer magnitude or might.[369]

In Lyotard's interpretation the sentiment of the sublime is a site for witnessing, a site where reflective judgement forces thought for ways in which the unpresentable can come into language – a passage that may take place

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[369] This opens the path for a critical philosophy that bears witness to the limitations of the human mind to comprehend the Ideas and of those of the human body to feel them – ultimately, to a theory of the subject that understands and accounts for the historical minimalization of the Being that calls itself human and which becomes for this theory a minimal subject that recognizes itself in/through the pain and pleasure of survival. The pain of the body in the sublime sentiment is the pain of death approaching and then, in a second instant, being overcome or withdrawing; violence directed at the body may become a source of the sentiment of the sublime insofar as the proximity of violence does not violate or annihilate the body's sensibility; it is also a pleasure – not a purified pain but a pain in abeyance, the pleasure of pain in retreat, but still in the proximity of violence. Cf. Andrew Slade: *Lyotard, Beckett, Duras, and the Postmodern Sublime* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 19-30.

through artistic experimentation, faced with the task of finding a way to phrase the differend, to turn into language the event before which we are impoverished. We cannot choose or not choose to seek for the new idioms that make such a passage possible but are elected by language itself to seek them out and realize them in our phrasing:

> In the differend, something 'asks' to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away. This is when the human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence (and of pleasure which accompanies the invention of a new idiom), that they are summoned by language, not to augment to their profit the quantity of information communicable through existing idioms, but to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms that do not yet exist.[370]

In this interpretation the sublime is not essentially unpresentable, but the idiom(s) of its phrasings have to be invented yet: its modernity lies in its capacity to become a central category of contemporary aesthetic reflection and in its ability to present the unpresentable in time, in its fugitive running. It is modern because it shows what is *untimely* in our time, because it opens the human mind to what is *out of joint*, to what is disruptive, showing what in our time belongs not to some lost nostalgic centre of consciousness but to the way of presenting that still has to be invented, for which we seek.[371] Modernity, in Lyotard's acception of the term, is not a periodization but a condition of the very concept of time, with the division of time into a set of dual concepts, classical and modern. The position of classicism is one where (aristocratic) taste is established as a consensus and shared by the community, where the artist and writer can thus occupy a position both of reader and creator – the classical sublime being a set of figurations that can be categorized under the heading *Fiat Lux*. These forms of the sublime became canonical through the eighteenth century and reached their apogee in Romanticism, in *Sturm un Drang* aesthetics. Romanticism already emerges as a mediation between classicism and modernity, being, essentially, an experiment that aimed to extend the capacity of artistic representation to forms of life that classical taste had earlier exluded from the horizon of representation, dispersing and

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[370] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. *The History and Theory of Literature*, Vol. 46 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 13.

[371] Cf. Slade, *Lyotard, Beckett, Duras, and the Postmodern Sublime,* 31.

democratizing taste across the social field. Yet Romanticism retains the structure of the relation between writer and audience: their respective positions are established beforehand, they remain well-known to each other, thus the fundamentally classical positioning is reiterated, even if it originates in a modern impulse.

As distinct from the 'modern' sublime, Lyotard's postmodern sublime is a mode of artistic response to a history which is without precedent, without reason and without the rules that make it accessible to comprehension; it solicits the artistic search for an idiom and for the rules that give form to this idiom in the pain, detritus, ruin and decay of history. The postmodern sublime is an event that sends us for a way of phrasing a response to it; it is an event that imposes the question: Is it happening?[372]

Both modern and postmodern aesthetics circle round the sublime sentiment and seek the presentation of the unpresentable, yet their concept of the sublime differs radically: their difference lies, as Lyotard points out, in the fact that

> modern aesthetics is an aesthetics of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace or pleasure.[373]

The unpresentable provides a source of redemption for the modern sublime. The essentially nostalgic modern aesthetics believes that there are kernels of liberatory force in the repressed unpresentables of modern history; the presentation of the unpresentable will thus liberate human beings from constraining violence. The strategy and critique favoured by the moderns – as epitomized by Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* – consists in capturing and (re)presenting those moments when the unpresentable of history might have been able to overcome the impossibility of representation, and then to work these recollections into artistic and linguistic creations. Tthe modern, in Lyotard's view, seeks to resolve the contradiction between imagination and understanding, thus ultimately mistaking the pain of nostalgia for the pain and pleasure that

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[372] As against the notion of the sublime apparently exhausted by the Enlightenment and in its wake, by the Romanticists, the question raised by the sublime in Lyotard's acception is the primordial question, that happens to thinking prior to any determination of the event. Lyotard exemplifies this postmodern sublime with the painting and the writings of Barnett Newman ('The Sublime is Now') who answers Lyotard's question beforehand: Now. *The Differend*, 13-15.

[373] *The Postmodern Condition*: *A Report on Knowledge,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 81.

together constitute the sentiment of the sublime. The postmodern, on the contrary, bears witness to the differend between the pain of nostalgia and the pain and pleasure, searching for idioms in which to phrase it. The postmodern is connected to history as survivor and witness; it is not the dialectical overcoming of the modern, but its radicalization.[374]

Lyotard radically displaces the meaning of *post* in the concept of the postmodern: he demonstrates the pointlessness of any periodization of cultural history in terms of *pre-* and *post-*, since they leave unquestioned the position of the 'now', a position impossible to determine, since it is always in-between – between what came before and what comes after, fading continuously from the mind's capacity to grasp it, always in the process of being eradicated; it is a present always in transit. In 'Note: On the Meaning of "Post"', he argues for a postmodern that is always implied, *a priori* contained in the modern, since modernity and modern temporality comprises an impulse to exceed into a state other than itself; in addition to this impulse, however, it also seeks to resolve itself into a sort of ultimate stability – a state which brings it close to the position of classicism, as exemplified by the utopian modern project or implied in the grand narratives of emancipation. As Lyotard affirms, 'modernity is constitutionally and ceaselessly pregnant with its postmodernity.'[375] The grand narratives of modernity that sought to emancipate, to liberate humanity from the chains that bound its freedom, and aimed at a radical transformation of the world – Christianity, Enlightenment, Marxism etc. – all harbor a revolutionary, transforming conception of time that is manifest in their continual seeking of (their, modernity's) own 'post'. As against classicism and the classical position, in modernity no taste is established by common accord and the writer writes to an audience that he/she cannot know; the experimentation of modernity should therefore be seen not as a periodization, but as a position, in opposition to classicism. The postmodern, as delineated by Lyotard in 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?' (1979) and refined later in *The Inhuman*, *Lessons* and *Gaming*, is not an era that takes over at the end of modernity, but a drive which is present within modernity itself; the postmodern is not the future of the modern, but is contained in it as its future anterior. The rewriting of modernity is postmodern only in this narrow sense.

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[374] Slade, *Lyotard, Beckett, Duras, and the Postmodern Sublime,* 39-40.
[375] Lyotard, *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford University Press, 1992), 25.

In this sense, Beckett's self-effacing writing (ideally mirrored in the artistic programme put forth in the Bram van Velde passage of the *Three Dialogues*) may be said to come close to the postmodern sublime: in the following passage from *Worstward Ho* for instance, the void that occupies a central position in Beckett's poetics is brought into being by its very effacement, resisting the (Romantic) notions of the Void as a transcendent being-beyond-language shared by the Axel Kaun letter – and bringing it into being in the pauses, silences between the (self-effacing, self-withdrawing) text fragments composed of silences:

> The void. Before the staring eyes. Stare where they may. Far and wide. High and low. That narrow field. Know no more. See no more. Say no more. That alone. That little much of void alone.
>
> On back to unsay void can go. Void cannot go. Save dim go. Then all go. All not already gone. Till dim back. Then all back. All not still gone. The one can go. The twain can go. Dim can go. Void cannot go. Save dim go. Then all go. (*Worstward Ho*, *NO* 97)

Writing on art again in French and English (*Pour Avigdor Arikha/For Avigdor Arikha*, 1966) Beckett delineates, in five lines, a poetics (or rather, a predicament) of going to encounter the void, of 'being short, short of the world, short of self' (*Three Dialogues*, *Disjecta* 143) – a poetics that could easily be applied to his own late dramatic and prose work, such as the last play, *Breath*, or *Imagination Dead Imagine*:

> Siege laid again to the impregnable without [*le dehors imprenable*]. Eye and hand fevering after the unself [*non-soi*]. By the hand it unceasingly changes the eye unceasingly changed. Back and forth the gaze beating against unseeable and unmakable [*Regard ne s'arranchant à l'invisible que pour s'asséner sur l'infaisable et retour éclair.*] Truce for a space and the marks of what it is to be and be in face of. Those deep marks to show. (*D* 152)

Beckett: Uneasy modernist, reluctant postmodernist

> The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. *It is not a mess you can make sense of*... One cannot speak anymore of being, one must speak only of the mess. When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess... what I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that

the chaos is really something else... To find a form that accomodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now... *There is the unexplainable, and there art raises questions that it does not attempt to answer*.[376]

Beckett's oeuvre has been a testing ground for criticism since the publishing of the 'Trilogy' and especially of *Texts for Nothing* and the later prose and theatre works, that repeatedly raised Watt's question quote in the title.[377] There is broad consensus that it has come into its own with the arrival of poststructuralist criticisms, especially with the Beckett studies of critics such as Maurice Blanchot, Georges Bataille, Deleuze, Foucault and of the deconstructivists – even if Derrida himself, who tackled in depth the writing of Paul Celan, James Joyce, Emmanuel Lévinas, Antonin Artaud among others, has consistently eluded to write about Beckett, claiming in a 1989 interview an excessive 'closeness' to Beckett.[378] In line with Beckett's own statement that art should not try to answer the questions it raises, his most sensitive commentators have produced statements on the irreducibility of Beckett's writing, even if some of them have found a name to this 'irreducibility': Maurice Blanchot's *neuter*; Leslie Hill's *indifference*. The latter designs an infinity of difference, an erasure of identity and a still turbulence at the centre of language and body; indifference, seen as a crucial movement in Beckett's texts, permanently threatens with dissolution while holding a promise of ecstasy and/or communion, infinitely deferred. The force of *indifference* cannot be incorporated; in terms of negative theology, it is a negativity that allows for no redemption – this being its definition.[379]

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[376] Conversation between Beckett and Tom Driver: Columbia University Forum, Summer 1961, 21-25, quoted in Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the Word: Samuel Beckett's prose works after the Nobel prize* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990): 14.

[377] Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (New York: Grove, 2004), 59.

[378] 'This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature,* ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992): 33-76. Answering the question why he never wrote on Beckett, Derrida states, 'This is an author to whom I feel very close, or to whom I would like to feel myself very close; *but also too close*. Precisely because of this proximity, it is hard for me, too easy and too hard … Too hard also because he writes – *in my language*, in a language which is his up to a point, mine up to a point (*for both of us it is a "differently" foreign language*) – texts which are both too close to me and too distant for me even to be able to 'respond' to them. How could I write in French in the wake of or "with" someone who does operations on this language which seem to me so strong and so necessary, *but which must remain idiomatic*? How could I write, sign or countersign performatively signs which "respond" to Beckett?' (47-48, *emphases mine*).

[379] Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words* (Cambridge University Press, 1990): 162-163.

It is easy to see how critical language indebted to than Blanchot's rewriting of criticism struggles to lend itself to Beckett's texts of impossible movements, of the 'step-not-beyond.'[380] At one end of Beckett's work is the end of language – an end that, however, is endlessly deferred, or which had already taken place; writing is done, writes itself, in the name of something not named, which has no name, to which this writing struggles to assign a name.

Ever since the late seventies one of the farthest-reaching polemics has been the issue of Beckett's 'modernism' vs. 'postmodernism'. Beckett's texts have been chosen to testify in turn to the various constructions of modernism and postmodernism. Singled out as one of the exemplary authors of the so-called 'Literature of Exhaustion' by John Barth,[381] Beckett is labelled as a late – or, with Anthony Cronin, 'last'[382] – modernist who exhausts the (organicist, mimetic) poetics of modernism while sticking to its politics of opposition and resistance. The meaning of 'exhaustion' in Beckett's texts is thoroughly changed in Gilles Deleuze's 1992 introductory essay to Beckett's television plays (*Ghost Trio*, *...but the clouds...*, *Quad* and *Nacht und Träume*), placing Beckett's three 'languages of exhaustion' under the auspices of a radical opening up and self-erasure of writing, thereby extricating him from a Modernist aesthetics.[383] Both Beckett's works and the data of his life have become grounds of contestation, points of departure and end-points for tentative chronologies of modernism/postmodernism. Whereas Ihab Hassan[384] and Rüdiger Imhof[385] proposed 1938, the year of the publishing of *Murphy*, as the beginning of literary postmodernism labelled 'the literature of silence', and as the beginning of postmodern metafiction respectively (the former coupling Beckett in an unlikely tandem with Henry Miller as 'intimates of silence – obsessive babblers', the latter hooking Murphy to Flann O'Brien's

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[380] Maurice Blanchot's term *le pas au-delà*, see *The Step Not Beyond*. Trans., with an Introduction by Lycette Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

[381] John Barth, 'The Literature of Exhaustion' [1967], in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984): 62-76.

[382] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*.

[383] 'L'Epuisé' ('The Exhausted'), in Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, Michael A. Greco, Anthony Uhlmann (London: Verso, 1998): 152-174.

[384] *The Postmodern Turn. Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (Ohio State University Press, 1987). In *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975) Hassan already designates Beckett a postmodernist, in line with David Lodge's *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature* (Chicago University Press, 1972).

[385] Rüdiger Imhof, *Contemporary Metafiction. A poetological study of metafiction in English since 1939* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1986).

At Swim-Two-Birds), December 1989 was appointed to mark the 'death' (or at least, one of the 'many deaths') of postmodernism also because it was Beckett's date of death.[386] For art theorist Timothy J. Clark, however, this same death-date coincides with the demise of an emancipatory 'idea' or ideology that stages a protest against modernity, equated with the driving force of Modernism.[387] Beckett's text-world continues to be visited to an equal extent by Modernism and postmodernism studies as exemplary and constitutive of both. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel* for instance, one of the author-itative surveys of Modernism studies, the uncanny and the (disintegrating) self are presented as points of entry into his fiction, which is ultimately seen as expressive of the void.[388] One of the mainstays of Beckett studies, Steven Connor adopts a more nuanced approach in his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism,* allowing for the Beckettian aesthetic to both saddle and elude framings of Modernism and postmodernism. As concerns the poetics of indeterminacy and the so-called language turn, whose exuberant, celebratory self-affirmation is equalled with postmodernism, Beckett's writing falls into the category of Modernism: 'where a writer like Beckett enacted the kind of shrivelling away of language under the pressure of doubt, post-modernist texts were excited by the prospect of the illegitimate, the un-speakable, and the unknowable.'[389] Yet, even if delineated as anorexic and ascetic as opposed to postmodern 'bigness' and excess, the Beckettian oeuvre's Modernism is at best half-hearted: whereas the texts' relentless noncompliance with the ethos of achievement and the trope of mastery distance them from

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[386] Theorists of the postmodern with as different backgrounds and orientations as Charles Jencks and Josh Toth use the date of Beckett's death (which happens to coincide with such obvious historical turning-points as the fall of the Iron Curtain and with it, the end of the Cold War and of 'history', but also such less evident turning-points as Derrida's turn to the work of Lévinas and to ethical issues, and the publishing of *Granta*'s special issue dedicated to American 'dirty realism') to mark the end of postmodern aesthetics and the advent of post-postmodernism(s) that may take various names and effigies, between 'critical modernism', 'remodernism', 'renewalism', etc.: see Charles Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where Is Post-Modernism Going?* (London: Wiley Academy, 2007); Josh Toth and Neil Brooks, 'Introduction: A Wake and Renewed?' in *The Mourning After: Attending the Wake of Postmodernism*, eds. Neil Brooks and Josh Toth (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007): 1-9.

[387] Timothy J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea. Episodes from a History of Modernism* (Yale University Press, 1999).

[388] Lois Oppenheim, 'Situating Samuel Beckett', *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. Moragh Shiach (Cambridge University Press, 2007): 224-237.

[389] Steven Connor, 'Postmodernism and Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 62-81: 70.

staple Modernism, on the other hand their austerity 'seems like the last reassertion of a Modernist impulse to master the world in the word, though not by bulimic absorption of reality, but rather by anorexic abstention from it'. And even this reluctant association with Modernist poetics has a postmodern flipside, as the endless recycling of materials and drive to repetition and reproduction, this 'perpetuum immobile' of the Beckettian text-world, may be seen as 'a curious, self-consuming kind of obesity', a 'principle of self-aggrandizement.'[390] Beckett's self-reducing, singular writing seems to belong to that grey zone ghosted by parallel aesthetics and their lingering accounts, between 'Modernism' and 'postmodernism', and functions as a litmus test to their validity.

Ihab Hassan begins his influential dialogic critique in *The Postmodern Turn* by an attempt at outlining postmodern literature that he considers 'a literature of outrage', a response to the void and, at the same time, also a begetter of its opposite, an invocation of apocalypse. However, his definition of a 'literature of silence', relying on Blanchot's, is far from the exhaustive definitions given by the advocates of the 'modernist' Beckett: the movement towards silence – where silence is read as a figure for indeterminacy rather than as some ultimate, transcendent being-beyond-language, as employed in most readings of Beckett along the pathway of some pretextual/prelinguistic presence or 'metaphysical comfort' (Nietzsche), for instance, negative theology, or language mysticism – is interpreted in Beckett's work as literature/art employing art to deny itself. Silence can also be attained through radical irony, inherent in any statement that contains its own denial; 'postmodernist' irony is different from the 'modernist' one that manifests itself in play, complexity, formalism, and is directed at the awareness of art's radical in-completeness, of non-being. Hassan refines his own theses in his 'inconclusive fiction' of the postmodern *indetermanence*, delineating a poetics of post-modernism that comes close to silence/exhaustion in displaying the resources of the void. In contradistinction to the more wide-spread negative aesthetics, this reading of Beckett's texts, among others, points at a passage to the other side of silence – a reading that shows affinities with Beckett's poetic 'programme' as delineated in his 'Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit', and with Jean-François Lyotard's own construction of postmodernism as a response to the unrepresentable, to the sentiment of the sublime. Hassan thus constructs his own concept of postmodernism around the impulse of self-

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[390] Ibid., 70-71.

unmaking, a construct which will necessarily have foregrounded Beckett's writing as exemplary and which can claim such remote antecedents for a 'postmodernist' aesthetics as Michelangelo's *Pietà Rondanini*, an artwork that employs the material in service of its own negation.[391] It is not difficult to see the impulse of self-unmaking that permeates Beckett's texts; what is perhaps more pertinent to these texts is the way they foreground self-unmaking as a process with no definite and definable goal – that their program of divesting (hackneyed) language of its functions is never totalized into any system that might transcend language; what is at stake is never a negation of language but its deconstruction that is at the same time a showcasing of that very language. As in Text 2 and 3 from *Texts for Nothing*, the void pointed at by the self-effacing voice and words is made possible by an affirmation of language inherent in the sequence 'what matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking':

> The words too, slow, slow, the subject dies before it comes to the verb, words are stopping too. Better off then when life was babble?[392]
>
> Leave, I was going to say leave all that. What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking. There's going to be departure, I'll be there, I won't miss it, it won't be me, I'll be here, I'll say I'm far from here, it won't be me, I won't say anything, there's going to be a story. Yes, no more denials, all is false, there is no one, it's understood, there is nothing, no more phrases, let us be dupes, dupes of every time and tense, until it's done, all past and done, and the voices cease, it's only voices, only lies.[393]

Beckett the uneasy modernist

Among the most influential exegeses of Beckett's work in a general Modernist framework has been Hugh Kenner's *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study*[394] – ironically, an approach which, according to Hassan, heralds the advent of 'postmodern' criticism since it discusses the literary act in quest, and question of, itself, exploring the self-subversion, self-transcendence of forms in relation to the 'languages of silence.'[395] Kenner's consistently Cartesian reading of Beckett's work up to *Texts for Nothing* places the

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[391] *The Postmodern Turn*, 33.

[392] *Texts for Nothing*, Text 2, *The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed., with an Introduction and notes by S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove, 1995): 106.

[393] *Texts for Nothing*, Text 3, *The Complete Short Prose*, 109.

[394] Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A critical study* (New York: Grove, 1961).

[395] Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn*, 31.

author at the farthest possible end of Modernism;[396] in his wake, Marjorie Perloff also discusses Beckett's work in the framework of Modernist poetics, placing the Trilogy in a prolonged train of Modernism that starts with Rimbaud.[397] According to these critical constructions, fiction that suspends belief in its own system of illusions, by 'stopping the world', creates a void that can be occupied by another category of perception: a fiction of meta-physical conditioning. Similarly, Bruce F. Kawin discusses the self-reflexive structures and the central category of the ineffable in Beckett's work in a general Modernist context. As he argues in his seminal *The Mind of the Novel*, there is nothing really 'going on' in self-conscious fiction, yet even in the most self-conscious fiction the show never completely stops, since the silence so achieved discusses the ineffable, the unpresentable; writing takes as its 'subject' the fact that 'reality' and 'imagination' are mutually sustaining, symbiotic categories, which create each other. Silence, and its figures in narrative – lacunae in texts (for instance, *Tristram Shandy, Watt*) – must be treated as a (meta)conceptual category rather than a sensory event; the unsaid always underlies the act of saying from *Watt* to the late short prose pieces (to *Lessness, Worstward Ho*) which may all be said to circle around the experience of wordlessness.[398] However, Beckett's writing does not easily lend itself to the taxonomy of the 'writing of the ineffable', as proposed by Kawin's structuralist grid: his reading of the Trilogy, drawing on Kenner, remains consistently rooted in (Modernist) perspectivism, in the progressive undoing of the category of the self and, as such, touches on Heideggerian metaphysics.[399] Thus the Unnamable's voicing is interpreted as a self whose

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[396] This stance is reiterated in Hugh Kenner and Irving Howe, 'Modernism and What Happened To It', in *Essays in Criticism* 37 (April 1987).

[397] Marjorie Perloff, 'The Space of a Door: Beckett and the Poetry of Absence', in *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1983).

[398] Bruce T. Kawin, *The Mind of the Novel: Reflexive Fiction and the Ineffable* (Princeton University Press, 1982): 211-213.

[399] Relying on Heidegger's *The Way to Language* that claims, 'The essential being of language is saying as showing… self-showing appearance is the mark of the presence and absence of all that is present in every kind and rank. Even when showing is accomplished by our human saying, even then this showing, this pointer is preceded by an indication that it will let itself be shown' (qtd. in *The Mind of the Novel*, 224), Kawin proposes three narrative patterns that respond to the difficulty of discussing silence: (1) the secondary first-person narrator; (2) the literature of the 'simultaneous self', resting on the narrative illusion that experience and narrative are simultaneous, as with Proust, Stein or Castaneda; (3) the displacement of the authorial position in the

simultaneity is so radical that all sense of its componency vanishes, leaving the 'I' facing silence. However, this silence is then retranslated by Kawin into categories of the self, concluding that if the Unnamable is bare consciousness which can express itself only in words or, which *is* only words – and thus, merely a taking of the Modernist device of stream-of-consciousness to its conceivable extreme –, 'he' is a thinking book, a voicing mind that has to be content with uttering 'I' when referring to himself, even though 'he' senses that 'his' identity can be found only beyond the reach of words, that even his self-referentiality is a self-declaring failure. Consequently, the tension of the unnameable speaker overlaps with the tension of the subject-matter, the ineffable; in this, *The Unnamable* constitutes the limit of the novel, that of verbal consciousness/language itself made self-conscious, Logos reanimating fiction.[400]

Apart from the existentialist constructions of Beckett, the constructions of an 'avant-garde' Beckett also have to be discussed in this category. The avant-garde as distinct from mainstream or 'core' Modernism[401] has been proposed by various literary historians and theorists: according to Irving Howe, the consistent 'deep structure' of Modernism, an exceptional fidelity to the spirit of opposition (seen by Howe as the salient element of the Modernist frame of mind) is most dramatically expressed in the avant-garde.[402] Matei Călinescu, in his *Five Faces of Modernity*, operates with a simultaneous inclusion and exclusion when he differentiates the avant-garde from the 'core canon' of Modernism, but at the same time locates both within a larger framework of modernity.[403] Ihab Hassan and, in his wake,

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text, where the author is allowed to present a framed dramatization of the experience of vision – hence the 'telescopic' or 'fencing-in' strategies of the literatures of myth/failure, for instance, *Moby Dick, Heart of Darkness, Dr. Faustus, Watt*, *Pale Fire*.

[400] Cf. Kawin, 277.

[401] The concept of 'core' Modernism was proposed by Douwe W. Fokkema, in *Literary History, Modernism and Postmodernism* (Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1984), and in *Modernist Conjectures. A Mainstream in European Literature 1919-1940*, eds. Douwe W. Fokkema and Elrud Ibsch (New York: St. Martin's, 1988); whether explicitly or implicitly, it is taken over to mean a canon, or normative, Modernism by such authoritative handbooks of Modernism studies as Peter Childs's *Modernist Literature: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London – New York: Continuum, 2011); *The Modernism Handbook*, eds. Philip Tew, Andrew Murray (London – New York: Continuum, 2009)

[402] Irving Howe, *The Decline of the New* (New York: Harcourt Press, 1970).

[403] Cf. Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitch, Postmodernism* (Duke UP, 1987).

Brian McHale[404] argue against such a cutting of Modernism in two halves, into a more radically oppositional avant-garde and a 'tamer' mainstream version, stressing their basic epistemological, ideological identity, while Sanford Schwartz, Hugh Witemeyer and others propose a reconsideration of the concept and poetics of Modernism and an extension of the 'Modernist' frame of mind to incorporate both the more radical experimentation of the avant-garde and some of the strategies currently gathered under the umbrella of postmodernism.[405]

According to the theoretical affinities of the various commentators, Beckett is designed as 'post-avant-gardist', whose deconstructive art grew out of, and continued to be sustained by, an essentially Modernist frame of thought, the central tenets of which are 'opposition' and 'resistance', pitted against postmodern 'difference' and 'deconstruction'[406]; it is not difficult to see how Howe's theory of Modernism informs such constructions. Howe himself places Beckett's work in an aftermath of Modernism, underlining Beckett's consistent refusal to lend himself to any prevalent style or mode of intellectual fixity; for him, every theatre, television or radio play and prose text constitutes a beginning anew, a refusal to fall into a pattern or mode of reading established by the previous texts – while continuously revisiting, reworking previous texts to different ends, 'for to end yet again'. Howe also underscores the refusal of Beckett's texts to sell out to a commercial culture which thrives on appropriating the oppositional values of yesterday and which, in concord with the Marxist critique of postmodern culture, is defined as essentially value-neutral, devoid of critical, satirical impulse, a radically eclectic mashing together of styles.[407] According to Howe, the specific difference of Modernism,

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[404] See Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987).

[405] See Sanford Schwartz, 'The Postmodernity of Modernism', in *The Future of Modernism,* ed. Hugh Witemeyer (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 9-31.

[406] Peter J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for being in Samuel Beckett's fiction* (University of Toronto Press, 1990).

[407] See especially Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991). Despite (feeble) theoretical attempts to differentiate postmodernism from postmodernity and with it, 'postmodern' art from cultural industry as phenomena of a global consumerist, late capitalist economy and lifestyle, the construction of 'anything-goes' postmodernism, one of cultural relativism, eventually gained ground not only in popular culture (tamed and hyped as 'pomo') but in the academia as well. Symptomatic in this sense is the apologetic obituary of 'postmodernism' by two of its most influential theorists, Ihab Hassan ('Beyond Postmodernism: Towards an Aesthetic of Trust') and Linda Hutcheon ('Epilogue: The Postmodern in Retrospect', and 'Gone Forever, But Here To Stay: The Legacy of the Postmodern'), collected in

most dramatically articulated in the avant-garde, is that it refutes any established, prevalent style for itself, acting against fixity and petrification; if it does, it ceases to be modern.[408]

Beckett's art is essentially oppositional, having resistance at its heart to such an extent as to elude the classifiable: the evolution of the writing is the evolution of this principle of resistance worked into a multiplicity of texts revisiting, 'ghosting' each other, yet refusing both repetition and ending. Beckett's constant formal experimentation both in the theatre and in the prose works shows a restlessness and self-resistance productive of endless metamorphosis: the later short prose *mis*remembers fragments from the earlier texts, rewriting these in an act of resistance to closure, so *Texts for Nothing* 'remembers' the Trilogy, the *Still* 'trilogy' remembers the short television plays, *Fizzles* ghosts the whole previous output. The device of repetition, the textual recycling of images, themes, words/sentences, even characters, shows at once a concentration and carrying to the extreme of Modernist practices inherent in the very texts recycled, and generates a suspiciously 'postmodern' multiplicity, lateral proliferation of meaning, since this type of repetition underscores difference, signalling the impossibility of repetition understood as generating sameness. As Porter Abbott writes, in employing repetition at every level, Beckett's text-world activates a web of resistances which situate the work against our expectations.[409] The selfsame spirit of opposition that operates Beckett's repetitions in face of closure is everywhere turned upon itself in the writing, spread to the whole of language. The late theatre and prose works are written against potentially deadening effects, against imprisonment into the strategies employed in the preceding texts. Beckett's writing is not only situated against the reader's expectations but also against the expectations

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*Supplanting the Postmodern. An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21*st* Century*, eds. David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). PDF e-book.

[408] The idea of opposition to fixity, to the nameable is reclaimed by Lyotard as the prime feature of *postmodernism*: in his acceptance of the term, Modernism constitutes a succession of established, nameable (repeatable) styles, while postmodernism constitutes their unnamable *pre*condition, as yet to be repeated; it is thus only Modernism which can reach a stage of fixity, of established, petrified form, while postmodernism is a permanent condition of not-yet-arrival. See Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[409] Porter H. Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett: The author in the autograph* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996): 28-29.

arising from the previous work; writing is thus permanently kept from coming to an end, essentially incomplete and uncompletable.

Even though poststructuralist theories seem to fit Beckett's writing like a glove, there are several aspects they don't address. Principally, an attitude towards art/writing that is hardly compatible with the playful, exuberant self-reflexivity of the 'mainstream' postmodernists; Beckett's deep seriousness about the persistent singularity of his exploits makes him a rather 'reluctant postmodernist'.[410] The deep seriousness of the Beckett who, in a series of nonfictional texts written in the 1940s, most notably *Les Deux Besoins* and *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, articulates an anthropological program of turning away from humanism, of which Rabaté claims no less than 'Beckett staunchly identified art with truth. This is a program from which he has not moved in his postwar texts'.[411] In Porter Abbott's words, 'What we do not get is Beckett who said: "They're doing it all wrangh". Everything [Beckett] did he did with fierce exactitude: he produced difference infinitely, yet everywhere we encounter the marks of a severe self-discipline… [Beckett treated] all individual work as an object of art – something to be hammered out.'[412] With all his misgivings about imposing his authorial stance, from early on in his theatrical career Beckett turned to the task of giving 'his kind of hand'[413] to theatre directors that asked for it, with the same relentless attention to details with which he translated his own work between English and French, occasionally supervising translations of his texts into German. To Alan Scheider, the director of the first, 1956 American production of Godot in Miami, within a month of the opening Beckett sends a list of 59 corrections and observations regarding accents, the length of pauses, the delivery pace of some exchanges, touching such minutiae as '*What is terrible is to have thought*. Accent on have', but at times intervening unequivocally when he sensed that the performance risked gliding into symbolic or allegorical interpretation of his text, as demonstrated by the instruction, '*In the loft*. Simply. No pointing to heaven', followed by '*Not really*. Ironic. Grock's

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[410] Breon Mitchell, "Samuel Beckett and the Postmodern Controversy", in *Exploring Postmodernism,* eds. Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam – Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1987) 109-122: 110.

[411] Rabaté, *The Ghosts of Modernity*, 154.

[412] Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, 56.

[413] In a 1955 letter Beckett writes of his intention to "give a hand if I fell he [Alan Schneider] is the kind of man to whom my kind of hand can be given." *The Letters of Samuel Beckett 1941-1956*, Vol. II, eds. George Craig, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Dan Gunn and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge University Press, 2011): 569-570.

Sans blâââgue', indicating as model the lengthening of vowels of the famous Swiss clown Grock Beckett admired.[414] For all his devotion to 'failure', Beckett the theatre director, directing his own plays in three languages, manifested a desire for exacting full artistic control over the work of 'failure' to be produced – behaving in the same tradition of (aestheticist, Paterian) asceticism which ran through Joyce.[415] Whether writing for the theatre, prose or poetry, Beckett continued to write his own autograph – even if this (suspiciously Modernist) autograph was written over a continuously evolving work of linguistic, textual, narrative subversion which sought to address and accommodate the chaos – or, in Beckett's own words, the 'mess'.

Beckett the reluctant postmodernist

Starting with Ihab Hassan's and David Lodge's criticism[416] Beckett embarked upon a second, 'postmodernist' career. The apparent correspondences between the tools of poststructuralist criticism and his writing have added not only in impetus but have also provided the justification for Beckett's turning into an exemplary author for, and by 'High Theory'. Foucault appropriated the voices from *The Unnamable* and *Texts for Nothing* for waging war on essentialist constructions of authority[417]; Deleuze and Guattari exemplified with Beckett's texts their concepts of 'schizophrenic disjunction', 'schizoid sequences' and the texts' 'territorial assemblages'.[418] Moreover, the most productive criticism to deal with Beckett's art has been deconstruction, and vice versa, Beckett provides a gloss on deconstruction: acording to Hugh Kenner, Beckett has deconstructed the English language when Derrida was barely 14 years of age. In tackling the Beckettian texts from different angles and exploring them to different ends and odds, exegetes coming in the wake of the iconic postwar thinkers nevertheless joined forces in their denouncement

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[414] *The Letters of Samuel Beckett II*: 575-579. Schneider later published the memoirs of his decade-long collaboration with Beckett under the title *Entrances* (New York: Viking, 1986).

[415] Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett*, 48.

[416] David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1972).

[417] See Michel Foucault's discussion of the 'author-function' in 'What Is an Author?', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bochard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977): 113-38; *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2004).

[418] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

of what they see as the essentializing activity of the Beckett establishment that aims at taming, "completing" the texts by constructing, or maintaining, a 'Beckett' who, by virtue of the unity attributed to him, safely reaffirms the totalizing claims of a humanistic tradition.[419]

Beckett's writing after *The Unnamable* has solicited a number of critical answers, mostly classifiable as theological in approach; these regularly stress that Beckett has reached an impasse, that the road towards silence and disintegration ('exhaustion') has been walked as far as conceivable by the Unnamable's 'Where now? Who now? What now?', and the prose works produced can be seen as an aftermath, a mere variation differing in excessive tidying up and reduction through repetition of the earlier creative period. Such views have also been fuelled by Beckett's own statement from 1956 – and thus suspiciously close to the completion of *The Unnamable*: 'At the end of my work there is nothing but dust – the namable. In the last book – *L'Innomable* – there's complete disintegration. No "I", no "have", no "being". No nominative, no accusative, no verb. There's no way to go on.'[420] It is mostly those critics that continued to read the later output, beginning with *Comment c'est* (1961/ *How It Is*, 1964) and *Textes pour rien* (1950/ *Texts for Nothing*, 1952), in the same line of a 'literature of exhaustion', equalling Beckett's rhetoric of failure with failure of rhetoric and of the literary forms as such, who designed Beckett as 'late/last modernist'. What the later prose

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[419] See Abbott, *Beckett Writing Beckett. The Author in the Autograph*, 40-41. An overview of the major events in Beckett's poststructuralist reception is offered in Leslie Hill, 'Poststructuralist readings of Beckett', in *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies,* ed. Lois Oppenheim (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 68-88. On the 'postmodern' constructions of Beckett: Angela Moorjani, 'Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett', in *North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures* no. 219 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Stephen Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Sylvie Debevec Henning, *Beckett's Critical Complexity: Carnival, Contestation and Tradition* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988); Thomas Trezise, *Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1990); Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the Word: Samuel Beckett's Prose Works after the Nobel Prize* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Rubin Rabinovitz, *Innovation in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Richard Begam, *Samuel Beckett and the End of Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 1995); Anthony Uhlmann, *Beckett and Poststructuralism* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature* (Stanford University Press, 2007).

[420] Interview with Israel Shenker, 1956, reproduced in *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage,* eds. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman, 146-149.

proposes, however, is a new strategy of writing that does not try to overcome the aporia arrived at by the Unnamable's 'I can't go on. I'll go on' by an act of dialectical mastery, but an attempt to generate, by foregrounding the process of writing itself, new, enabling forms which resist reading and which would allow writing ('anew') to take place. As Leslie Hill observes of the prose of the 1960s, these texts circle around, describe, plot in words impossible, evanescent, aporetic places having neither entrance nor exit.[421] Accordingly, *Comment c'est* (a homonymy of the French *commencer*, 'to begin', the title signalling a new beginning of writing that addresses the issue of ending) does not epitomize a state of decay (a failed version of some existing unified whole, to which the conspicuously fragmentary text, present in the form of thirteen shards of narrative with no ascertained order or narrative coherence, might bear witness), but rather, reflects on the condition where there is no "original" text, real(izeable) or ideal, that were not fragmentary itself, and that fragmentariness eludes all dialectical framing.

It is in addressing this very fragmentation, the silences and the merging of voice and silence that Maurice Blanchot, the thinker whose name is most closely bound up with Beckett, derives his central working concept in his critical response to *Comment c'est* and *Textes pour rien*, the *neuter*. The *neuter* is, accordingly, the function of this active fragmentation, neither same nor different, an irreducible, unnamable 'still motion' at the heart of these works that both undermines and transgresses any form of determination or dialectic closure in the direction of indeterminacy.[422] The neuter is difference without identity, affirmation without assertion; its workings in the text render all provenance, origin uncertain, merely a fragmentary sum total of nomadic phrases, sequences of sentences, language fragments ('language packets') with no punctuation marks – thus with multiple and indeterminate connections – ranging from single words and prepositional phrases to whole propositions, attributable to a voice without identity or place.

Blanchot, no doubt the most sensitive reader of Beckett's silences, refuses to apply to the work the dialectics voice/language vs. silence it apparently thematizes. He reads Beckett beyond negativity, with an acute receptiveness to the radical exigency of incompletion and fragmentariness that is inscribed in Beckett's work, as a form of resistance to any form of incorporation

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[421] Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words,* 121-22.
[422] Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

which makes this writing permanently go in the face of critical ambitions of naming that which is unnamable, non-identical and irreducibly other.[423] Far from earlier existentialist readings which stress an aspiration in the voices of the Trilogy to arrive at a sought-after silence which might be definitive and which precedes and thus transcends all language, in his 1953 response to *The Unnamable* Blanchot addresses the issue of who speaks in Beckett's books, of who embodies the (disembodied) voice. The question is whether this narrat*ing* voice can be identified with any textual persona (as claim the majority of the existentialist readers of the Trilogy for whom the series Moran-Molloy-Malone-Unnamable constitute the decaying sequence of one self in the process of disintegration), or if the Unnamable's voice is simply the voice of literature. The narrating voice that inhabits the work must remain at the same time outside that work, in a condition of 'being short of *me*', the 'me' of the Unnamable. One of the constitutive features of fiction, Blanchot argues, is an alterity for which it cannot account and which it cannot incorporate, yet which cannot be reduced to self-reflexivity, to the questions literature asks of itself. The radical separateness of all art/fiction from itself in Blanchot's reading is the very condition of art's emergence *as* art, allowing for art's radical (and unanswerable) self-questioning:

> Here the voice does not speak, it *is*; in itself nothing begins, nothing is said, but it is always new and always beginning again. The writer is the man who has heard this voice, who desires to make himself its mediator, to impose silence upon it by pronouncing it. He is the man who has surrendered himself to the incessant, who has heard it as a voice, who has entered into an understanding with it, has fulfilled its requirements, has lost himself in it and, nevertheless, for having properly sustained it, has brought it within his grasp, has uttered it by firmly referring it to this limit, has mastered it by measuring it.[424]

Comment c'est, as Blanchot and, following him, Leslie Hill point out, does not allow reading in a key of mere narrative self-referentiality, however tempting its overall thematization of inscription. The major event in the narrative is the continuous inscription of a text (indeterminate) on the body of another (indeterminate) who answers to the name Pim. The text bears

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[423] On Blanchot's reading of Beckett's texts see Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words*, 121-161, and 'Poststructuralist readings of Beckett', 68-88, as well as Jean-Michel Rabaté's 'Bataille, Beckett, Blanchot: From the Impossible to the Unknowing', *Journal of Beckett Studies* 21.1 (2012): 56-64.

[424] Maurice Blanchot, 'Where Now? Who Now?' [1953], in *On Beckett. Essays and Criticism*, ed. With an Introduction by S.E. Gontarski (New York–London: Anthem, 2012) 111-117: 116.

some similarity to a theatre event whose arena, an indeterminate space of mud and excrement, enables the text to take place as a performance and supplies in the course of the coming-into-being of the text the narrative props for this performance. Whereas the text, with the cyclic changes of position of the narrating voice and its/his other, Pim and their master-slave relationship of writing on (Pim's) body across human waste seems to overtly invite an allegorical reading – of cosmological fiction, of fiction on fiction with its never-ending chain of recycling (of mud, of words) – it instantly dispels and disqualifies all such possibilities in its erasure of the fictional fabric, leaving the reader to enact (perform) the text which is spun by a solitary voice murmuring in the mud. The words of the text, written/uttered across excrement, might be said to violently thematize recycling – of language, words (inscribed on the body, with the continuous reverting and upsetting of the positions speaker/listener, subject/object, aggressor/victim, resulting in the destabilizing of the reader's position in the text). When the protagonist listens to the voice of the text and claims to be quoting from it, it is uncertain what the source of the words is: Pim's words, inside or outside, self or other. The difficulty of naming the 'protagonist' voicing in *Comment c'est* is symptomatic of the eclipse of the narrating voice. As there is no narrator at the text's opening – therefore no (bodily) presence, no possibility of embodiment of the voice – but only bodily remnants (expelled from the body), the embodiment of the narrating voice has to be enacted in the very act of expulsion, of bodily passage, in a text which precludes the very possibility of (bodily, textual) passage.[425]

Blanchot was the first to recognize the need for a radical reinvention of criticism that sets itself the goal of responding to Beckett's work after the Trilogy, beginning with *Comment c'est/ How It Is* – a writing which is increasingly unreadable and does not lend itself to critical tools applied to the earlier work. He therefore claims that it is the responsibility of criticism not to reduce such writing as *Comment c'est* to the terms of the already known, but to affirm the text in its paradoxical refusal to allow reading to take place. The task of criticism will be therefore to highlight how the text itself disables criticism: since *Comment c'est* refuses to be read as a work of art displaying traditional aesthetic values, the critic will have to renounce all claims and tools of reading the text as such and so betray it/read it for something it is not, and indeed, renounce all claims to *reading* it. S/he would have to reinvent the very act of reading as a mute retracing of the text's act of inscription,

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[425] Cf. Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words*, 137-140.

and the affirmative force of neuter in the fusion of the acts of reading and writing. Affirmation cannot mean the assertion of established (aesthetic, ethical, political) values, for this would impose upon literature a dogma, criticism's will of mastery arising from the power position of the critic (accordingly, Blanchot himself fragments his critical text into a multiplicity of voices, arrogating himself no 'last word'). Beckett's text puts the act of reading itself at a test, almost as if it wanted to do without a reader: the reader is absorbed into the text; s/he is not invited to interpret the text as a set of meanings, but is given the task of embodying the text – that is, performing a series of textual, linguistic productions which make reading akin to writing. The position of the reader is no longer that of interpreter/audience, but that of joint performer, onstage, reading the text or theatrical event, extending the experimental work in reading it (a feature of the prose works starting with *Comment c'est* which resembles the experimental plays *Ohio Impromptu*, *Eh Joe*, or the script *Film*). The literary text becomes thus more performative than descriptive/representational; most of its narrative content elaborately mirrors the production of the text which enacts, in the theatrical sense, more than it recounts. At the same time, it is symptomatic that Blanchot's desubjectified model of enunciation, attributed to (transcendental) language/literature voicing, is modeled entirely on Beckett's fiction, Blanchot – similarly to Bataille and Foucault – never tackling Beckett's theatre where claims of dissociating enunciation from the agency of a speaker would be more difficult to sustain.[426]

One of the most far-reaching and influential poststructuralist readings of Beckett comes from Gilles Deleuze who glosses on three main features of Beckett's writing and whose work (mainly, the *Thousand Plateaus*, as well as 'The Exhausted', Deleuze's essay on Beckett's television plays) is conversely

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[426] In his article examining the ethics of enunciation in critical constructions of Beckett by Blanchot, Foucault, and Agamben, Russell Smith even states that Blanchot's 'ventriloquistc model of enunciation' (*sic*) is 'derived from the text of *The Unnamable* itself', without acknowledging that the novel offers 'a staggering variety of enunciative acts', thus the Blanchovian model of pure exteriority, of speech without a speaker, lifts the weight of the Beckettian aporia: 'If no one is speaking, then The Unnamable's formula "It's not I speaking" ceases to be a paradox; if there is an occasion but no artist, a representee but no representer, then there can be no "ferocious dilemma of expression."' Russell Smith, 'The Acute and Increasing Anxiety of the Relation Itself: Beckett, the Author-Function, and the Ethics of Enunciation', in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 18. *'All Sturm and No Drang': Beckett and Romanticism*, eds. Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007) 341-354: 345.

glossed on by Beckett. These main domains of interference are: the nomadic character of the wanderings of Beckett's heroes, both in the theatre and in his prose works ('the schizo's walkabout' of the *Anti-Oedipus*, as reflected in the aimless travelling to and fro of Watt, Molloy, etc.), emblematic figures for Deleuze for the production of inclusive disjunctions; the comic intensity of Beckett's prose achieved through 'clothed' (vs. 'naked') repetitions, and willed impoverishment; and thirdly, Beckett's status as a minoritarian writer moving to and fro between Anglo-Irish, a minor tongue, and non-native French, in a state of continuous becoming, multiplying differences without identity and showing an acute awareness of a perpetual foreignness.[427] In Deleuze's reading of literature as event, block of sensations, intensities and eminently non-institutional and non-institutionalizable experimental domain, the 'exhausted' Beckett of late Modernism and the sense of 'exhaustion' in Beckett's writing take on a radically disjunctive, transformational meaning. 'Exhaustion', far from the general horizon of negativity implied by the fictions of 'exhaustion' vs. 'replenishment', addresses the transformation of reality into an infinite number of inclusive disjunctions according to a criterion of exhaustivity, therefore Beckett's pervasive use of mathematical combinations, permutations etc. are treated not as a revealing by reduction of the inherently reductive range and methods of mimesis, but as a positive principle at work in the 'cartography of the real'. In his 'L'Epuisé' ('The Exhausted'), an essay on Beckett's late television plays, Deleuze proposes a discussion of Beckett's narrative work following a threefold categorization of languages of 'exhaustion'[428]: in the first of these 'languages' words (names used as atoms) supplant objective reality, exhausting the possible through a strategy that can be likened to mathematical combinations and permutations (such as the permutation lists throughout *Watt*; Molloy's 'sucking stones', etc.). Language II emerges with the taking of words, instead of the objects they refer to, to the limit, making them into an endless series of possible voices – as with *The Unnamable* – which, in turn, carry with them possible worlds created by their stories. This 'language' points at the infinitely ramifying relation between voices, stories and the composition of world(s), central to fiction and to the 'real'; in these relations the groundlessness of the literary text (and the worlds posited therein) is revealed. Language III appears as an unexpected interruption, as in-betweenness, as pure image or

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[427] On Deleuze's reading on Beckett see Hill, 'Poststructuralist readings of Beckett', 68-88.
[428] *Essays Critical and Clinical*, 154-170.

sound, being likened to the pauses that tear the surface of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony of which Beckett speaks in the Axel Kaun letter.[429]

A further junction of Beckett's work with poststructuralist theory, which seems to lend itself to poststructuralist analysis, is the increasingly elliptic nature, willed incompleteness of Beckett's texts after *Comment c'est*. Some of the prose works beginning with the 1960s are condensed, reduced texts revisiting and reworking earlier ones (for instance, the sequence *All Strange Away*, *Imagination Dead Imagine*, and *Ping*); many short prose pieces are proposed as unfinished (and unfinishable) fragments (*All Strange Away*; *Le Dépeupleur/ The Lost Ones*); the late texts (the last two 'trilogies': *Still* and *Nohow On*) build on silences/ellipses to such extent that reading them amounts to an arduous process of rewriting, of filling-in-the-gaps which the texts stubbornly resist. The (textual, linguistic, narrative) gaps in Beckett's texts are of such nature that they maintain attention on the experience of *un*know*ing* in the face of being; in Porter Abbott's term, these 'egregious' gaps function in such a way as to prevent the reader from filling them in with any kind of (fixed) ideas.[430]

These later short prose texts, as their form and many of their titles suggest, are *remaninders*. The French title of a 1967 volume of short prose, *Têtes-mortes* (Engl. *Residua,* 1972), alludes to the Latin *caput mortuum* (chemical

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[429] 'Is there any reason why that terrifyingly arbitrary materiality of the word surface should not be dissolved, as for example the sound surface of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony us devoured by huge black pauses, so that for pages on end we cannot perceive it as other than a dizzying path of sounds connecting unfathomable chasms of silence?' (1937 letter to Axel Kaun, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett I: 1929-1940*, eds. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Lois More Overbeck, George Craig and Dan Gunn (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009): 519.

[430] H. Porter Abbott, 'Narrative', in *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies,* 7-29. Beckett's 'egregious gaps' function as openings in the text which require filling in with authorial assistance, while resisting all such attempts; whereas it is the condition of their coming-into-being that they solicit an action of filling in, they resist the latter to such extent that they counteract the very possibility of their coming-into-being, placing narrative under the sign of the impossible in such late prose pieces as *Ill Seen Ill Said*. In this, Abbott argues, Beckett's texts simultaneously elicit and preclude the readings of the Void as *topos*, or ultimate goal of Beckett's writing (Steven Barker, Recovering the Néant: Language and the Unconscious in Beckett', in *The World of Samuel Beckett,* ed. Joseph H. Smith. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, 125-156), or as the *place of origination* which, in Shira Wolosky's reading of Beckett's negativity, accounts for the generative power of that which is against the realm of what is not – Beckett's texts becoming 'a defiant creation from nothing' (Shira Wolosky, *Language mysticism: the negative way of language in Eliot, Beckett, and Celan.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

deposit, residue left over after sublimation/distillation of substance; it has interferences with the English technical term of gardening 'deadhead', meaning the removal of a finished flower head before it goes to seed), bringing into play a wide range of meaning.[431] Beckett himself, in an interview to Brian Finney, declared that these texts are 'residual' even when it is not apparent in relation to what text they are so, and that they are residual in relation to the whole body of the previous work – the implications of this statement being that these texts are the sole remnants of a textual whole which, if it exists at all, is unavailable, or downright absent, and/or that, being residues, their status is merely a function of that (absent) whole which, if inexistent, renders the residual character of the available texts impossible to ascertain.[432] Furthermore, if reading complies with what the titles seem to inscribe on the texts – an absence, the traces of something removed from the texts, of some essential substance they no longer contain – it also has to infer an identity for these texts within Beckett's other writings and indeed within the whole of Beckett's oeuvre. Yet, if they possess no identity/essence within themselves, as the title would imply, then they should contaminate the absent/nonexistent 'wholes' of which the residua are all that remains. As Leslie Hill concludes, this entangles the texts in the perverse logic of Derrida's *De la grammatologie*: if the 'residues' have been removed from 'whole' entities, then these entities which exclude them can no longer be wholes, therefore there is no whole work any longer, and so the *Residua* are residues without essence of a work without essence. The 'whole' body of the work negates itself repeatedly by splitting itself into a 'body whole proper' and a 'supplementary corpus improper', both denied the attribute of wholeness.[433] The texts convert the process into an active one, of writing remainders, where 'remainders' is to be read as an active verb form; the implication is that all texts produced are dispersed fragments of a writing which implies no whole and no source of origin, not even a fictitious one. An emblematic figure (for) writing *remainders*, that embodies and disembodies itself in a single self-effacing self-enactment, is the volume of short prose texts, some recycled from the output of the 60s with the addition of several new texts, published in 1976 under the title *Pour finir encore et autres foirades*/*For to end yet again and other fizzles*: *foirade*/fizzle, an immaterial excretion (breaking wind without noise) can be

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[431] Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words*, 141-142.

[432] 1971 interview with Brian Finney, quoted in Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 142.

[433] Ibid., 143.

seen as a figure for failure and aporia, where lack of passage gives way to the passage of something that pertains to the body, yet is detached from it, is both real and insubstantial.[434]

Beckett: writing against the grain

> The danger is in the neatness of identifications. [435]
>
> The worst risk facing an exegesis of Beckett's work is not that of turning it into an endless analysis of an unending work, but of reducing it to the very things the word uses as a launching pad in order to demystify and expel: an ideology, rationalization and fetishism of the word itself.[436]

If Joyce must have appeared to his contemporaries, *volens nolens* in the guise of Stephen Dedalus of *Portrait* fame, as the supreme God-like controller hidden behind, beyond, above his handiwork, paring his fingernails, the author who could state, referring to *Ulysses* and the *Wake*, that 'I have discovered I can do anything with language I want',[437] Beckett since his early attempts at writing strove at a control made increasingly problematic and then gradually denigrated and given up, paring down form, language and narrating voice in the process of approaching the state of non-canning and not-knowing, turned into a process of *un*know*ing* (*Worstward Ho*). If Joyce's works generate an endless semiosis that operates through excess of language, the language of Beckett's prose operates with subtraction. Already his early prose and poems written, as it were, in the wake of *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* where he adopts the pose of a Shem the Penman, ironically question the authorial control manifest in literary omniscience, flaunting an intrusive authorial voice that admits his lack of control while indulging in linguistic virtuosity and academic clowning that sometimes out-Joyces Joyce.[438] Nevertheless, from *Texts for Nothing* onwards

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[434] Ibid., 144-145.

[435] *Dante…Bruno. Vico…Joyce*, in: *Disjecta* 19.

[436] Aldo Tagliaferri, 'Beckett and Joyce', in *Samuel Beckett: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), 252.

[437] Quoted in Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford University Press, 1959), 365.

[438] The creative misspellings of 'The Smeraldina's Billet Doux' in *More Pricks* are not far removed from Wakese; one of the early poems based on an acrostic on Joyce's name, 'Home Olga', as Gontarski points out, plays on *Homo Logos*, word-man – a direct reference to Joyce –, the Greek-derived word *homologous* and possibly on *homage*, while calling to mind a private joke of the Joyce household: cf. Gontarski, 'Samuel Beckett, James Joyce's "Illstarred Punster"', in *The Seventh of Joyce*, 32-33.

to the *Nohow On* 'trilogy' the late prose creates a semiosis of its own kind, precisely through extreme linguistic reductions coupled with repetition where the production of meaning occurs in spite of the defigurations of the text, depending on the changing positions of the signifier.

According to one of the most penetrating exegeses of the late prose texts, Carla Locatelli's *Unwording the World*, Beckett's unending writing can be divided into three major phases with their distinct 'typologies of meanings': the early fiction (*anti-novels*) is marked by a strong critical attitude towards traditional realism and shows a heightened awareness of its own textuality, of the literary medium; a middle phase (of the 'Trilogy') could be described as the transformation of anti-novels into *a-novels*; finally, the late short prose is characterized by an epistemological use and conception of language. Accordingly, the questions formulated by these creative phases would be, 'with what authority does one speak?' becoming, '*who* speaks?' and finally, '*does speaking need a subject*?'[439]

The early writings of Beckett already show a detachment from the poetics pursued by Joyce, perhaps most visible in their treatment of consciousness and of the monologue form. While Joyce aimed at transforming the conventions of the inherited monologue and making them pliable and transparent to the extent of accommodating his *sents*, so as the effect created to be that of the immediacy of consciousness, Beckett turned his back on improving any mimetic conventions which he acidly enlists as 'uniformity, homogeneity, cohesion, selection scavenging for verisimilitude… the Professor's tastes', unable by their nature to accommodate the chaos of human experience ('Proust in Pieces', *Disjecta* 64). He aimed at denouncing the monologue form as a mystifying, 'lyrical' convention and rejected all the subtleties of the practitioners of the form that rendered their artifice invisible; he connoted all literary conventions as 'mind manacles'.

Narrative disorganization begins with *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* where the chaos of experience refuses to be contained in the forms of art, undoing the type of authorial omniscience that Belacqua associates with Balzac. The intrusive, technically omniscient authorial voice frequently lapses into self-admitted impotence: of Belacqua's longing to get back into the maternal womb he says, 'He remembers the present gracious bountiful tunnel and cannot get back… And *we* cannot do anything for him; *how can you help people, unless it be on with their corsets or to a second or third helping*?'

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[439] Locatelli, *Unwording the Word*, 30.

(*DFMW* 110); 'What she meant by that and what pleasure she hoped to get out of that, *cannot be made clear*' (97). Belacqua and the voice that narrates him expose the omniscient author as a falsity – the denouncement of the conventions of traditional realist fiction and the willing suspension of disbelief it triggers from the reader go hand in glove with the jocose program of 'democratic fiction' formulated by Flann O'Brien's unnamed student-narrator in *At Swim-Two-Birds*:

> The procédé that seems all falsity, that of Balzac, for example… consists of dealing with the vicissitudes, or absence of vicissitudes, of character in this backwash, as though they were the whole story. Whereas, in reality, this is so little the story, this nervous recoil into composure, this has so little to do with the story that one must be excessively concerned with a total precision to allude to it at all... To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude, he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses. The whole thing, from beginning to end, takes place in a spellbound backwash. We all love and lick up Balzac, we lap it up and say it is wonderful, but why call this distillation of Euclid and Perrault *Scenes from Life*? (*DFMW* 106)

What the two authors of self-generating (and especially with Beckett, increasingly self-effacing) fictions share in common is a transfer of the locus of discourse into the psyche of an (ideal) reader. If it has been said that the Joycean theatre of *Finnegans Wake* is the human brain in which civilization sleeps, one can say that Beckett's texts are played out, performed among the residua of life, the picnic litter of past times' pastimes. These texts progressively become a site where reading takes place; moreover, they come into being in, and as, the event of reading. Neither discourse bears any fixed, stable meaning in relation to an external, objectifiable reality; on the contrary, both tend to destroy referentiality and place their fictional world(s) in a space of indeterminacy. *Ulysses* provides a model for Beckett in exposing the patent artifice of his fiction: the disruption and hybridization of linear narrative by headlines in 'Aeolus'; the (meta)thematization, with an equanimity worthy of Bloom, of all styles/discourses as equally relative linguistic frameworks for representing the real and whose existence is founded solely on (narrative) consensus in 'Cyclops', 'Oxen', 'Eumaeus', 'Ithaca'; the wealth of intra- and intertextual games culminating in the Nighttown language of 'Circe' are all eccentric literary techniques that violate the decorum of the work and

enforce a suspension of the suspension of disbelief – or rather, an *un*willing suspension of belief. In one of the excerpts from *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* Beckett's protagonist outlines a fiction to be written, thematizing the narrative goal of what could be extrapolated to the whole of Beckett's early fiction:

> 'I shall write a book', [Belacqua] mused, tired of the harlots of earth and air… a book where the phrase is self-consciously smart and slick, but of a smartness and slickness other than that of its neighbours on the page. The blown roses of a phrase shall catapult the reader into the tulips of the phrase that follows […] the experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement… his experience shall be the menace, the miracle, the memory of an unspeakable trajectory. (*DFMW* 138)

The project is overtly for the creation of metanarratives ('where the phrase is self-consciously smart'), yet there is also an inbuilt strategy towards transforming mimetic writing: the emphasis on the gaps, silences between the 'blown roses of the phrase' and 'the tulips of the phrase that follows' already signal that acknowledgement of the value of linguistic traces, residua ('the memory of an unspeakable trajectory'), to be fully exploited in the late short prose – a poetics of the silence/pause first outlined in the German letter to Axel Kaun. One can thus trace an evolution, already at work in the early prose texts, that starts from a rejection of the 'plain sailing' of realist writing and, through a foregrounding of the textuality, linguistic constructedness of the writing, eventually points at a (tentative) acceptance of the linguistic constructedness of the world.

Most of Beckett's early fiction – *Dream*, *More Pricks than Kicks* and, above all, *Murphy* – plays upon the reader's impulse to accept the fictional world as valid: among the various means of highlighting artifice and undermining credibility are the Sternean interpolations/ metaleptic gestures of the narrators of *More Pricks, Murphy*, *Watt*, continuing in the narrative games of the narrating voices in the 'Trilogy'. 'Dante and the Lobster' for instance, the first narrative in *More Pricks*, ends with a statement that cannot be located within the narrative and which questions, on a tone of authority – cf. the proximity of the turn of phrase *God help us all* – Belacqua's musings on the lobster's doom:

> She lifted the lobster clear of the table. It had about thirty seconds to live.
> Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all.
> *It is not.* (*MPTK* 19, *my emphasis*)

Apart from Sternesque jokes, Beckett's narratives erode the credibility of narrative by presenting circumstance that itself undermines the credibility (and authority) of the fictional world/discourse: Moran's discourse gradually turns him into an invention, a fiction of Molloy, whereas the Unnamable dismisses all earlier Beckett characters/fictions starting with Belacqua and Murphy as 'its' pastime inventions. Both Beckett and Joyce write fictions that thematize and propose belief at another, deeper level of awareness: the suspension of the suspension of disbelief involves yet another suspension of disbelief.[440]

As distinct from the Joycean self-generating (and, in its wake, self-destroying) text, born of an associative flux of language rather than from a necessity of plot, character, situation, which proposes (all) style/narrative voice as hybrid – a *bricolage*, Beckett's self-generating and self-effacing texts are engaged in a progressive attempt to dismantle their (textual, fictional) world, exposing the verbal nature of reality and attempting to point at the inexpressible – the void. In addition, Beckett's fictions also attack the holistic notions of the voice/self as an irreducible, unitary whole, proposing the voice which turns out to be a medley of self-sustaining, self-generating fictions. With the *locus classicus* of Joycean self-generating and self-dismantling text, the 'Parable of the Plums' in 'Aeolus' a narrative (already fragmented, punctured by headlines that function as a narrative counterforce, obstinate physical presences that interrupt the course of narrative, comment and call attention to themselves through their graphic form) is both composed and decomposed in the process of telling. In Beckett's *Watt* we have similar figures for creation *ex nihilo* when, at the opening of the novel, Mr Hackett turns a corner and space itself remains undefined, but takes shape only in the process of telling – of Mr Hackett's perception, of the voice narrating Mr Hackett – as words issue from one another to fill up the page. Mr Hackett himself, at first only an abstraction, a name, develops as the lines of story burgeon into different, multiple dimensions and the world begins to solidify. As elements of the world are discovered one by one, the narrative is deployed both as a linear progression and retroactively, since we can only infer that Mr Hackett called for a policeman after he arrives:

> But he had not reached the corner when he turned again and hastened towards the seat, as fast as his legs could carry him. When he was so near the seat, that he could have touched it with his stick, if he had wished, he again halted and

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[440] Cf. David Hayman, 'Joyce → Beckett/Joyce', in *The Seventh of Joyce*, 37-39.

examined its occupants. He had the right, he supposed, to stand and wait for the tram. They too were perhaps waiting for the tram, for a tram, for many trams stopped here, when requested, from without or within, to do so.

Mr Hackett decided, after some moments, that if they were waiting for a tram they had been doing so for some time. For the lady held the gentleman by the ears, and the gentleman's hand was on the lady's thigh, and the lady's tongue was in the gentleman's mouth. Tired of waiting for the tram, said (*) Mr Hackett, they strike up an acquaintance…

I see no indecency, said the policeman.

(*) Much valuable space has been saved, in this work, that would otherwise have been lost, by avoidance of the plethoric reflexive pronoun after *say*. (*W* 5-6)

The reader is engaged in the extension of a story line, in its most concrete form: the autonomous, self-generating story-line develops in the process of reading/writing as one word succeeds another and as one story takes over another. An additional twist to the narrative that foregrounds its own constructedness is given by the intrusiv**e** footnote that pronounces the text it disrupts, comments on and relates to at the same time, a written work, locating it ironically in the sphere of academic, scholarly writing; such Sternesque jokes (cf. 'Hiatus in ms', 238; 'ms illegible', 241) also contrast with the minimalist paring down of language and narrative. Later Mr Hackett listens to the story of the gentleman and lady who literally turn into husband and wife, then into Goff and Tetty, father and mother, as they relate to Hackett the birth of Larry, their son – a birth that literally happens in the process of the telling of their story, both being characters in the story they themselves tell inside another story told of Mr Hackett, in the body of the novel – only to turn, at the end of their story, when they formally introduce themselves to Watt, into Mr. and Mrs. Nixon. Watt's world extends as far as these story lines extend; *Watt* literally and graphically displays and deploys the cognitive processes that the recounting (and reading) of narrative presupposes, laying bare the narrative conventions that postulate the unity of time and place, the assumption of narrative identity and, in the process, breaking away from all considerents of narrative economy:

I wouldn't go as far as that, said the gentleman.

Would you care to hear, Mr. Hackett, said the lady, about the night that Larry was born?

Oh do tell him, my dear, said *the gentleman*.

Well, said the lady, that morning at breakfast Goff turns to me and he says, Tetty, he says, Tetty, my pet, I should very much like to invite Thompson, Cream and Colquhoun to help us eat the duck, if I felt sure you felt up to it. Why, my dear, says I, I never felt fitter in my life. Those were my words, were they not?

> I believe they were, said *Goff*.
> Well, said *Tetty*, when Thompson comes into the dining-room… I was already seated at the table… The first mouthful of duck had barely passed my lips, said Tetty, when Larry leaped in *my wom*.
> Your what? said Mr. Hackett.
> My wom, said Tetty.
> You know, said Goff, *her woom*. (*W* 10-11, *my emphases*)

Watt is the process of words – autonomous physical presences – extending, *provecting* themselves into a story line, creating and subsequently erasing a world by the addition of new elements, in turn exposed as linguistic constructs, effects of language. Hugh Kenner claims that *Watt* is derived from Joyce's 'Ithaca', the catechistic chapter which runs the 19th century bourgeois novel to the ground, for within it nothing, unless it be the analytic faculty, can survive, and the human consciousness does no longer appear against the background of quantifiable matter, but is 'immersed to the eyes' in it.[441] What in the opening of *Watt* is achieved by literally playing out the assumed mental processes on which narrative/discursive coherence and cohesion are based is thematized more thoroughly in the *Trilogy* where Molloy, Moran, Malone and the Unnamable all spin fictions *ex nihilo*, listing words that generate other words and which are duly erased by narrative subtraction. With the Molloy-Moran-Malone-Unnamable series self-generation itself becomes self-destruction, the telling of the self its untelling, one storyteller's place is taken by another as storytellers, in turn, are reduced to figments of another storyteller's imagination. In the passage below from *The Unnamable*, out of the idea of (the absence of narrative) junction and the voice speaking – and, ultimately, out of language itself – a (fictional) space is generated, growing into a self-reflexive text that relates and responds to its own actant, the voice, with each sentence calling forth its amplification in other tropes. The passage can be read as a fictional character's gloss on 'his' own fictionality, where

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[441] Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 69-70. Both Kenner and Ruby Cohn point out Beckett's embeddedness in a tradition of 'Anglo-Irish wit' (Cohn) or, 'the great Irish nihilists' (Kenner) in the effacement of fictional verisimilitude seen as the novel's preoccupation with people preoccupied by trivia. Swift, a mere seven years after Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, parodies the overriding concern for dogmatic verisimilitude in portraying a mind so biased towards the 'demented particulars' of the novelistic art that it is imposed on by talking horses; the numerical inventories in *Gulliver's Travels* (which the manuscript's editor has unchristianly trimmed, as announced in the preface) constitute the antecedent to both Joyce's catechistic excesses and the mathematical 'madness of language' in *Watt* (Kenner, 69).

the space generated is itself a function of 'their' fiction, of 'their' words and where the breach in narrative continuity/coherence is violently exposed:

> But instead of making the junction, I have often noticed this, I mean instead of resuming me at the point where I was left off, they pick me up at a much later stage, perhaps thereby hoping to induce in me the illusion that I had got through the interval all on my own, lived without help of any kind for quite some time, and with no recollection of by what means or in what circumstances, or even died, all on my own, and come back to earth again, by way of the vagina like a real live baby, and reached a ripe age, and even senility, without the least assistance from them and thanks solely to the hints they had given me… Two falsehoods, two trappings, to be borne to the end, before I can be let loose, alone, in the unthinkable unspeakable, where I have not ceased to be, where they will not let me be. It will perhaps be less restful than I appear to think, alone there at last, and never importuned. No matter, *rest is one of their words, think is another*. (*UNN* 350, 335, *my emphasis*)

The voice speaking appears as if it were being written into fiction by language itself; the text necessarily appears as a palimpsest of fictions, with no secure ontological ground on which the arbitrarily (self-)multiplying fictions could be based. If the voice speaking may seem a fiction of the indefinite 'they', 'they' in turn are a fiction spun by the Unnamable and its various fictions, equally groundless: far from being a *mise-en-abîme* in a metafictional structure, a mere abysmal game of voices/ levels of fictionality, this groundless fiction probes into the condition of speaking from within language itself, of the positions of *voicing* that language makes possible.

'All these demented particulars'.
Narrative providence provides in Murphy

> In short there was nothing but he, the unintelligible gulf and they. That was all, ALL, ALL. (*Mu* 134)
> Murphy believed there was no dark quite like his own dark. (*Mu* 54)

Murphy, Beckett's first novel to be published, underwent a literary 'trial' before coming out in 1938; the publishers' objections are telling as to the novelistic games the text proposes and, equally, to the readerly expectations and narrative conventions *Murphy* breaks with. To the publisher's proposal that Beckett delete or suppress the opening (which, according to the author, was 'plain sailing enough'), the whole chapter II (*Amor Intellectualis quo M. se ipsum amat*) as well as the game of chess between Murphy and Mr Endon, Beckett defends what to his old-world publishers must have appeared as his work's idiosyncrasies, stressing particularly those features that his

writing might have seemed short of – compression and structure: 'Do they not understand that if the book is slightly obscure it is because it is a compression and that to compress it further can only result in making it more obscure? The wild and unreal dialogues, it seems to me, cannot be removed without darkening and dulling the whole thing. They are the comic exaggeration of what elsewhere is expressed in elegy, namely, if you like, the Hermeticism of the spirit. Is it here that they find the "skyrockets"? There is no time and no space in such a book for *mere* relief. The relief has also to do work and reinforce that from which it relieves. And of course the narrative is hard to follow. And of course deliberately so.'[442]

From the novel's opening we are plunged in a fictional world that is entirely under the sign of the repetitive; its physical setting as well as its representational language belong to the order of 'lessness', of 'less is more', achieved through reduction of scenery, of the outer, material world. The form of fiction as well as the underlying Cartesian network of ideas belong to a well-established literary tradition within which the narratorial voice Beckett employs and his central hero work in the direction of paring down, reduction, withdrawal and understatement:

> The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out of it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brompton. Here 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 northwestern aspect commanding an unbroken view of medium-sized cages of south-eastern aspect. Soon he would have to make other arrangements, for the mew had been condemned. Soon he would have to buckle to and start eating, drinking, sleeping, and putting his clothes on and off, in quite alien surroundings. (*Mu* 5)

All the elements of this reduced universe perform their grotesque existence, a chain of repetitions, under compulsion; the language 'gives away' clues ('cage', 'condemned'; 'having no alternative', 'would have to') to the nature of this world, closed upon itself, clockwork-like and predictable. This world delimits the place and condition of the protagonist, Murphy, who defines himself in terms of his inner, mental world – he 'sat out of it' (the referent of 'it' being here indeterminate: either the sunlight or the world itself – the 'nothing new'), yet in an illusion only: 'as though he were free'. The second sentence's withdrawal of the possibility of self-identification based on volition mirrors, in fact, the oxymoronic potential of the first sentence: whereas 'the

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[442] Beckett's letter to George Reavey dated November 13, 1936: *Letters I*, 380-381.

sun shone' is a syntagm which, through the use of the active verb form (the preterite) implies personification and thus a voluntary action on the part of the sun, the 'having no alternative' retroactively denies any possibility of volition or choice ('shining' being in fact the condition of the sun). Similarly, the syntagm 'the sun shone *on the nothing new*' gives a twist to the cliché 'there is nothing new under the sun': while the use of the definite article substantializes nothingness (the void, by definition, cannot be substantialized, eluding all descriptible categories), newness can only qualify an entity of some kind. The sequence of words on the page point at the existence of an insurmountable gap between reference and literary form: the opening sentence which announces the 'nothing new' is a literary paraphrase that thus compels the reader to consider the fiction *as* fiction which renounces the claim of originality. Paradoxically, in the wake of this renouncement the novel achieves a striking originality. The linking of the narrative syntagms produces a parodic effect, since the sentence, playing upon the 'literal' and 'figurative' meaning of words (e.g. 'aspect') demonstrates that meaning viewed in relation to fact is irrelevant to the development of meaning in the narrative. This narrative opening deploys the full arsenal of traditional narrative setting (place, time, circumstance), but the 'having no alternative' and the other, markedly superfluous specifications of the first sentence already challenge the most elementary principle of traditional narrative economy, thus triggering a rethinking of the traditional questions about life-like representations. The alternative announced by *Murphy* is in fact in the voicing of the 'having no alternative' – displacing the question of representation to the question of what is said and what is not said, since in narratives we can only find the actualization of possible alternatives. 'Having no alternative' is in fact the narrative norm – the original repression from which narrative verisimilitude can ensue, since 'traditional' narratives always pursue *one* narrative path only. Through this intricate, demystifying parody of the world in discourse and of realism and 'truth' in fiction, *Murphy* makes the reader aware that the sentences of a literary discourse have no referent and have to be regarded with an *un*willing suspension of disbelief.[443]

Murphy, formally speaking, is safely anchored in the tradition of the adventure story or of picaresque novel: it has a quest pattern; the centre to which all action converges, though himself static, is Murphy; the voice speaking is that of an omnipresent, time and again intrusive narrator, true heir of the

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[443] See Locatelli, *Unwording the Word*, 58.

intrusive omniscient narrator of premodernist fiction, who regularly dispenses references to painters, philosophers, poets, sculptors, psychologists, scientists and knows all there is to know about the characters. He sometimes offers his judgements freehandedly to the reader: 'all the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later except for Murphy who is not a puppet' (71); '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' (67). At other times he slips unobtrusively into direct interior monologue, like some traditional narrators in modernist fiction. However, he turns the tables on these by posing questions (thus, presenting the reader with a metaleptic gesture to be expected from a Fielding narrator) without answering them, or at other times offering unasked-for answers, being both verbose and occasionally withholding information – for instance as to the location of Murphy's seventh scarf which, on closer inspection, turn out to be six:

> Seven scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible. (*Mu* 5)

The enygma of the seven scarves also draws attention to a further crux: by what means did Murphy, unaided, manage to tie himself in a position that allows for 'only the most local movements'? Similarly, Murphy's death is enveloped in mystery, since the gas explosion only occurs after his return back to his room, lighting the candle, tieing himself to his seat (by unelucidated means), due to a gas leakage for which apparently no party is responsible *inside* the narrative – were it not for the narrator/fabulist himself who can step out of the fictional world at will.[444] Such sternesque jokes flaunt the artificiality of both the fictional world and of the narrative, reminding the reader that such occurrences are only possible in a world that is entirely fictional, grounded in language solely.

The novel is unique in Beckett's *oeuvre* for its entirely conventional structuring, based on cause and effect largely; the 'vulgarity of a plausible concatenation' (*Proust* 90) is kept at bay through making everything 'essential to the whole'. The obedience to formal exigencies of the adventure/picaresque tradition, however, is true at face value only: its central character, Murphy,

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[444] Rubin Rabinovitz gives a list of twenty-eight similar narrative inconsistencies in *Watt*, in: *The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 119.

certainly the most memorable of Beckett's 'omnidolent' heroes, is an idiosyncratic young man who has virtually no story, no journey to a defined goal (to himself), but a stasis that defines, and identifies with – the Nothing that Beckett's *Dialogues* speak of. The closed system of picaresque novel/of rational (Cartesian) structure is laid bare, on the one hand, by the games with language and excesses of representation, on the other, by the driving of the very rational axioms on which it rests, ad absurdum. Beckett's notebook testifies to his wide reading, while working on *Murphy*, of Cervantes, Fielding, Lesage and to his practice of reversing their strategies: 'The picaresque inverted. *Gil Blas* is realised by his encounters and receives his mission from them. [Murphy] is realised by his failure to encounter and his progress depends on his failure being sustained. If he made terms with people the story would come to an end. He seems to and it seems to. Then [the Horoscope] to the rescue.'[445]

Murphy could be defined simply as an anti-hero, were it not for the carefully built up, highly parodic philosophical understructure of the novel, founded upon the dualism of mind and body, inner and outer world. Murphy is he who cannot be identified according to the terms of the outer world, the 'big blooming buzzing confusion' (6), having no profession, no (accountable and relatable) history and no possessions to place him. His beloved Celia, when trying to answer her grandfather's questions ('What is he? Where does he come from? What is his family? What does he do? Has he any money? Has he any prospects? Has he any retrospects? Is he, has he, anything at all?' – constituting, in themselves, a comic de-construction of identity-tags) can only affirm as much as 'He was Murphy. He had Celia' (14). He rejects the idea of doing anything for a livelihood, exhorting Celia for wanting to change him: 'What do you love?… Me as I am. You can want what does not exist, you can't love it… Then why are you all out to change me? So that you won't have to love me… You do what you are, you do a fraction of what you are, you suffer a dreary ooze of your being into doing' (25). The terms to his identification lie elsewhere, in his near-arrivals at the state of unbeing, *bound* to his rocking-chair in the 'post-mortem' situation of Belacqua[446] in Antepurgatory, in embryonal repose, in meditation:

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[445] Beckett: *Whoroscope* notebook, MS 3000, quoted in James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 216.

[446] An inhabitant of Dante's *Purgatory*, the poet's friend known in his lifetime for his indolence and sloth whom Dante meets crouching with his head between his knees below a rock, refusing to go further the path of purification; Beckett adopts the name (and character) in *More Pricks Than Kicks*.

> …looking down at dawn across the reeds to the trembling of the austral sea and the sun obliquing to the north as it rose, 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. He thought so highly of this post-mortem situation, its advantages were present in such detail to his mind, that he actually hoped he might live to be old. Then he would have a long time lying there dreaming, watching the dayspring run through its zodiac, before the toil up hill to Paradise. (*Mu* 78)

Murphy strays from the path of realistic representation, as well as from the aesthetics of High Modernism, not by turning its back on rationalism but by carrying the central assumptions of Cartesian thought to the extreme, inter-preting them literally and, thus, turning rational thought against itself in the closed system of its fictional world. The novel – frequently termed an *anti-novel* –, as Beckett's early fiction in general, shows a strong critical attitude towards realism and an acute awareness of the literary medium. Chapter 6, dedicated to the anatomy of Murphy's mind, has as epigraph a paraphrase of Spinoza, '*Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat*'.[447] The whole chapter plays upon Spinoza's interlocked and self-enclosed system, mixing Cartesian notions (on the dualism of body and mind, further parodied in *Watt*) with Aristotelian ones (distinctions between actual and virtual), playing them off against each other in outrageously ironic digressions. Another crucial in-gredient of this 'anatomy' is the epistemology of Arnold Geulincx, Descartes's disciple whose *Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis* is quoted in the novel ('"I am not of the big world, I am of the little world" was an old refrain with Murphy', Chapter 9, 101) and who strove to account for the illusion of interconnected-ness of mind and matter, preserving Descartes's dualism.[448] Murphy's mind

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[447] In the original, 'The intellectual love with which God loves Himself', *Ethics*, V, where Spinoza describes the third level of knowledge (parodied in the third level of Murphy's mind, chapter 6) that permits access to the beatitudes. In this substitution not only Murphy's self-love is parodied but Spinoza's principle is driven *ad absurdum*: the philosopher proposes that God, the eternal cause who loves not and hates not, can bestow upon himself an intellectual love; the enlightened individual can approach the intellectual love of God and in this case, through reason, he is joined to the timeless order of the universe and becomes part of the infinite.

[448] 'Where you are worth nothing, there you should want nothing' or: 'Where you can do nothing, there wish nothing', highest principle of ethics from which each and every obligation follows – that one should accept both death and life; as about the human condition, man can only know what it is, not how he arrived at it, thus faced with that question man can only affirm 'I don't know.' Geulinx reformulated Descartes's rigid dualism of mind and body, which Beckett parodies in both *Murphy* and *Watt*: the two are two separate clocks set at exactly the same time by the Creator, thus the interactions

is portrayed as a self-sufficient, closed system which is hermetically closed to the without and contains the whole of being, in a state of parodic blessedness:

> Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it… He distinguished between the actual and the virtual of his mind, not as between form and the formless yearning for form, but as between that of which he had both mental and physical experience and that of which he had mental and physical experience only. Thus the form of kick was actual, that of caress virtual. …
>
> Thus Murphy felt himself split in two. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. He was satisfied that neither followed from the other. He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one. Perhaps the knowledge was related to the fact of the kick as two magnitudes to a third. Perhaps there was, outside space and time, a non-mental non-physical Kick from all eternity, dimly revealed to Murphy in its correlated modes of consciousness and extension, the kick *in intellectu* and the kick *in re*. But where then was the supreme Caress? (*Mu* 63-64)

Beckett's heroes as pure fictions of the mind would be comprehensible; as facts, the correspondence of their motion with the will to move is unbelievable, thus they need to analyze their simplest movements and prove what they are doing. Metaphors, and especially metaphors used by philosophy, applied literally and with considerable pedantry of language, constitute one of the five prime procedures of nonsense tradition, related to the treatment of the fictional world(s) rather than with the treatment of time and space, as outlined by Susan Stewart.[449] This reification or cancelling out of 'realism' results in the self-reflexivity of the fictional world, one of the basic narrative strategies of post-modernism.

On the textual level, moreover, it amounts to a play with boundaries, a progressive movement away from realistic representation towards irony and, with the occasional metaleptic intrusions of the narrator, towards meta-fiction. The omniscient narratorial voice is not even: Beckett frequently

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of will and matter seem cause and effect, while in reality being completely separate. See Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist*, 229-230.

[449] Susan Stewart, *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*, discussed in Keith Hopper, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-Modernist* (Cork University Press, 1995), 248-251.

adopts strategies of 18th century fiction where the narrator gives himself away, often with an edge to contemporary readership, e.g. 'This phrase is chosen with care, lest the filthy censors should lack an occasion to commit their filthy synechdoche' (47), alluding to state censorship; 'The above passage is carefully calculated to deprave the cultivated reader' (69); 'Turf is compulsory in the Saorstat, but one need not bring a private supply to Newcastle'(111); 'The turf was truly Irish in its eleutheromania, it would not burn behind bars' (75), or in the irresistibly comic description of the bard Ticklepenny's poetic labours:

> This view of the matter will not seem strange to anyone familiar with the class of pentameter that Ticklepenny felt it his duty to Erin to compose, as free as a canary in the fifth foot (a cruel sacrifice, for Ticklepenny hiccuped in end rimes) and at the caesura as hard and fast as his own divine flatus and otherwise bulging with as many minor beauties from the gaelic prosodoturfy as could be sucked out of a mug of Beamish's porter. No wonder he felt a new man washing the bottles and emptying the slops of the better-class mentally deranged. (*Mu* 53)

Similarly, along the boundaries of intertextual discourse different modes collide and throw out 'surpluses of signification'; an ever-present procedure wherever two (or more) discourses are juxtaposed, creating thus a hetero-glossic text where the discourses (that pertaining to the solipsistic world of Murphy and the discourse of the more 'plainly' picaresque world of his pursuers, Miss Counihan, Neary, Collins and Wylie, for instance) mutually destabilise each other. At the same time, the breach between the idiosyncratic, pseudo-philosophical digressions on Murphy's and Neary's mind, with their many-faceted allusions, erudite and obtrusive artistic and literary references and the narratorial voice, indulging in wordplay and witticisms, rendered in a consciously pedantic and flamboyant language, is a constant source of textual parody: 'The vast floor area was covered all over by a linoleum of exquisite design, a dim geometry of blue, grey and brown that delighted Murphy because it called Braque to his mind, and Celia because it delighted Murphy. *Murphy was one of the elect, who require everything to remind them of something else*' (40, *my emphasis*); 'His problem was not only how to find Murphy, but how to find him without being found himself by Ariadne née Cox. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack full of vipers. The town was alive with her touts, with her multitudinous self, and he was alone... He had written begging Wylie to come and support him, with his resource, his practical ingenuity, his *savoir faire*, his *savoir ne pas faire*, all those vulpine endowments that Neary did not possess' (68); 'For an Irish girl Miss Counihan

was quite exceptionally anthropoid' (69); 'Providence will provide' (16); 'Liberal to a fault, was Murphy' (15). Such passages make the reader aware that *Murphy* shares a creative *hinterland* with Beckett's excursions into academic writing, *Our Exagmination…*, but also the poems, *Echo's Bones* and *Whoroscope* (the latter having more footnotes than Eliot's *Waste Land*). Through interposing an obtrusive narratorial voice, the novel constantly and ironically plays upon its own fictionality, creating a dialogic space which runs counter to the principles of Modernist writing:

> Wylie came a little closer to Murphy, but his way of looking was as different from Murphy's as a *voyeur*'s from a *voyant*'s, though Wylie was no more the one in the indecent sense than Murphy was the other in the supradecent sense. The terms are only taken to distinguish between the vision that depends on light, object, viewpoint etc., and the vision that all those things embarrass. In the days when Murphy was concerned with seeing Miss Counihan, he had had to close his eyes to do so. And even now when he closed them there was no guarantee that Miss Counihan would not appear. That was Murphy's really yellow spot. Similarly he had seen Celia for the first time, not when she revolved before him in the way that so delighted Mr Kelly, but while she was away consulting the Reach. It was as though some instinct had withheld her from accosting him in form until he should have obtained a clear view of her advantages, and warned her that before he could see it had to be not merely dark, but his own dark. Murphy believed there was no dark quite like his own dark. (54)

Apart from metaleptic intrusions, the continuity of narrative is disrupted by other non-realist, metafictional strategies, taken from the tradition of 18th century fiction: the whole of chapter 6, dedicated to the exploration of the workings of Murphy's mind, may be seen as the heir of the interpolated episode or moral essay of Sterne's or Fielding's fiction, allowing for the treatment of dogmatic issues and suspending narrative momentum. Besides interpolated speculative discussions of Murphian-Geulinxian epistemology, the text makes use of another self-reflexive strategy, rooted, similarly, in Sternesque fictional practices as well as serving Beckett's predilection for academic clowning, but also harking back to Joyce's textual games of cataloguing in 'Ithaca' and 'Cyclops': the inclusion, into the body of the narrative, of lists, inventories, as well as the horoscope compiled by Ramaswami Khrishnaswami Narayanaswami Suk, Murphy's 'life-warrant' or 'Bull of incommunication' (22-24) that is to direct Murphy's doings. Similarly, the itemized inventory of Celia's charms – modelled on the Venus of Milo – is a taking of realism *ad absurdum* where representation comes to be totally irrelevant, to turn upon its own absurdity; the

effect, as with the exhaustive lists in 'Ithaca', is both a reification/ de-realization of the reality to be represented, and its obsessively punctual documentation.

Age	Unimportant
Head	Small and round
Eyes	Green
Complexion	White
Hair	Yellow
Features	Mobile
Neck	13 ¾"
Upper arm	11"
Forearm	9 ½"
Wrist	6"
Bust	34"
Hips, etc.	35"
Thigh	21 ¾"
Knee	13 ¾"
Calf	13"
Ankle	8 ¼"
Instep	Unimportant
Height	5' 4"
Weight	123 lb
(*Mu* 10)	

Excess of representation (the 'demented particulars' denounced by Mr Kelly, 12) leads to Celia's 'whatness' totally eluding representation; the passage is revealed as a form of 'drunkenness, madness' of language where what is 'real' is de-realized. Celia, Murphy's beloved, is no more defined by these figures pinning the diameter of the various parts of her body down than by her 'identity' (prostitute, lover, granddaughter), her whereabouts or her inter-action with the 'picaresque' characters of the quest story. The frequent puns on her name, as well as her being physically modelled on the canonic statue of female beauty, suggest an ironic assimilation (or, rather, dilation) of her identity into some Romantic *ewig Weibliche*: her name can be read as the Latin word for 'sky', *coelum* – one of Murphy's points being 'What shall a man give in exchange for Celia?'(16) –, or as *s'il y a*, 'if there is'. Her name appears in a playful etymology, 'Hell. Heaven. Helen. Celia', associations that further abstract her identity into thin air. In contrast with Miss Counihan (probably a pun on Cathleen ni Houlihan whom she certainly parodies) who speaks in ready-made phrases, truths and commonplaces ('"Oh, if you have," cried Miss Counihan, "if you have news of my love, speak, speak, I

adjure you." She was an omnivorous reader', 69), she is the one who is defeated by words:

> She felt, as she felt so often with Murphy, spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. It was like difficult music heard for the first time. (*Mu* 27)

The novel's consciousness of *being (in) language*, arguably the principal theme around which writing revolves, is highlighted on every page where characters manipulate language to the point of excesses of language, as seen above, but even more so in their inability to mediate their own/ each other's reality in/through language. The emphasis on technical languages, specialized discourses, academic/pseudo-academic jargons is countered by the pervasive sense of language's '*in*communication', to use another item of the Beckett baroque – that the characters' 'reality' refuses to be contained in however dense a language, which turns out to be but a means of their commodification, seen in the inventory of Celia's charms. In this sense, the novel also seems to be a quest for the 'right word', forever denied/withheld either by an (overtly stated) refusal, or by obscuring the lack of adequate naming through linguistic excess. Chapter 4 closes with a dialogue between Neary and Wylie on Murphy's qualities that make him so irresistible to women; the passage, in search for 'the right word', deserves to be quoted for the subtle language effects employed:

> Wylie considered for a moment. Then he said:
> 'It is his –' stopping for want of the right word. *There seemed to be, for once, a right word*.
> 'His what?' said Neary.
> *They went a little farther in silence*. Neary gave up listening for an answer and raised his face to the sky. *The gentle rain was trying not to fall*.
> 'His surgical quality,' said Wylie.
> *It was not quite the right word*. (*Mu* 39, *my emphases*)

Apart from the narrator's intrusive comments on (his) fictional characters' groping in language, the linguistic constructedness of the silences which build up suspense doubly underline the (failed) attempts to put reality in words. The two interlocutors, deviating from normative idiomatic language, 'went a little *farther in silence*' (the choice of the adverbial phrase suggesting a physical distance to be walked) while the syntagm 'the gentle rain was trying not to fall' ironically questions the very text that sustains the existence of the interlocutors, as well as the normative linguistic conventions that obliterate

the fact that all search for the 'right word' must be a failed one. On the other hand, the conspicuous linguistic pedantries reinforced by a wealth of technical/academic terms (and, quite often, malapropisms) liberally thrown in the most casual conversations, heighten the awareness of the artificiality of all discourse/language:

> 'Yes,' said Ticklepenny, '*nulla linea sine die*. Would I be here if I were not on the water-tumbril? I would not.'
> He worked up to such a pitch his *gambadoes* under the table that Murphy's memory began to vibrate.
> 'Didn't I have the dishonour once in Dublin?' he said. 'Can it have been at the Gate?'
> '*Romiet*,' said Ticklepenny, '*and Juleo*. "Take him and cut him out in little stars…"' Wotanope!'
> Murphy dimly remembered an *opportune apothecary*.
> 'I was snout drunk,' said Ticklepenny. 'You were *dead drunk*.'
> Now the sad truth was that Murphy never touched *it*. This was bound to come out sooner or later.
> 'Unless you want me to call a policewoman,' said Murphy, 'cease your clumsy *genustrupration*s.'
> *Woman was the keyword here*. (*Mu* 52, *my emphases*)

The outlandish neologisms and playfully inverted Latin aphorism obviously betray Beckett's delight at such academic clowning which – to quote a no less erudite Flann O'Brien narrator – 'ring[s] with the iron of fine words, canvass[ing] witticisms depending for their utility on a knowledge of the French language as spoken in the medieval times' (*ASTB* 24). The passage abounds in ironic self-reflexivities, as for instance the mention of 'dead drunk' in the context of the pharmacopoeia given to 'Julio' and, ultimately, the threat of a police*woman* to pacify the bard who had just inverted the genders of the ill-starred lovers – and who is in a perpetual search for Woman as much as for the 'right word'. Not to mention the fact that Ticklepenny's 'genustuprations' allude to another shifting of gender roles, in the *sub*decent sense, as the comically indeterminate referent of 'Murphy never touched *it*' highlights. No less ironic is the contextual coupling of the Shakespearean 'opportune apothecary' with Ticklepenny who gives medication to the 'better-class mentally deranged' in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat:

> 'That same Ticklepenny,' said Ticklepenny, 'who for more years than he cares to remember turned out his steady pentameter per pint, day in, day out, is now degraded to the position of male nurse in a hospital for the better-class mentally deranged. It is the same Ticklepenny, but God bless my soul *quantum mutatus*.'

> '*Ab illa*,' said Murphy.
> 'I sit on them that will not eat,' said Ticklepenny, 'jacking their jaws apart with the gag, spurning their tongues aside with the spatula, till the last tundish of drench is absorbed. I go round the cells with my shovel and bucket, I –'
> Ticklepenny broke down, took indeed a large draught of his lemon phosphate, and altogether ceased his wooing under the table.' (*Mu* 52)

The passage offers not only a playful deconstruction of Ticklepenny's 'steady pentameter' (not quite steady, since most line endings hiccup indeed), whose bardic status is not the better for the venerable Latin aphorism (*mis*used from the *Aeneid*),[450] yet whose poetic skills appear at his most representative in the description of his menial duties: here the biblical incipit lapses into an alliterative catalogue of tasks, closely reminiscent of Celtic poetry. The parody of such 'prosodoturfy' is all the more enhanced since the harshly evocative clusters, showing the (stereotypical) stylistic features of the Gaelic literary tradition resurrected by the Revival – alliterative lists, internal rhymes, etc. – describe force-feeding. The occurrence of the word 'tundish' in this context cannot be innocent: the word, heavily charged with linguistic 'unrest of spirit' ever since Joyce's *Portrait*, is a powerful signal of an inner alienation from language (English), comically brought into play. The (Irish) bard-boozer who turns out his (un)steady pentameters in the language of the 'other' is even mutated *ab illa*, from (her) that he was – a gender shift is thus also attributed him, in line with the stereotypes of the *womanly* Celt. The effect of this miniature parody of style within a parody comes close to Joyce's experiments with the device in 'The Cyclops', *Ulysses*; the conspicuously self-conscious and self-reflexive use of language makes the reader alert to the surpluses of signification – e.g., the 'lemon phosphate', rather lacking in spirits, speaks of pharmaceuticals – which bring into play a space that is necessarily metafictional.

Murphy contains a list of permutations and of combinations of the order in which Murphy can eat his daily 5 biscuits, as well as a list of all the movements (86 in all), with narratorial comments on the progress, of the chess game he plays with one of the mental patients of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. The game that Mr Endon[451] plays returns upon itself; Murphy's

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[450] 'Quantum mutatus ab illo': Aeneas's exclamation at the sight of the hero Heracles, greatly changed in appearance: Virgil, *Aeneid* II, 274.

[451] Greek *endon*: 'inside'. Almost all the characters' names are puns and wordplays: Neary is the anagram of 'yearn', Miss Rosie Dew, Miss Carridge etc; the bard Ticklepenny is

submission to it triggers off his revelation of the Nothing towards which Beckett's hero has been moving constantly through the novel – that indefinable, inexpressible Nothing at which art, in Beckett's poetics, is obliged to point, although incapable and impotent of doing so. Ironically, Murphy's acceptance of the job of male nurse leads to the loss, as predicted to Celia, of all three of his life's goods: Celia, his body and his mind, yet in the sense of annihilation, of becoming one with the Nothing to which he aspires. The allusion of the passage is to the axiom of Democritus of Abdera, 'Nothing is more real than Nothing' and the revelation comes to Murphy while gazing into the eyes of Mr Endon which don't see him:[452]

> Then this also faded and Murphy began to see nothing, that colourlessness which is such a rare postnatal treat, being the absence (to abuse a nice distinction) not of *percipere* but of *percipi*. His other senses also found themselves at peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real…
>
> Kneeling at the bedside, the hair starting in thick black ridges between his fingers, his lips, nose and forehead almost touching Mr Endon's, seeing himself stigmatized in those eyes that did not see him, Murphy heard words demanding so strongly to be spoken that he spoke them, right into Mr Endon's face, Murphy who did not speak at all in the ordinary way unless spoken to, and not always even then.
>
> 'the last at last seen of him
> himself unseen by him
> and of himself'
>
> A rest.
>
> 'The last Mr Murphy saw of Mr Endon was Mr Murphy unseen by Mr Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy.'
>
> A rest.
>
> 'The relation between Mr Murphy and Mr Endon could not have been better summed up by the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself.'
>
> A long rest.
>
> 'Mr Murphy is a speck in Mr Endon's unseen.' (*Mu* 139-140)

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a savage parody on the Irish poet Austin Clarke, see Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 213-214.

[452] In his early fiction Beckett's vast reading and scholarship suffer grotesque mutations into puns and academic clowning, whereas he eradicates all traces of 'omniscience' in his later novels. His biographers emphasize his study of pre-Socratic philosophy, see Cronin, 231-239.

Murphy's revelation of himself – of Nothingness, of himself in Nothingness, of Nothingness in himself – occurs as a perfectly closed circuit, like the chess game before, or like his sentences spoken to himself on the textual level; the image is of himself reflected in the pupils of Mr Endon which do not see him, which see only himself, as Murphy is/becomes the one who sees nothing but himself, and himself as Nothingness. The encounter with Murphy's self-identity occurs at the moment of his encounter with Nothingness, and this marks his encounter with language also – unlike Beckett's other creatures who lose the faculty of speech after their experience of the Naught. His death by accident and the scattering of his ashes on the floor of a London pub in the midst of 'the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit' (154) are emphatic for his total, self-willed annihilation and, on the other hand, continue the line of happenings irrelevant and inconclusive to identity, rounding up the quest with Celia's 'protasis' (literally 'stretching forward', to the continuance of her life) in the park, flying her grandfather's kite.

Murphy is the first of Beckett's heroes who arrives at the state of Nothingness, and who is defined, in terms of identity, through his gradual approaching of that state, through his gradual self-obliteration: renouncing his former, relative 'freedom' he becomes male nurse at the asylum, engrossed in the various forms of madness, gravitating to ever closer spaces and ever greater stasis, in a continuous regress. His way towards the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat is the ironic inversion of the Modernist hero's liberating journey to himself in the without, textually of Stephen Dedalus's self-exile as well as of Dante's 'climb' of the three worlds of the 'beyond':

> Regress in these togs was slow and Murphy was well advised to abandon hope for the day shortly after lunch and set off on the long climb home. By far the best part of the way was the toil from King's Cross up Caledonian Road, reminding him of the toil from St Lazare up Rue Amsterdam. And while Brewery Road was by no means a Boulevard de Clichy nor even des Batignolles, still it was better at the end of the hill than either of those, as asylum (after a point) is better than exile. (*Mu* 45)

The ironic inversion of the quest/journey structure of the great literary models, from Dante through 18th century fiction to Joyce and 20th century German *Künstlerroman*, its transformation into a self-bound regression to immobility in the self and gravitation towards the Void already prefigures Beckett's great thematic clusters. In *Murphy* the exigency and necessity of expressing the self in terms of stasis, the reduction of the outer, physical aspects of the fictional world are already present, but the 'Who am I?' does not surface in

language. Realist representation, as well as the central tenets of modernist fiction are resisted and undermined through ironic language games, through metafictional elements that reveal that fictional reality is linguistically constructed, which result in an exuberant, 'baroque' language constantly at play.[453] Beckett's 'mature' prose, beginning with *Watt*, shifts towards a minimalist, elliptic and allusive language, bared to the bone, which constantly grapples with its own impotence and incompetence to express even the simplest of human experience.

> Journey anyway is the wrong figure. How can one travel to that from which one cannot move away? *Das notwendige Bleiben* is more like it. That is also in the figure of Murphy in the chair, surrender to the thongs of self, a simple materialisation of self-bondage, acceptance of which is the fundamental unheroic. In the end it is better to perish than be freed. But the heroic, the *nosce te ipsum*, that these Germans see as a journey, is merely a different attitude to the thongs and chair, a setting of will and muscle and fingers against them, a slow creation of the desire and power to stand up and walk away, a life consecrated to the possibility of escape, if not necessarily the fact, to a real freedom of choice when the fire comes. Murphy has no freedom of choice, i.e. he is not free to act *against* his inclination. The point is that the *nosce te ipsum* is no more mobile than the *carpe te ipsum* ['gather thyself'] of Murphy. The difference is that in the one motionless there is the seed of motion, and in the other not. And so on. And so on. It is pleasant to find something in the book that I did not know was there.[454]

Murphy, as its earlier siblings in undoing the form of literature Beckett disparaged as 'the professors' tastes' – *Whoroscope* (1930), *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934) – refuses a set of assumptions that would imply an assent to the traditional definition of literature/mimesis. Instead of refining the means of creating mimetic images of the 'real' and in doing so, conceal their conventional quality, the novel exposes all such constructions as artificial, tells a story in a way that demystifies the telling of stories. Its aggressive parody of conventional mimesis foregrounds the distance between 'art' and 'life', between language and the represented world: in its constructed world, nothing can be elevated to the status of a solid foundation for knowledge, experience, 'truth'. *Murphy*, as Carla Locatelli argues, represents the first stage in a project of 'unwording'

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[453] *Murphy* and Beckett's early fiction is included in Vivian Mercier's *The Irish Comic Tradition* which postulates the existence of a distinct Irish tradition of humour, blending the grotesque and the macabre.

[454] Beckett's letter to Tom McGreevy, 8 February 1935, on reading Hesse's *Demian*, quoted by Knowlson, 247.

which is carried out through a progressive dissolution of traditional narrative structures and of the linguistic linkage these presuppose, by ridiculing canonical forms of fiction.[455] More than a mere destruction of traditional narratives through the creation of metanarratives, however, Beckett's writing turns itself increasingly into a radical critique of traditional typologies of meaning: Beckett's evolution could be charted as starting from metanarrative awareness linked to the rejection of conventional referentiality/ pseudo-referents ('The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new') – that is, from a suspicion growing into negation of the narrative genesis of writing, to a continuing project of undoing/unwording which tentatively accepts narrative genesis, acknowledging the value of its traces.

'All language an excess of language'. Considerations on Beckett's writing across languages

Towards a delineation of Beckett's writing-as-translation

> The artist who stakes his whole being is from nowhere, has no kith.[456]
> Art has always been this – pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric.[457]

Beckett stands apart from the majority of 20th century expatriate writers who turned to writing in a language other than their mother tongue: his choice was motivated neither by the access, through a language of international circulation, to a larger reading public, nor by persecution of any kind fatally linked to his first language. His choice of abandoning English in favour of French for a long period and, later, translating his own works from the one language to the other, from the context of the one culture to the other was entirely voluntary; he was driven to French partly by aesthetic, partly by psychological needs. He consciously made himself bilingual and bilingualism and biculturalism have unquestionably contributed, to a great extent, to the daring of his artistic experimentation, to his ability to see artistic forms, genres and language itself afresh. The majority of his works, both fiction and theatre written in French in the early 1950s and the first half of the 1960s – beginning with the short stories written in 1946 (*Premier Amour/First Love,*

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[455] Cf. Locatelli, *Unwording the Word*, 55-62.
[456] *Hommage a Jack B. Yeats* (1957): *Disjecta* 149.
[457] 'Intercessions by Denis Devlin', *Disjecta* 91.

L'Expulsé/The Expelled, Le Calmant/The Calmative, La Fin/ The End; the latter three published as *Nouvelles et textes pour rien/ Texts for Nothing*) bear the pervasive signs of the will to objectify, as well as a negation of narrative spontaneity which is inseparable from the negation of the mother-tongue: his use of language is thoroughly the result of a choice, not of inculcated habit.

Beckett's continuous movement to and fro between the two languages begins with the translation of *En attendant Godot* (1953) and of the 'Trilogy' (1953-58), written in French, into English; these are followed by the translation into English of *Fin de partie/Endgame* (1957). In the second half of the fifties Beckett resumes writing in English (*All that Fall*, 1956; *Krapp's Last Tape*, 1958; *Happy Days*, 1961; *Film, Play*, 1963) while continuing a steady output of prose fiction in French after the 'Trilogy' (*Nouvelles et textes pour rien*, 1951, publ. 1955; *Comment c'est*, 1958-60, transl. *How It Is*, 1962). From the '60s he begins working on his hermetic, self-reflexive short prose texts in both languages, gradually returning to English: *Imagination morte imaginez/ Imagination Dead Imagine, Assez* and *Sans/Lessness* were originally composed in French, whereas his last two 'trilogies', *Still* (*Still, Sounds, Still 3*; 1972, French translation 1974) and *Nohow On* (*Company/Compagnie, Mal vu mal dit/ Ill seen ill said, Worstward Ho*: 1977-81) occupy a space between the two languages, the first version being revised after translation in the light of the text in the other language.[458] *Worstward Ho* reaches such a level in experimentation with language (English) that the author was unable to perform a translation into French, deeming it 'untranslatable'. These late short prose pieces challenge the status of 'original' vs. 'translation', emerging from an ongoing process of mutual reshaping of the two versions, being best described as 'bilingual' since none of the two, equally autonomous versions can claim primacy over the other language text. 'This is what it means to be a writer as self-translator. It means a total displacement of language from one culture to another. And yet, at the same time, especially in the case of Beckett, it means never stepping outside language. In other words, Beckett, in his bilingual

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[458] *Nohow On*, Beckett's last 'trilogy' is a case apart, since its first 'novel', *Company/ Compagnie*, was first written in English, then translated into French, the English version being revised in the light of the French; *Mal vu mal dit/ Ill Seen Ill Said* shows a reverse process, French-English-French, while with the last text, *Worstward Ho* Beckett reached untranslatability. See Andrew Renton, "From the *Residua* to *Stirrings Still*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 168-169.

work, allows us to listen to the dialogue which he entertains with himself in two languages.'[459]

The Beckett of the first prose works, written years before his decision to expatriate, is already an extremely language-conscious writer; like Joyce, to whom he is frequently compared by criticism (to the point of irrelevance), he is intrigued by words and treats language (and, consequently, style and forms) with irreverence, playfulness and irony. His prose indulges in language games (often with more languages), puns, academic clowning carried to the verge of pedantry, pastiches – eminently so in *Murphy* with its vocabulary ranging from colloquial to the obscure and recondite ('spado', 'astringent kiss'), with occasional recourse to neologism ('genustupration', 'prosodoturfy', 'viridescent', 'apmonia'). His language-consciousness and the 'traffic in languages' that his later writing performs are surely conditioned by his early infatuation with, and academic successes in, French scholarship, his long stays in Paris (and, one may add, his wide reading in Italian and German), yet its roots are to be found, first and foremost, in his Anglo-Irish background. These language games, especially of the prose works, visibly counteract the cultural encoding of meaning: they do not allow the associations that are not proper to the first dictionary definition of the word, foregrounding, then in the late prose works abolishing the idiomatic use of language, dead metaphors, clichés. Beckett's (mis)use of a (foreign) language, which culminates in the *foreignizing* use of his native English, probes deeper than any writer in English, into the relationship between reality and language, by a radicalizing of the refusal of all allusions. This linguistic practice sets him worlds apart from Joyce's creative (mis)use of language that revels in unlimited, multi-lingual semiosis and exposes, as it does in 'Eumaeus', the associative range of dead metaphors and rhetorical residua in language. The lack of familiarity resulting from writing in a foreign language allows the writer to point out the conventional nature of the presumed 'naturalness' or 'inevitability' of the structure of reality, an effect of linguistic structuring. By changing the linguistic code, his texts point out that reality is determined according to one of many possible descriptive conventions; the negation of cultural encodings (of habitual, repressed hyper-determinations) is a necessary step towards laying bare the pervasiveness of language, towards making conspicuous the presence of language *as language*, as a reflex without choice. The conditioning

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[459] Raymond Federman, *The writer as self-translator*, quoted by Ann Beer, 'Beckett's Bilingualism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, 217.

presence of language is foregrounded even in the *Residua*, the late short prose where language is stripped to the bone: in the concluding paragraph of *From an Abandoned Work* for instance, in the obsessive circling of (the *un*abandoned native) language around physical reality in a prose piece that in turn undermines and witnesses the disintegration of authorial knowledge, traditional character and narrative voice, taking the reader to such (narrative) extremes as the questioning of the voice speaking.

> But let me get up now and on and get this awful day over and on to the next. But what is the sense of going on with all this, there is none. Day after un-remembered day until my mother's death, *then in a new place soon old until my own*. And when I come to this night here among the rocks with my two books and the strong starlight it will have passed from me and the day that went before, my two books, the little and the big, all past and gone, or perhaps just moments here and there still, this little sound perhaps now that I don't understand so that I gather up my things and go back into my hole, *so bygone they can't be told. Over, over, there is a soft place in my heart for all that is over, no, for the being over, I love the word, words have been my only loves, not many.* (*From an Abandoned Work*, CSP 162, *my emphases*)

The discontinuous language operates through ellipses, frustrating all attempts to read it according to (grammatical, discursive) norms, thematizing (self-generating) language as the medium where voice/subject and its story/complement change places; its phrases make possible non-normative decodings – e.g., 'there is a soft place in my heart for all that is over, no, for the *being over*' where the adverb 'over' can be substantivized and, as such, turned into the expression of an (oxymoronic, for it unites 'being' with 'over'/non-being) state, wishful self-identification with impossibility. Language, we are reminded, is the only foundation of Beckett's voices whose world is, to borrow the words of the teacher of languages in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, 'but a place of many words'.

The writer in exile, the being in exile is the one who takes the 'exilic leap' beyond the borders of the known; Jim's leap off the Patna and into the 'everlasting hole' in Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* could be a figure for this exilic movement away from the familiar. Exile, as Michael Seidel argues in his study *Exile and the Narrative Imagination*, is not only a state of creative defamiliarization but a symptomatic metaphor for the general state of the narrative imagination – a material resource for history, literature and legend in the West.[460] The root of the Latin word 'exile' ('rootless') is *ex*, 'out of'

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[460] *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 9-21.

and *salire*, 'to leap'; the same etymological root produces the word 'exult'. In narrative, it serves as a figure for allegory itself, whose etymology is pronouncedly exilic: *al*, 'other', and *goria*, 'voicing', is the representation of an alien voicing. Seidel further equates exile with a figure for allegory (in Dantean terms). The word 'allegoria' comes from the Latin *al*, 'other' and *goria*, 'voicing'; the record of exile in narrative is, accordingly, 'an alien voicing'. Exile is related to allegory in terms of narrative, and it is further linked to the basic words related to allegory: also, alternate, alteration, alien, parallel, else, ulterior, as, alibi. The word *alibi* in Latin means 'elsewhere'; in a schematic sense, exile enters narrative as *allegory, alibi*, a necessary *elsewhere*.[461] The exilic domain, on the other hand, is characterised by Seidel as a *new action* (in Joycean terms, 'postexilic eminence'), a crossover of boundaries. This activity, or rather, its projection sets the scene of narrative (exilic fable) defined as a crossover, a 'speaking metaphor' in a *mimetic* and *illusionistic* space – a conception of what might be on the other side. This seems to be enforced by the structure of the recurrent exilic fable in narrative, for which Ovid's Daedalus is paradigmatic. The exiled hero turns for solace to illusion; locked inside the Cretan labyrinth, he eventually becomes an imaginer soaring beyond the borders of place and across the borders of certain states of consciousness.

Similarly, the 'exilic leap' taken into another language – whether congenial, as with the case of Joyce and Beckett, both 'teachers of languages', Beckett an outstanding scholar in Romance literatures, or enforced by circumstance – has as effect a certain linguistic loss of innocence: the halo of (aural, sensory, visual) associations pertaining to the words in the mother-language, the state of one-ness of the word with the world, is upset by alternative namings. The linguistic experience of the bilingual or multilingual comes close to Watt's experience with Knott's pot: the realization of the breach between word and object, signifier and signified. As Nabokov confesses in *Speak, Memory!*, speaking/writing in a foreign language can never be done with impunity; 'a language is a live physical thing which cannot be too easily dismissed'. For him *Lolita* was akin to 'a love affair with the English language' where language takes the place of the voluble nymphet; the Russian-born author was reawakening and reaquiring the language he first learnt in his early childhood from an English nurse.[462]

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[461] Ibid., 15.
[462] Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Putnam's, 1966), 250.

Of a well-to-do Protestant upper-middle-class family, brought up in a Tudor-style mansion in Foxrock, a fashionable Dublin suburb, receiving the best education available at elitist Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, and attending Trinity where he was soon to excel in Romance scholarship, only with some sleight of hand could Beckett be called an Irish writer. He had virtually no access to, nor interest in, traditional Gaelic culture and, while in Ireland, he certainly viewed the restrictive policies of the Catholic church, of the Republic and nationalist struggle with all its assets – the language revival, cultural nationalism and the literature of the Celtic Twilight, censorship and the restrictive sexual politics of the Republic[463] – with the utmost irony and never sought identification with the Irishness they offered.[464] However, he was brought up in a linguistically divided space where language 'could not be taken for granted as it could in the other two countries where Beckett lived, England and France… Irish had the effect of making English visible *as* a language.'[465]

Anglo-Irishness is an in-between, 'hyphenated' identity, neither English nor Irish; it is a background likely to render one more sensitive to the instability and fragility of all identity, to make one reluctant to accept any given and 'stable' identification. The space which Anglo-Irish identity is bound to occupy is one of 'unrest of spirit', even more so than the space of (English-speaking) 'Irish-Irish' identity as epitomized by Joyce. Whereas the primary linguistic identification of the latter is with an acquired language (English) that substitutes an 'original' 'mother' tongue, experienced as a lack – which lack nevertheless remains, ideologically, a source of identification, the place of Irishness by excellence –, the (Protestant) Anglo-Irish find themselves in the situation of being able to identify solely with English and find the place of English occupied by the 'English-English'. Stephen Dedalus's experience of the foreignness and familiarity of the language he is

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[463] In a 1935 essay left unpublished, 'Censorship in the Saorstat' in which he denounces the 1929 Censorship Act and the Irish Academy of Letters' condoning of it, Beckett shows censorship and ban on contraception as being cognate: 'Sterilization of the mind and apotheosis of the litter suit well together. Paradise peopled with virgins and the earth with decorticated multiparas': *Disjecta* 87.

[464] Emilie Morin makes a strong argument that the residual degree of engagement with issues of Irishness in Beckett's work (present foremost in imagery and the deliberate use of distinctive Hiberno-English phrases) takes the form of a continuous, active *disengagement* from Ireland, of conceptual significance for the work as a whole: *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[465] Ann Beer, 'Beckett's Bilingualism', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, 210.

speaking ('his language...is his before it is mine') refers, in another sense, to the linguistic experience of the Anglo-Irish writer as well. Vivian Mercier, Beckett's friend and critic, himself of Protestant Anglo-Irish stock and of Huguenot descent, describes the typical experience of the Anglo-Irish as learning, almost before learning to talk, that one is not Irish and later becoming aware that one is not to be called English either: 'The pressure on him to become either wholly English or wholly Irish can erase segments of his individuality for good and all. "Who am I?" is the question that every Anglo-Irishman must answer, even if it takes him a lifetime, as it did Yeats.'[466] Such a background, if far from providing a complete explanation, must nevertheless have significantly enhanced Beckett's concern with, and lifelong exploration of, the problems of being and identity of the self.

For the Anglo-Irish writer three possibilities are open: the return to the 'mother country' (which means less than expatriation), the way adopted by Wilde, G.B. Shaw; *im*patriation – which equals forging oneself a new identity through the re-interpretation of 'core' identity, 'core' culture: the way practiced by Synge, Yeats as well as by John Hewitt; and *ex*patriation, which implies adopting a distance from the identifications one leaves behind and, at the same time, accepting a distance from the identifications/culture one attempts to grow into. The expatriate's situation is that of double alienation; his/her space is always on the margin, in the without, which allows for a deeper, and more irreverent, exploration of the possible answers to the 'Who am I?' of both cultures. Beckett's true source of strength in his later works lies in his total acceptance of expatriation. He made alienation into a way of life first in London, then, from 1937, in France till he became estranged from his native English to the point of becoming an inimitable artist of language in French and, already by the time of the completion of *Watt* he must have realized that he could never be content with a simple identification as an Irishman/Frenchman – that identity lay far deeper than identification. *Murphy* and *Watt* open the path for that radical search for idiom, for the disruptive misuse of the two languages which in the late prose pieces culminate in the deconstruction of language and its subsequent turning into an event – the event of language-as-communication/reading.

Jacques Derrida glosses the condition of the *monolingual* writer who, like himself, is fated to inhabit one and only one language which does not

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[466] Vivian Mercier, *Beckett/Beckett* (London: Souvenir Press, 1990), 26.

belong to him, which he can under no circumstances call 'his'.[467] For the monolingual whose language (the only language in which 'to inhabit', 'inhabiting' is meaningful to him/her, which does not exclude the existence of other acquired languages) is given from the outside, its grammar rules, idioms, pronunciation established and controlled from without, from a 'mother' country that marks him as 'provincial'/'other', the primary linguistic experience is of a double barrier, a double prohibition separating him/her, on the one hand, from the 'inhabitants' of the language he speaks/writes (the inhabitants of the 'mother country') and, on the other hand, from the inhabitants, natives of the 'province' for whom 'mother tongue' means a language different from the language he/she speaks. For the *monolingual* to whom the term 'mother tongue' itself is inaccessible it becomes necessary, in order to reappropriate language, to *invent him/herself* with no available model and no established addressee. This condition generates, according to Derrida, a resistance in, and through language: enhancing the resistance of the *purity* of one's language, a *resistance to translation* into whatever language, the French of the 'mother country' included. It generates a jealous watching over one's language which produces a series of *shibboleths* while, at the same time, resisting all nationalist policies inherent in, or bound up with the idiom. Paradoxically, writes Derrida, the language is seen by the one who inhabits it, who dwells closest to it, to be desert; in it one is forced to grow, construct, build up yet another language along the path of a *return* to language.[468]

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[467] Derrida, coming from French-speaking Jewish family from Maghreb, Algeria, writes on the condition of the monolingual who cannot identify himself either as French or Algerian (unlike the Algerians – Arabs, Berbers – whose mother tongue is other than French, for whom *mother tongue* has a concrete reference); he cannot affirm that he *possesses* the one language in which he writes (*mother tongue* lacking, in his case, a referent), since it is occupied by the 'mother country', France. His linguistic experience, closely related to the experience with language of philosophers Rosenzweig, Hannah Arendt or the German-speaking Lithuanian/Russian Jew Emmanuel Lévinas who adopted French as a language of writing, all of whom *inabit* a language which, strictly speaking, cannot be called theirs, can be resumed in two axioms: 1. We always speak one and only one language; 2. *We never speak one and only one language.* The ultimate question of the monolingual who inhabits a language whose place is *elsewhere* is: Where do I find myself? With whom can I identify in order to reinforce my self-identity, in order to be able to relate my (hi)story? (*The Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthasis of Origins*, 57-58).

[468] Ibid., 58. Without the intention of forcing this argument – one cannot refer Beckett's case to the linguistic trauma experienced by Algerian French writers (Abdelkebir Khatibi, quoted by Derrida) coming from a colonial situation, even less of the trauma experienced by German-speaking Jew philosophers of the Holocaust, Scholem, Rosenzweig and

The lack of a stable model of identification for the self – in its linguistic, cultural and other dimensions –, the inaccessibility or indecipherability of (hi)stories set in motion the compulsive drive to remember, the 'love of idiom'. Three main lines of evolution are open to the self, all three leading to 'madness': **1.** irredeemable loss of memory in the form of pathological de-structuring, 'madness'; **2.** another, integrative type of loss of memory: the assimilation into the homogenous stereotypes of the average or dominant 'mother country' models – another kind of 'madness'; **3.** the 'madness' of the excess of memory, that carries memory beyond the simple re-composition, re-construction of a given heritage, of an accessible past, beyond knowledge that can be mapped and taught, directly to the traces of writing, experience and language. As Hugh, the hedgeschool-master in Brian Friel's play *Translation* puts it: 'To remember everything is a form of madness.'[469]

This unique alienation establishes a common condition for all those who lack a primary identification with a 'mother tongue': with Derrida this results in the condition of absolute translation, of *being-thrown-into-translation*, without any 'original' or source-language, and with no points of reference, where only the target language(s) is/are given. Target languages which remain mere *targets* throughout, since they have no stable starting point *from where* they could speak, therefore the way they have made to *non-arrival* remains forever inaccessible to understanding; languages without direction, without an information highway, always on the way towards arrival.[470]

The central prose works in Beckett's oeuvre – *L'Innommable/The Unnamable* first and foremost, *Mercier et Camier*, as well as his late short prose, in whichever language written originally – show an acute language-consciousness: the protagonists of the *Trilogy* and of *Mercier et Camier* are verbally adept and nervous, in their first-person narrative one is faced with the sense of a doubled, alienated language. A kind of awe, terror of language

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Hannah Arendt, or the poet Paul Celan, who stuck to the German *Muttersprache* –, one can nevertheless individuate in Derrida's tracing of the condition of *being outside one's language*, a condition of splitting, the ingredients of a radical questioning of all identification and identity in, and through, language.

[469] Brian Friel, *Translations* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), 88.

[470] Ibid., 60-61. Derrida speaks here of the compulsion to write as resulting from the impossibility to express; as the access to a 'primary' language (or, rather, to a language-before-primary-language) is barred, the 'language of arrival' of writing, into which experience is to be translated, can only be a 'promised language', a language-in-the-making whose origin is lost.

as well as a certain (failed) struggle against being-thrown-in-language speaks from these works that go virtually all the possible way to asking 'Who am I?'

> I speak, speak, because I must, but I do not listen, I seek my lesson, my life I used to know and would not confess, hence possibly an occasional slight lack of limpidity. And perhaps now again I shall do no more than seek my lesson, *to the self-accompaniment of a tongue that is not mine… 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, its 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… I know no more questions and they keep on pouring out of my mouth. I think I know what it is, it's to prevent the discourse from coming to an end... (*UNN* 307, *my emphases*)

Dissociation from a stable identity goes together with dissociation from language(s) as a possibility of identification; the moment of dissociation from English and the consequent liberation of Beckett's imagination in his work is marked by the writing of *Watt*, in English, in war-ridden France while hiding in Rousillon from the Gestapo (1942-1944). *Watt* is a point of extreme bilingual tension: it precedes by a few years the great outpouring of the works for which Beckett is mostly remembered (the 'Trilogy', *En attendant Godot* and *Fin de partie*, as well as *4 Nouvelles*), in French, and at the same time it begins an exploration of English which continues up to *Worstward Ho*, building up a texture of 'shibboleths': language games, puzzles, puns, inversions, lists and sequences, excesses and grotesque out-growths of language that unleash a mad comic energy.

The astonishing freedom in treating every literary genre, in undoing and reconstructing forms in full knowledge of a literary tradition is closely and intimately linked to Beckett's bilingual art: his equal distance from both cultures, his detachment from the identifications offered by both is central to his self-renewal. As his 1957 *Hommage a Jack B. Yeats*, written at the painter's death, affirms, 'The artist who stakes his whole being comes from nowhere': the art which explores the ultimate questions of being, of self comes out of risk, and out of a lack of stable (local, national) identity. Bilingualism is a way of preserving one's freedom and detachment from all incorporating local, national identifications; and in Beckett's case one can sense a drifting towards an inner bilingualism even before he actually chose to write in French, a bilingualism conditioned by his Anglo-Irish background. Out of resistance to ready-made identifications Beckett constructs and reifies the

imaginary space in which his writing dwells: 'Slipping from world to world, the author maintains a voice that inhabits margins, thresholds and anonymous quiet spaces, often in transit or in solitude. With increasing attention to the "vaguening" of realist detail, Beckett purifies and intensifies the special space he has created, a space which, in its refined state, becomes simply human.'[471]

This liberation of, and from, language came to Beckett via French. Whereas in his 1929 essay *Dante…Bruno. Vico…Joyce*, in *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* Beckett, no doubt acting as spokesperson for Joyce's own ideas about *Finnegans Wake*, imagined a reinvigoration of English, 'abstracted to death' like medieval Latin, through a picture language as exemplified by Joyce's text in which 'the language is drunk. The very words are tilted and effervescent' (*Disjecta* 27) – that is, speaking for that poetics of addition that he was later to reject –, after the completion of his first prose works in English he voiced an exigency to break off with the demands of conventional representation altogether and invent a new syntax, new forms. He even blamed the failure of an early play script, *Human Wishes* (left unpublished) on his frustration with English as an expressive medium.

His frustration with his native English is expressed again – characteristically, in another foreign language, German – in his 1937 letter to Axel Kaun where he writes about the need to disrupt English, which appears to him as a veil [*Schleier*], in order to arrive at the things or at the nothing lying behind. Grammar and style in this language, he writes, have become as untenable as a Biedermeier swimsuit, assets akin to a maggot; the hope for language (and contemporary writing) lies in the *able misuse of language*, the best conceivable use of language. Beckett proposes himself the task of instinctively, spontaneously acting upon a foreign language in the way he would have liked to/ would like to misuse English purposely:

> It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And *more and more my language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. Grammar and Style*. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. *A mask*. Let us hope the time will come, thank God that in certain circles it has already come, *when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused*. And we cannot eliminate language all at once, we should at least leave nothing undone that might contribute to its falling into disrepute. *To bore one hole after*

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[471] Ann Beer, 'Beckett's Bilingualism', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, 216.

> *another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to*
> *seep through; I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today…*Only from time
> to time I have the consolation, as now, *of sinning willy-nilly against a foreign*
> *language, as I should love to do with full knowledge and intent against my own –*
> *and as I shall do* – Deo juvante.[472]

The envisaged treatment of language is thus a critical probing into linguistic
structures and values, in terms of an epistemological questioning of the value
of language, a given that cannot be eliminated altogether, the underlying
silence being impossible to perceive without the voicing of language. If the
mother-tongue is perceived as a 'veil' or 'mask', then the use of a foreign
language could unmask conventions – 'sinning' against a foreign language is
thus seen as a necessary first step toward the creative misuse of the mother-
tongue, a transgressive, demistifying linguistic practice.

This poetic programme for a 'literature of the unword' states that liter-
ature (in Celan's sense of *Dichtung*) should coincide with a practice striving
toward unattainable silence, a silence which can be achieved by 'bearing
hole after hole' in the fabric of language, by a 'mocking attitude towards the
word'. This practice should end the game (of *Kunst* – of *Grammar and
Style*), should bring literature to its most radical extreme, to its effacement in
the *un*word. This idea will be gradually reshaped in the later prose: faced with
the ineliminable residua of language which persist even within (achievable)
silence, Beckett's literature of the unword will transform itself into an
unending process of *unwording*, or *decreation*: a conception of literature
that continuously deconstructs itself in its own self-generation. Beckett's

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[472] Martin Esslin's translation into English, *Disjecta* 171-172, *my emphases*. In Beckett's
German original: „Es wird mir tatsächlich immer schwieriger, ja sinnloser, ein offizielles
Englisch zu schreiben. Und immer mehr *wie ein Schleier kommt mir meine Sprache vor*,
den man zerreissen muss, um an die dahinterliegenden Dinge (oder das dahinterliegende
Nichts) zu kommen. Grammatik und Stil. Mir scheinen sie ebenso hinfällig geworden
zu sein wie ein Biedermeier Badeanzug oder die Unerschütterlichkeit eines Gentlemans.
Eine Larve. Hoffentlich kommt die Zeit, sie ist ja Gott sei dank in gewissen Kreisen
schon da, *wo die Sprache da am besten gebraucht wird, wo sie am tüchtigsten missbraucht*
wird. Da wir sie so mit einem Male nicht ausschalten können, wollen wir wenigstens
nichts versäumen, was zu ihrem Verruf beitragen mag. Ein Loch nach dem andern in
ihr zu bohren, bis das Dahinterkauernde, sei es etwas oder nichts, durchzusickern
anfängt – ich kann mir für den heutigen Schriftsteller kein höheres Ziel vorstellen...
Nur von Zeit zu Zeit habe ich wie jetzt den Trost, *mich so gegen eine fremde Sprache*
unwillkürlich vergehen zu dürfen, wie ich es mit Wissen und Willen gegen meine
eigene machen möchte und – Deo juvante – werde." *Disjecta* 52, 54.

late prose bears witness to the presence of language rendered in the process of meaning.[473]

Anglo-Irish, even more than 'plain' English, is an idiom particular for its purity of diction and its wealth of playful rhetoric and wordplay; it shows a higher degree of play upon language than Standard English, as a quick scan through *Brewer's Dictionary of Irish Phrase and Fable* would reveal. Apart from its inherent richness, it also contains a greater potential towards instability which unquestionably contributes to the frequent 'outsider' self-image of the writer of this idiom. Attempting to express, to point at that which cannot be expressed, the Void of the *Dialogues*, Beckett must therefore be constantly on his guard not to yield to English – never to say that which the *words* would make him say. English, as he discussed in a series of interviews, is a highly expressive poetic medium: 'you couldn't help writing poetry in it' (which, maybe, accounts for the poetic quality of much of Beckett's English prose). Its comparative freedom from grammatical rigidity and the extraordinary power of sensory evocation possessed by its vocabulary make the writer liable to follow the whim of language. To achieve his aims, that of expressing the ultimate reality, Naught, which cannot be expressed directly in terms of language, language had to be rigurously disciplined, defeated, all its flourish of idiom, all the ready-made aspects of style eradicated. This discipline of stripping language bare (of which the ultimate example is, maybe, *Comment c'est*) Beckett achieved in French: 'in French it is easier to write without style'; 'French has the right kind of weakening effect'.[474] His personal need was met by the expressive possibilities of French:

> The writing of, say, Racine or Malherbe, perpendicular, diamanté, is pitted, is it not, and sprigged with sparkles; the flints and pebbles are there, no end of humble tags and commonplaces […] they give you the phrase, the sparkle, the precious margaret. Perhaps only the French can do it. Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want. (*DFMW* 48)

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[473] Cf. Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the Word*, 60.

[474] Beckett in an interview to Nikolaus Gessner and to Herbert Blau, quoted in Richard N. Coe, *Beckett* (Edinburgh & London: Olliver & Boyd, 1964), 13-14. A similar work of stripping language bare to the bones and of expressing via allusions – of defeating language and allowing for the liberating, disruptive actions of 'poetry' to happen – was achieved by the late poetry of Paul Celan, himself a poet-translator working with, from and into German, French, Russian and in his early period, Romanian, in his volumes from *Sprachgitter* onwards: *Die Niemandsrose*, *Atemwende*, *Lichtzwang*.

What is lisible from the texts (drawing attention here to Beckett's early fiction, written in English) is that language as an expressive medium (and, through language, rhetorical formulae, the wealth of *objet-trouvée* of style, idiom ridden with reminiscences of a literary tradition) is constantly played upon, never taken for granted; and in an environment where language is an issue, consciousness of language as problematic is certainly enhanced. Exploration of language as expressive medium – by translation into a re-invented English, then by endless, self-generating translations between two languages, English and French, both, in a Derridean sense, 'languages of arrival' – is intimately linked to Beckett's Anglo-Irish background.[475]

Beckett's bilingual art came into the searchlight of criticism during the 1980s, when a series of volumes on Beckett's self-translating appeared.[476] Various studies – coming from the field of psychoanalysis, translation studies, even feminism – have suggested that Beckett's bilingualism (and relationship to his 'mother' tongue) might have had roots deeply embedded in his psyche, closely bound up with his ambiguous relationship with his mother, which might explain why he eluded discussions of his bilingualism. Patrick Casement[477] went so far as to suggest that the writer's decision to shift languages, like his earlier decisions to move to London, then to settle permanently in Paris, have been a way of self-distancing from a powerful mother-figure; the unleashing of creative energy that produced the 'Trilogy' and the first plays that brought Beckett fame would have been probably impossible in the mother tongue

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[475] Cf. Olga Ostrovsky, 'Le Silence de Babel', writing on Beckett's exile from English, 'the first and hence the most familiar and non-personal language, the one that is made up of the words of "others"... a brutal act which cuts the artist off from his roots, his native soil, even his ways of thinking (so intimately bound up with the forms, nuances, tones of language...' English, Ostrovsky writes, is dethroned by a foreign language, French 'which *seeks* to be weak in grammatical and idiomatic structure, *simple, familiar, hesitant, unsure of itself, which corrects itself, makes fun of its own ignorance*. In other words a castrated language that has been cut short and reveals the fact of its mutilations in reduced formulas, difficulty, expressive helplessness, its transparency, almost its annihilation...' (*L'Herne* 34, 1976, 207-8, trans. and quoted by Brian Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*. University of Toronto Press, 1988, 157-58, note 14; *Italics mine*).

[476] *Beckett Translating/Translating Beckett*, eds. Alan Warren Friedman et al. (Pennsylvania University Press, 1987); Brian Fitch, *Beckett and Babel* (Toronto University Press, 1988); Ann Beer, '*Watt*, Knott and Beckett's Bilingualism', in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 10 (1985), etc.

[477] 'Samuel Beckett's relationship to his mother-tongue', in: *International Review of Psycho-analysis*, 1982/9, 35-44; Didier Anzieu, "Un soi disjoint, une voix liante, l'écriture narrative de Beckett", Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse, 28 (Automne 1983), 71-85; both studies are based on Deirdre Bair's biography.

while the mother was still alive. Only during his mother's terminal illness did he start translating his own texts back into English, and only a few years after May Beckett's death did he return to English as an expressive medium. Having, to all appearance, abandoned the literary use of his native tongue in the 1940s, Beckett returns to English to the suggestion of his American publisher George Reavey, with a new English novel, first abandoned then unabandoned and published in 1958 as *From an Abandoned Work* – the first text written directly in English by Beckett since *Watt*.[478] *Watt* opens the series of Beckett's 'novels of language' and is the last 'full-grown' novel to be written in English; at the same time, it is the first fully to exemplify the poetics of 'impotence, ignorance' already budding in *Murphy*. It begins the exploration of the ultimate question of the self, which is at the same time the question of language, the exploration from which Beckett will never desist: 'I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me' (*UNN* 291).

'No symbols where none intended': *Watt and the adventure of language*

> For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and as the only way one can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realized that, is to speak of him as though he were a termite… For to explain had always been to exorcize, for Watt. (*W* 74-75)

With *Watt*, the novel Beckett wrote while in hiding in Rousillon during World War 2 for his activity in the French Resistance and which he described as 'a game, a means of staying sane, a way to keep my hand in',[479] the reader

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[478] Symptomatically, this short piece, now generally anthologized with Beckett's short fiction, was first published as a theatre piece by Faber & Faber, among four theater works in *Breath and Other Shorts* (1971), after being performed on BBC Third Programme on 14 December 1957. When Shivaun O'Casey dramatized *From an Abandoned Work*, Beckett stated his preference for a staging different than *Play*: 'I feel... that no form of monologue technique will work for this text and that it should somehow be presented as a document for which the speaker is not responsible.' Like many of Beckett's short prose works, it shows many overlappings with the dramatic genre (retaining an oral, performative quality), as well as with poetry – the short work *'neither'* has been published with line breaks suggestive of poetry, and it was Beckett who refused its inclusion in the *Collected Poems*, considering it a prose work. Cf. Gontarski, 'Introduction. From Unabandoned Works: Samuel Beckett's Short Prose', in *The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, xiv-xv, xvii.

[479] In an undated interview with Lawrence Harvey, quoted in Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 303.

is plunged into Beckett's disinherited, disenchanted world, a world which turns out to be monstrous at closer inspection. It is also crucial in Beckett's work for the linguistic tension it emerged from; although written in France, in a time of extreme strain for Beckett and his companion Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil who were hiding on a farm, the novel's language is an English that is increasingly deconstructed, pushed to the extreme. As Ann Beer shows, as the writing progressed Beckett began to think in French, as shown by the number of sentences with a French word order and by the marginalia written in French as well as by the originally intended title, *L'Absente*.[480] *Watt* thus marks the beginning of Beckett's bilingual writing – or rather, writing between/across languages – where the two languages surface in the (monolingual) text as two photographic images in double exposure.

As the title and the names suggest, the novel's/the protagonist's adventure is an investigation into the 'whatness' of things: if Watt is the one who acts out, performs the quest(ion) – a question to be voiced between WHAT and WIT(T) – then he who possesses the answer(s) is Mr Knott, at whose house Watt serves. Knott may similarly be read as 'not', 'naught', 'knot', or 'Not' (German 'necessity') – each leading, literally, nowhere, since the novel's last line ('no symbols where none intended') rejects, retroactively, all possibility of symbolic/allegorical reading. The 'knotty' answer to Watt-Knott is that which Watt and Watt's language cannot explain – that is, cannot explain away or exorcise; and, in a literal playing out of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, that which cannot be explained comes to nothing, as if it had never existed:

> As to giving an example of the second event, namely the failure, that is clearly quite out of the question. For there we have to do with events that resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only to suffer them, when they recurred, though it seems probable that they recurred no more, at the period of Watt's revelation, to me, but were as though they had never been. (*W* 75-76)

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[480] Cf. Ann Beer, '*Watt*, Knott, and Beckett's Bilingualism', in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 10 (1985), 37-75; Ann Beer, 'Beckett's Bilingualism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 209-221. Beer claims that *Watt* exposes Beckett's altered relation to English, this being the book that 'reveals the pressure of bilingualism in its most acute form in Beckett's works' ('*Watt*, Knott and Beckett's Bilingualism', 37); between the externalization of English in the novel, she argues, and the working of the bilingual mind a parallel can be drawn where the two languages function as different codes, less reliable than, and never to be taken for granted as the monolingual's only language.

The world of *Watt* is a weird one: like in *Murphy*, there are solid points of reference to representational space and time (although representational space and time is far more reified), yet the texture of the novel extends into vast, plotless adventures of words, permutations and combinations, unending chains of logical deductions, excesses of explanation/exorcism and description that ultimately reify 'reality' out of existence. We are not yet in the monologic worlds of the *Trilogy* and of the late prose texts, inhabited by voices in quest of a self which can't be located in any 'reality'. Time and space in *Watt*, however, are not coherent either: Watt's history is told by a problematic, omniscient narratorial voice which changes by the middle of the novel into a first-person narrative by a fellow mental patient, Sam, yet whose interpretation of Watt's experience is unreliable, since Watt is speaking in an idiom that is no human language and apparently cannot interpret his own experience. Moreover, there are long episodes in this history to which neither Sam, nor Watt himself have access, thus breaches are produced in the text which mingles Sam's narrative with that of the omniscient narrator of the novel's beginning, along fractured margins of experience. This (hi)story presents strange loops in time which blatantly defy narrative logic and expectations: Watt's 'journey' from the station to Mr Knott's house, then from Mr Knott's house to the station and away 'to the further end of the line' – into an indefinite nowhere that the reader is tempted to read as the Naught that motivates Watt's quest, were it not for the ending line's 'ban' on symbolic interpretation – unfolds in an indefinite time span, yet halfway in the novel we find him walking and talking backwards, to Sam, trying to make sense of his experience in Mr Knott's house. What is at stake in *Watt,* above all, is language and the impotence of language to account for, to represent experience.

The only way to safely pinpoint things in this world is by giving them names. Words are names for things. The thing exists for us if, and when we have a word to name it.

> My name is Spiro, said the gentleman.
> Here then was a sensible man at last. He began with the essential and then, working on, would deal with the less important matters, one after the other, in an orderly way. (*W* 25)

Since identity is conferred and established by names, as in a literal repro-duction of Creation, when names turn out to rest on shaky foundations, the integrity of the world is shattered. The inspection of the Watt-ness of things, namely of Knott's pots rests on Watt's starting point that about the phenomena

we cannot know anything; we can only know something about words relating to them. Meaning and language are identical for Watt; the 'meaning' of a phenomenon is equal with the meaning of the word that 'explains', exorcises the phenomenon, thus as long as one can formulate a statement about an event – as long as one can translate an event into language –, one can dismiss it. Explanations, however, are relative; since one word is as good as another, any combination is as good as any other combination, therefore the only resort, in order to 'possess' meaning, is to give all possible explanations – all possible permutations of combinations, in a mathematical language. When faced with a puzzling event, all possible combinations of words relating to it have to be shuffled in his computer-like mind, only then will his knowledge of the event be complete. This results in excesses, 'madnesses' of language – endless combination lists of possible logical deductions, movements in space, orders of items or of happenings etc, as the inventory of Mr Knott's physical activities in his room:

> Here he stood. Here he sat. Here he knelt. Here he lay. Here he moved, to and fro, from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the window; from the fire to the bed, from the bed to the fire; from the bed to the fire, from the fire to the bed; from the door to the fire, from the fire to the door; from the fire to the door, from the door to the fire; from the window to the bed, from the bed to the window; from the bed to the window, from the window to the bed; from the fire to the window, from the window to the fire… (*W* 203-204)

The mathematical reductions teeming in *Watt* – with Knott's servants succeeding each other like terms of a series, combination and permutation lists that extend over the length of several pages, for instance, the looks exchanged among the five committee members of an oral examination in mathematics – belong to a strategy of evasion at work throughout Beckett's output, which was to culminate in the mathematicized plots of the late prose texts where all movement is expressed in terms of spatial positions (e.g. *Bing/Ping*, *All Strange Away*, *Imagination morte imaginez/ Imagination Dead Imagine*). In this way, representation is physically reduced through a series of logical movements on which Cartesian thought, as well as Newtonian physics is based; more than that, however, *Watt* and the late Beckett texts constitute a single-minded experiment in representing the language of this reduction. If *Murphy* brought into being a fictional universe that takes Cartesian laws ad absurdum, *Watt* represents a Cartesian universe as a system of discourse within language. As Shira Wolosky argues, 'Beckett represents this in his linguistic

design, reflected in restrictions of linguistic resonance to mechanized, physical significance – his delimiting of the sense of his words to an unmitigated literalism while always including, as part of his intention, the "figurative" meanings the words might otherwise convey but which he suppresses.'[481] The 'evasion by number', as Wolosky terms it, corresponds to the reductions of Beckett's denotative, literalist language as the inverse of literalism: while radical literalism – as exemplified in *Texts for Nothing*, *Fizzles* – strives to eliminate the *figurative* level from the language of writing, in a radical experiment to suppress all figuration, mathematical reduction attacks language from the other end, attempting to eliminate the literal (sensory, physical) level. Mathematics functions in/through a language that asserts the non-sensible, non-physical 'sense', or pole of figuration while eliminating all empirical content; as such, its mode of being is that of metaphoric transfer which it both eliminates and fulfils.[482] Mathematics becomes one mode in which Beckett carries out his experiment in exposure: *Watt* is an extensive exercise in logical positivism whose project is to reduce language to a near-mathematical system – with the systematic exclusion both of the *literal* and of the *figurative* ('no symbols where none intended'). Such language, scrupulously restricted to enumerations, combination and permutation lists, logical propositions and

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[481] *Language Mysticism. The Negative Way of Language in Eliot, Beckett, and Celan* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 58-59.

[482] In *White Mythology* Derrida discusses the structure of metaphor as quintessentially metaphysical: it performs a transposition, a carrying-across (*meta-pherein*) of the sensible into the (supposedly) non-sensible. The very notion of such transposition rests on the assumption that a distinction/separation between the sensible and the non-sensible, (Heideggerian) *sinnlich* and *Sinn* can be performed; this is reproduced in the (metaphotic) distinction *literal* vs. *figural*. Thus metaphor proposes to pass from a sensible meaning to an essential, spiritual one, through a figurative detour; its movement is one of idealization through the terms inherent in Western metaphysics. Mathematics in this system both fulfills and eludes metaphoric transfer, inhabiting the nonsensible, 'metaphysical' pole of figuration. 'White Mythologies', in *Margins of Philosophy*. Translation and notes by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207-272. Wolosky discusses Beckett's late prose work in terms of a resistance to figuration which is carried out through a systematic elimination of figurative meaning in the texts on the one hand, and on the other hand by appropriating a positivist, mathematical language that strives to a thorough elimination of the literal; thus the Beckettian *via negativa* can be seen as a deconstruction of language as a system of representation. Her approach, however, does not rest on the assumption, like most works of negative theology/ language mysticism, that there is an ultimate, inexpressible reality *beyond* language, which only becomes apparent in *silence*. See Wolosky, 'Samuel Beckett's Figural Evasions', in *Language Mysticism. The Negative Way of Language in Eliot, Beckett, and Celan*, 51-89.

so forth, is a language of failure, as Watt's failure in making sense of Knott's pots demonstrates.

It is in Knott's house that Watt first experiences the resistance of words to formulation, the resistance of meaning to inhabit (his) words: for throughout his time as a servant of Knott, the latter is experienced as a non-presence whose incongruous and illogical changes in aspect, in movement, in clothing, eating, resting habits, in ordering around the items of his rooms as well as in freely changing the space he inhabits elude all combinations, permutations, all deductive capacities of logic. Throughout his process of inquiry of, and about Knott's existence, there are only ambiguous non-answers; since to Knott's (non)existence the rules of rationality do not apply, Knott cannot be appropriated, possessed and exorcised by language. Knott – or rather, all that which can be said about him in the symbols of (Watt's) linguistic logic – is created, by way of logical deductions, in the process by Watt in order to justify his existence in serving Knott to himself. Watt himself is disconcertingly taken for various objects; not only is he not identified, but onlookers even fail to attribute him a human shape ('Tetty was not sure whether it was a man or a woman. Mr. Hackett was not sure that it was not a parcel, a carpet for example, or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord', *W* 14). A rather more macabre example of lives ordered around the central absence of Knott/Naught in order to justify his existence and, in the process, to justify themselves and their histories, is the descendance of the dogs and of the Lynches whose livelihood and existence rests on the succession of their dogs, whose only function is to eat up the rests of Knott's lunch and dinner, provided these rests exist. Knott not only resists identification by naming: in his space, domain, house he is the one who generates 'reality' and – since Naught multiplied by any other number is naught – the 'other number' (that which Watt perceives of Knott and his surroundings) can vary to infinity and result in the same answer: Naught. This results in a world which entraps Watt who can no longer appropriate it by shredding reality into minute parts, phases, naming them, producing sequences and combination lists, sticking words to all its items. Language, in this work positivist by excellence, cannot assimilate the irrational:

> Not that Watt desired information, for he did not. But he desired words to be applied to his situation, to Mr Knott, to the house, to the grounds, to his duties, to the stairs, to his bedroom, to the kitchen, and in a general way to the conditions of being in which he found himself. For Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance.

> And the state in which Watt found himself resisted formulation in a way no
> state had ever done, in which Watt had ever found himself, and Watt had found
> himself in a great many states, in his day. Looking at a pot, for example, or
> thinking of a pot, at one of Mr Knott's pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot,
> pot. Well, perhaps not quite in vain, but very nearly. For it was not a pot, the
> more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that, that it was
> not a pot at all. It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which
> one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted. It was in vain that it answered, with
> unexceptionable adequacy, all the purposes, and performed all the offices, of a
> pot, it was not a pot. And it was just this hairbreadth departure from the nature
> of a true pot that so excruciated Watt. For if the approximation had been less
> close, then Watt would have been less anguished. For then he would not have
> said, This is a pot, and yet not a pot, no, but then he would have said, This is
> something of which I do not know the name. And Watt preferred on the whole
> having to do with things of which he did not know the name, though this too
> was painful to Watt, having to do with things of which the known name, the
> proven name, was not the name, any more, for him. For he could always hope,
> of a thing of which he had never known the name, that he would learn the name,
> some day, and so be tranquillized. (*W* 77-78)

For Watt identity is to be, and can only be queried by practicing it, in all the
small actions it implies: the naming of Knott's pots corresponds to the safe
establishing of the Watt-ness of these pots. What Watt performs in his daily
doings are a series of namings: doing and naming, that is, appropriating through
language, being one and the same for him, his walking, for instance (*W* 28-29),
becomes a shattered, incongruous sequence of small, grotesque movements
as he physically performs that which is, can be, described by sticking words
to every phase of his motions. The textual image of his errands and randomized
movements is a 'drunkenness' of language, an excess of representation where
the text/language ultimately turns upon itself and reveals the irrationality at
the core of representation, that is, of joining words to phenomena. Instead
of giving reality to representation, representation de-realizes the 'real'. The
same textual effect is achieved by the inclusion into the body of the text of
heterogeneous, textual and non-textual, forms of representation (for instance,
the nonsense verses for a four-voice musical score, 32-33; the combinations
on the rhythms of three frogs croaking, 135-137) all with the function of
representing, mapping the 'real'; as a result, a heteroglossia is created which
constantly points at the possibilities and impotence of language as expressive
medium.

Watt's experience of Knott, the unaccountable, comes as no revelation,
as the encounter of Naught experienced by Murphy; he is left in a world

even more disinherited, leaving Knott's house the same as he had entered it, without choosing to do so, acting at random. (His) language, his capacity of speech breaks down as the words uttered gradually empty themselves of content, as do the expectations of meaning. Watt at this point is found entrapped in a monstrous universe on which he, having lost language, having lost the expectation and confidence that there is a rational link between words and whatness/Wattness, that identity/Watt can be answered by, and through, language, has no hold.

> What had he learnt? Nothing.
> What did he know of Mr Knott? Nothing.
> Of his anxiety to improve, of his anxiety to understand, of his anxiety to get well, what remained? Nothing.
> But was not that something?
> So sick, so alone.
> And now.
> *Sicker, aloner.*
> *Was not that something?*
> *As the comparative is something. Whether more than its positive or less. Whether less than its superlative or more.* (*W* 147, *my emphases*)

The loss of words, the loss of the possibility to communicate and thus to repossess experience – the revelation of the 'madness' of language causes the 'madness' of world in Watt's self-enclosed inner world: it is language which names, thus creates identity, similarly, 'mad' language acts upon the world destabilizing it. Watt is encountered walking, moving, and talking backwards, and acting out all the combinative possibilities of inversion in utterances, entrapped in a logical system of representation/naming by addition, combination, permutation. Beckett's prose seems to be calling into question the very structure in which representation attempts to equal a reality that lies beyond it, but inevitably fails to do so. The reductive, mathematical language of *Watt* exposes not the failure of language as such to reach through to some 'truth' that transcends it, but rather, reveals how our language constructs experience; even more than echoing Wittgenstein's (positivist) *Tractatus*, this language (Watt becoming what he says, his language/speech) is more suggestive of the *Philosophical Investigations* in the sense that the language Watt chooses is one that severely restricts his reality. Pointing towards the literalist and mathematical reductions of language at work in the late short prose, *Watt* stages a linguistically constructed world in which words can only

be interpreted according to their logic, conducting a thorough examination of how language worlds set up particular boundaries of experience.[483]

> The following is an example of Watt's manner at this period:
> *Deen did taw? Tonk. Tog da taw? Tonk. Luf puk saw? Hap! Deen did tub? Ton sparp. Tog da tub? Ton wonk.*
> Thus I missed I suspect much I presume of great interest touching the fourth stage of the second or closing period of Watt's stay in Mr Knott's house. (*W* 164-165)

His questions and answers play upon his, and Knott's names/whatness, and repeat the dialogue with himself on his adventure with Knott/language, turned into nonsense: 'What did need? Knot. What ad got? Knot. Was cup full? Pah! But did need? Praps not. But ad got? Know not.' At the end of his quest for Knott – a quest represented in circular form, as Watt's statements return to the point where they started: he starts from, and arrives at the station, at random, after having served Knott; his circular quest is best epitomized by his description of a painting which hangs in Erskine's room, representing a circle and a point, lost in space, ' a circle and its centre in search of a centre and of a circle respectively' (127) – he is victimized by the whatness that resists words and the words that resist the 'whatness of things'. In the narrative he appears three times as physically wounded: at the outset and end of his quest absurdly, by people who are distressed by his sight or try to identify him; when he is seen walking and talking backwards, to Sam, he is wounded by his own failure to deal with the world, so that he is likened to Bosch's *Christ carrying the cross* in the Brussels gallery. Whereas Murphy's 'prostasis in the crucified position' (*Mu* 28) after one of his minor accidents in his rocking chair (in search of his own Naught) is highly ironic, Watt's image as grotesque *vir dolorum* is not relieved, or played down, by any wordplay. He is a victim of words, and since his world is governed by the logic of naming, the failure of words deranges the world, inflicting literal suffering on him.

Watt's experience which he fails to account for, to turn into language, and his experience of failing to understand language (the haunting memory of the dialogue of the two piano tuners, 69) trace all the impotence of rationality, of linguistic logic, to come to terms with the Naught, so that the experience of encountering Nothingness is expressed through the gaps, the ellipses of language and, after Watt's leaving Knott's house, in his 'demented' language, in his broken and inverted sentences. Watt is the first in the line of Beckett's victims of language, and *Watt* the first novel of the impossibility of 'I name/I

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[483] Wolosky, *Language Mysticism,* 69-70.

speak'. Moreover, besides the failings of utterance to come to terms with the experience of Knott/Naught, to account for experience, the text turns upon itself and signals, through graphic means, the gaps in (human) language. These gaps tear up the texture of narrative; they function as places of disruption where referential language is suspended, cancelled and a gap, an empty space is created in the process of signification which points at the beyond, and at the nature of that referentiality:

> The song that Erskine sang, or rather intoned, was always the same. It was:
>
> **?** (*W* 82)

The gap of language, signalled with a question mark, may point at the un-translatability into language of sensory experience, of music; it may ironically stand for the teachings of Erskine, Watt's predecessor, about Knott and his house; it functions as an empty space that renders Nothing visible. At the same time these graphic signs serve as metafictional tools, making the writing *as* writing visible. The *Addenda* at the end of the novel (with the following authorial/editorial note: 'The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its in-corporation', 247), modelled on 18th-19th century fictional strategies meant, mostly, to enhance the effect of 'reality' of the fictional world, serves to lay it bare as artefact, as manuscript; at the same time, the fragments allude to the work-in-progress of Stephen Dedalus at the end of *A Portrait* with a parodic edge, withdrawing, rather than offering, clues to the 'meaning' of the fiction: 'no symbols where none intended' (255). Interestingly, it is in the *Addenda* that linguistic tension is most pronounced: its cryptic entries are given in a disconcerting multiplicity of languages, as if the sense of splitting of the one language (of writing) led to a multiplication of equally relative, equally unintelligible tongues/idioms. It is all the more poignant that in one of the shards of lyrics (faultily) overheard by Watt on his way to the station/ backwards from the station, inserted between foreign phrases, the word 'exile' is repeated to the point of effacement. The cryptic, fragmentary texts (German, Latin, English, Italian) that bracket pauses of silence/music seem to be records of that 'alien voicing' of languages from the outside, figures for textual allegory which the closing line, 'no symbols where none intended' erases:

> das fruchtbare Bathos der Erfahrung
>
> ---
>
> faede hunc mundum intravi, anxius vixi, perturbatus egredior, causa causarum miserere mei

```
---
change all the names
---
descant heard by Watt on the way to station (IV):
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Sop: With all our heart breathe head awhile darkly apart […]/
     the air   exile   of ended smile of ending care […]/
     darkly awhile   the exile air […]

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parole non ci appulcro (W 254-55)
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The procedure is in many ways similar to Joyce's inclusion of foreign-language elements in *Ulysses* as signals of (linguistic, psychological) tension and disruption. At the same time, the shards of foreign phrases and (English) words presented in a musical context suggests a quality other than that of 'sense' – a fascination with the multiplicity of opaque linguistic surfaces acting as musical textures, where translation is as much a matter of different sensory qualities and a traffic between different media, as it is an interlinguistic transfer of enunciations. The resulting play of meaning that results depends on an unlocalized, indefinite making-visible of all language *as* language, as foreignness, as a potential exilic space/'exile air'; writing is reproposed as a site of meeting and mingling of ever-changing *names*, where none may claim to be the definite name, but all names/languages aspire to a status of a musical phrase or rather, pause. The complex interface between music and text, text and silence, music and silence precludes any positivist 'decipherment' of these multilingual texts, creating a multilingual texture which is in the reading, even if the reading is not in the text. An interesting byplay of this string of language-bracketed silences is that it thematizes the one foreign language, site of foreignness that is not represented – French. While the *Addenda* is teeming with fragments of German, Latin and Italian, the language that would soon take over and whose presence is felt in the foreign phrase structures permeating English, is conspicuously absent or rather, not made visible. What emerges, in this brief multilingual passage, is an exercise in (interlingual) fertility, *Fruchtbarkeit* (thematized in the German line as a breach in linguistic expectations, taking the place of 'furchtbar'). Although Beckett's later writing will never tackle interlinguistic exile with such thematic intensity, the fascination for foreignness is sublimated in a linguistic going-into-exile, the language turn, as well as by the bilingual crossovers, shibbolets and numerous bilingual puns that are woven into the texture of Beckett's writing across languages. In retrospective reading, the short poem at the beginning of the *Addenda* speaks about this linguistic tension that stems from

a tension between voices, selves – a questioning of expression and the means of expression, language which is only possible in, and by means of, language:

> who may tell the tale
> of the old man?
> weigh absence in a scale?
> mete want with a span?
> the sum assess
> of the world's woes?
> nothingness
> in words enclose? (*W* 247)

Writing 'to the self-accompaniment of a tongue that is not mine': on Beckett's work across languages

> *'Are you English?' – 'Au contraire.'*[484]
> *'...what's to be said of this latest other, with his babble of homeless mes and untenanted hims...' (Textes pour rien/Texts for Nothing T12, CSP* 150*)*

After *Watt* Beckett turns his attention towards writing in French; for more than a decade, the language acquired through academic study will be his sole conduit of writing, leading to a curious, if short-lived, variation in language/position/genre – after *Krapp's Last Tape*, most of Beckett's theatre is written in English, while most of his narrative prose continues to be composed in French. Already in *Watt* there is an all-permeating awareness of the plurality of languages, but after 1945 Beckett the *Irish* writer ceases to belong to any single language or cultural tradition, creating in his work an in-between world between languages, (national) identities, where the central role is undoubtedly played by the differences *between* languages and the differences *in* language. Beckett's choice of writing in French after *Watt* and the experience of the war cannot be severed from his wish to dispossess himself. As he confessed to Ludovic Janvier, 'Á la libération je puis conserver mon apartement; j'y revins et me remis á écrire en français – avec le désir de m'appauvrir davantage.'[485]

As Hugh Kenner observes, between a native language and one of adoption there is a difference not merely of tools but of selves; speaking in a foreign language has the effect of a substantial alteration in the speaker's sense of

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[484] Beckett in an interview: quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Samuel Beckett, Nayman of Noland*. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1986), 5.

[485] Ludovic Janvier: *Samuel Beckett par lui-méme* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1969), 18, quoted in Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton University Press, 1973), 58-59.

self.[486] With the acquisition of a foreign language, the deep affective and unconscious structures of subjectivity are permeated; the acquired language will never occupy a symmetrical position to that of the first language through whose medium it was learnt, will not replace it, but becomes grafted onto it, continuously displacing, supplementing, complicating, upsetting, extending, entangling the mother-tongue. The infant Stephen Dedalus, as well as the young boy whose experience is rendered by the narrating voice in the first of the *Dubliners* stories becomes aware of language when encountering the first foreign words; the Stephen of 'Proteus' uses foreign language(s) as a narrative outlet, but also as a doubling, or extension, of his troubled (and, throughout *Ulysses*, largely projected, or imaginary) work-in-progress with/on language. Belacqua Shuah dreams in the foreign language and associates foreign words according to an unconscious logic of displacement and condensation; *Watt* is teeming with (playful) Gallicisms, revealing the degree of pressure that Beckett's French exerted on English. Moreover, the subject learning a second language is not identical with the subject acquiring the mother-tongue: there is a change in the speaker's position – as a result, the split between the (two) languages becomes the split between the positions of subjectivity, the relationship between these two being in constant variation; the verbal behaviour, the modes of dramatising subjectivity are changed. Nor will the domains of experience and expression go unaffected: the acquired language 'colonizes' segments of experience, speaking more readily of matters to which the other tongue has little access. The self is released from pressure of homogeneity and unity; bilingualism becomes an experience not only of a difference between languages, of the ways in which these represent/construct the world differently, but also of a mobility within language – to the extent that the non-native speaker who talks in the first person speaks with a different voice.[487] Kenner even affirms that with turning to write in French, Beckett freed in himself an 'indigestible, precocious morbidity' which continued to 'infect his words with frenzy' as long as he was a monolingual writer: so 'he was freed to pursue in English the gentle career of Murphy when his clot of despairs had begun speaking in French'[488] – even though, retrospectively, Beckett's output in English, from *From an Abandoned Work* through *For to end yet again and other fizzles* to *Worstward Ho* hardly seems the 'gentle career'

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[486] *Samuel Beckett: A critical study* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 56.
[487] Cf. Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words*, 37-38.
[488] *Samuel Beckett*, 56.

of the (academic) clown who performs the impossibility of tightrope-walking, as Kenner insightfully argues.

Writing in a language other than the native one presupposes the giving up of all the repertoire of verbal strategies embedded in the mother-tongue – an act of linguistic self-dispossession, yet one in which renunciation (of the security, intimacy, *Heimlichkeit* of the familiar) is bound up with a sense of liberation: with the instalment of a creative, and liberating, distance/difference between his writing and the (linguistic) stresses permeating *Watt*. Beckett's often-quoted statement on his choice of writing in French – 'Because in French it is easier to write without style' – is probably true of any second/foreign language, and points at the possibilities, offered by another language, of a more self-conscious and language-conscious manipulation, the acquired language never quite becoming a second nature to the extent a mother-tongue is. Beckett thus rewrites himself into a language to which he is not bound by filial obedience – being, in effect, reborn into another language, into the words of others: as another. In French, as Leslie Hill reminds us, Beckett's position is a purely verbal one: 'Beckett is anonymous, having no birth certificate in the language, no identity outside words… he exists as an effect of words – as a fictitious entity.'[489] Distance from the mother-tongue and its embedded genealogies is turned into a proximity: it is in French that Beckett's prose uses the first person narrative, French allowing him to articulate a new position in language and a new relationship to fiction.[490]

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[489] *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words*, 39, note 19.

[490] Cf. Derrida on the relationship of writing and exile in an interview to François Ewald (*Magazine Littéraire*): 'I had the impression that I could never "write" while living "at home" (*chez moi*)…' On the subject of 'the constant fact of being born': 'The consternation which surrounds this subject will never cease. Because the event designated in this way might only announce itself to me in the future tense: "I am (not yet) born", but in the future in the form of a past in which I will never have been present and which will remain for this reason always promised – and, moreover, always multiple. Who said that one is only born once…': quoted in Anthony Uhlmann, *Beckett and Poststructuralism* (Cambridge University Press 1999), 148. Similarly, Beckett often expressed his sense of never being properly born – to the extent that he frequently left his date of birth open. Arguably the greatest 20th century language philosopher, Emmanuel Lévinas who, born as a Jew on the Lithuanian territory of tsarist Russia, heir to the Russian, German, French cultures, exiled in turn in Ukraine and Hanover, who took refuge in France and adopted French as the language of writing, speaks about the condition of never being at home in oneself, of being 'without home' ('that home whose conquest and jealous defence constitutes European history') and being in continuous variation; with him, philosophy itself becomes nomadic/migrant, stepping outside itself. In his system of opposing orders, *totality* (the same seeking to reduce all difference to itself) vs. *infinity*

One of the rare testimonies of Beckett's work as a (professional) translator is a 1946 script for the Irish Radio entitled *The Capital of the Ruins*, addressing an Irish audience.[491] After the liberation Beckett went back to Ireland to visit an already ailing May Beckett and, as foreign nationals were not allowed to enter post-war France, Beckett joined the Irish Red Cross as a voluntary, working as a translator in Saint-Lô hospital in Normandy, an experience which he worked into the text:

> It would not be seemly, in a retiring and indeed retired storekeeper, to describe the obstacles encountered in this connexion, and the forms, often grotesque, devised for them by the combined energies of the home and visiting temperaments… When I reflect now on the recurrent problems of what, with all proper modesty, might be called the heroic period, on one in particular so ardous and elusive that it literally ceased to be formulable, I suspect that *our* pains were those inherent in the simple and necessary, and yet so unattainable proposition that *their* way of being *we*, was not *our* way and that *our* way of being *they*, was not *their* way. It is only fair to say that many of *us* had never been abroad before. (*CSP* 277, *my emphases*)

Although at face value the pronouns of inclusion/exclusion *we*/*they* designate the Irish with whom Beckett aligns himself and to whom he is speaking, and the French, the 'us' in which he apparently includes himself – 'many of us [who] had never been abroad' – at once excludes him. Comprehension between the two parties turns upon (linguistic) inclusion – an inclusion Beckett stands out of, as a 'translator' for the Irish mission, attempting (just) inclusion by oscillating between the two sides, remaining apart/ in-between throughout. He addresses the Irish by an identification which he cannot help but make, yet only does so to intercede on behalf of the French, 'they'. The voice speaking becomes the place where communication is possible, being neither the one nor the other; as a translator, as Anthony Uhlmann writes, he is the medium of voices, having no voice/story of his own, unless it is the story of

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(infinite, irreducible difference between same and other) language nevertheless functions as an opening towards infinity by *justice*, to be found between the two sides; it is only language that can accommodate a discourse of nonviolence, which is a radical separation of absolutes, without the intent of reducing the other to the same. This nonviolent discourse is at the same time the opposite of silence, seen in this system as inherently violent. Cf. Lévinas, 'Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence', in *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority,* trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 54.

[491] Reproduced in *The Collected Short Prose* 277, my emphases.

mediation – of the sensation of being a conduit, a channel, not a source.[492] All experience of being-in-language is an experience of being a translator – hence, the Unnamable's indefinite abstract state points to the groundlessness involved in extracting our identity from languages which are always tied to social bodies outside our selves.[493]

The translator, as exemplified by the Beckett text, can be identified as the one who comes between (other) voices – one whose voice *passes through*: according to Deleuze's essay 'The Exhausted' which explores the 'exhaustion of the possible' in Beckett's work through a distinction of three kinds of languages,[494] while setting as their counterpoint totalizing kinds of storytelling, the translator can be opposed to the idea of (political) leader whose voice drowns all other voices, or allegedly stands for other voices. While the voice of the leader is aligned with comprehension ('understanding' through inclusion – cf. French *comprendre* – a statement that presupposes exclusion), that of the translator is aligned with justice – with the desire to understand by taking difference seriously, not appropriating it, but attempting to preserve it.[495]

Beckett's works, written in one language, then translated into the other by the author, have a problematic status in both French and English: from the 'Trilogy' onward, all works exist *twice*, as if accompanied by their uncanny

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[492] *Beckett and Poststructuralism*, 150-152.

[493] Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 77-82.

[494] Giles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted' (trans. A. Uhlmann), in *Substance. A Review of Theory and Literary Criticism*, 24-3, Nr. 78, 1995, 3-28. Deleuze proposes a discussion of Beckett's narrative work according to a threefold categorization of languages of 'exhaustion': the first of these 'languages' exhausts the possible with words (names used as atoms), through a strategy that can be likened to mathematical combinations and permutations (cf.. permutation lists: the dogs to eat the rest of Mr Knott's dinner, the academic committe etc. in *Watt*; Molloy's 'sucking stones' etc.). *Language II* emerges with the taking of words to the limit, making them into an endless series of possible voices, as with *The Unnamable*, which, in turn, carry with them possible worlds created by their stories; this 'language' points at the relation between voices, stories and the composition of world(s), central to fiction/'the real'; in these relations the groundlessness of the literary text (and the worlds posited therein) is revealed. *Language III* appears as an unexpected interruption, as *in-betweenness*, as pure image or sound, being likened to the pauses that tear the surface of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony of which Beckett speaks in the Axel Kaun Letter.

[495] See Anthony Uhlmann, 'Voices and Stories: the translator and the leader', in *Beckett and Poststructuralism*, 137-155. The anecdote at the basis of the dichotomy is a 1958 visit to Algeria of French president de Gaulle who announced a strategy of decolonisation in a discourse whose culminating point was, 'Je vous ai *compris*' ('I have understood you') – a double-decker sentence that also reads, 'I have *included* you'; however, both the political strategy and the verb imply a necessary exclusion: Uhlmann, 147-48.

double – consequently, the work loses its unity, splitting into two. As Brian Fitch, the author of the most comprehensive study of Beckett's bilingual work to this day shows, both versions have acquired the status of originals in the language they were written, leading to a fusion of author and translator where the usual hierarchical relationship between author and translator/original and translation no longer holds.[496] The status of the second (self-translated) versions of the work eludes most attempts at classification: as any translation undertaken by the author of the original cannot be called a translation proper, they have all come to be considered 'originals' in both languages.[497] If, according to translation theories from Schleiermacher to Henri Meschonnic and Lawrence Venuti, a 'normal' translation text is perceived as a metatext pointing at another text (the original) which can be made out as a palimpsest beneath the translation text, its presence imposing itself through its very absence, the situation changes radically when the second version, in another language, is also attributable to the author – thus, the same creativity that produced the 'original' text will be at work in the second version as well. If, with translation, what is lost sight of is the writing process (creativity), in the case of self-translation it will be the second version's status as a metatext, derivative from the first that is concealed.[498] Reverting Schleiermacher's claim that the production in a foreign language is not original (being conditioned by the remembrance of certain styles, authors, periods), therefore a writer

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[496] Moreover, the conditions of the reception are also altered: the study of a bilingual work calls for a similarly bilingual critical metalanguage, whereas for several decades there have been two critical discourses and constructions of Beckett – an Anglophone Existentialist writer and a francophone exponent of the Nouveau Roman, since Beckett became known to the French public with the publication of *Molloy* (1951) only – in the years when the first novels which were later to be grouped under the umbrella-term *Nouveau Roman* emerged -, his previous output in English, from *Proust*, the early poems and short stories of *More Pricks Than Kicks* to *Watt*, and the very important *Three Dialogues* (1949) which place him in a long tradition of English and Anglo-Irish writers ranging from Sterne to Joyce, did not appear in French until the late eighties, truncating thus the perception of Beckett's work as a whole. On the other hand, all the prose works written in French beginning with the *Trilogy* were shortly translated into English, making Beckett's oeuvre accessible as a whole in English. Brian Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*, 15-19.

[497] Cf. the term 'covert translation': a translation that would not be considered as such by its readers, but rather, as if a single text existed in more languages simultaneously; such is the case of the translations of all diplomatic, scientific, commercial documents – see Juliane House, *A Mode for Translation Quality Assessment* (Tübingen: Verlag Günter Narr, 1977), qtd. in *Beckett and Babel*, 12.

[498] Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*, 18-19.

can create original work in his/her mother-language only,[499] Brian Fitch demonstrates that Beckett's writing in English was guided at least to the same extent by a remembrance of his works written in another language – French. He therefore proposes a discussion of the Beckettian work in terms of *intra-intertextuality* – that is, of the manifold, multiple relationship between texts by the same author, written *across* languages.[500] Thus the second versions of Beckett's works have to be considered

> part of the intra-intertextuality of his work and to be seen as participating thus in the dynamic interaction between the different texts… On the level of texts as texts in the strict sense of the term there exists a whole range of interplay through which the texts of a writer coment on one another without any intervention on the part of their author, whether or not the latter so wishes, through the mere fact of their co-existence. [...] through an inevitable process of contamination, every text comments upon those around it and thereby *interprets* them [...] the status [of the text produced by self-translation] has nothing to do with that of every other kind of translation, which shares with the interpretation or commentary the fact that it arises from a reading of the original made by someone for whom the latter began by being quite foreign and who had to appropriate or, to use Gadamer's term, 'apply' it through the normal hermeneutic process.[501]

The degree of the intra-intertextual connectedness of the bilingual Beckett texts is easily seen in a comparison of the late prose texts, which reiterate and compress themes and linguistic strands from the earlier fiction. Molloy's monologues are best read against, and from the direction of, *Stirrings Still*, of which they carry the germ and which operates by paring down the 'excesses of language' at work in *Molloy*. The achieveable silence, at the same time, is the silence the Unnamable *listens of* on the last pages of the work – the voice that only becomes audible once discourse stops. The passage thematizes the beginning brought forth by the ending at work in the succession of Beckett's texts, which resume where the previous text ended:

> And it says that here nothing stirs, has never stirred, will never stir, except myself, who do not stir either, when I am there, but see and am seen. Yes, a world at an

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[499] Friedrich Schleiermacher, 'Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens', quoted in Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19-20. To the history of translation theory see Ida Klitgård, 'Issues in Contemporary Translation Theory', in *Fictions of Hybridity*, 53-95.

[500] Fitch first used the term in his study 'Just between Texts: Intra-Intertextuality', in *The Narcissistic Text: A Reading of Camus' Fiction* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press 1982); see also *Beckett and Babel*, 23.

[501] *Beckett and Babel*, 29-30.

> end, in spite of appearances, its end brought it forth, ending it began, is it clear enough? And I too am at an end, when I am there, my eyes close, my sufferings cease and I end, I wither as the living can not. And if I went on listening to that far whisper, silent long since and which I still hear, I would learn still more, about this. But I will listen no longer, for the time being, to that far whisper, for I do not like it, I fear it… It's with your head you hear it, not your ears, you can't stop it, but it stops itself, when it chooses. It makes no difference therefore whether I listen to it or not, I shall hear it always, no thunder can deliver me, until it stops. (*M* 40, *Italics mine*)

As against the status of (derivative) translation texts seen in relation to the source language original (which would, according to recent translation theory, build up a *transtextual* body of works in which the literary text functions in/across different languages), self-translations, rather than being a 'reflection' of the source-text, will be on an equal footing with the latter, both being the 'reflections' of the same creativity – yet, a reflection which cannot be grounded in the assumption of some pre-existent 'Ur-text' *behind* or *beyond* them, a fictive heterocosm of which both versions are the actualizations. If literary translation is to be seen as an (autonomous) writing process, a text in its own right – 'the writing of a reading-writing', and the translator, him/herself a creator of a literary text,[502] the position of the self-translator/self-translation is doubly problematic, its specificity residing in the relationship between the target-text and the source-text. It is the common experience of bilingual authors that the medium of different languages channels the writing process, bringing about significant differences in the two versions: in a letter to Lou Andreas Salomé, Rilke confesses, 'Several times I attempted the same theme in French and German, and to my astonishment it developed on different lines in the two languages.'[503]

Concerning the status of the two versions of the *Trilogy* and of the late prose texts one may state that the chronological precedence of the one (French) text version cannot, in this case, justify a claim to its superiority as 'more faithful'. The coming-into-being of the later, English, text 'doubles' the

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[502] Cf. Henri Meschonnic, 'D'une linguistique de la traduction à la poétique de la traduction', in *Pour la poétique* (Paris, Gallimard, 'Le Chemin' 1973), 354: 'If the translation of a text is text, it is the writing of a reading-writing, a personal adventure and not a transparent process, the constitution of a system of discourse within a linguistic system in the same way as what is called an original work.' (transl. Fitch, quoted in *Beckett and Babel*, 36, note 43).

[503] Quoted in James McFarlane, 'Modes of Translation', *Durham University Journal* XVI, no.3, 91.

'original' – consequently, there are two texts signed by Samuel Beckett, none of them unique. On a diachronic case study based on the close reading of the successive manuscript versions of the French/English prose texts *Bing*/*Ping* and *Still*/*Immobile,* Fitch points out how the English version departs from the 'original' French text – a departure that can either be read as a further evolution of the (later) text for which the earlier French text served as a point of departure, or as a series of modifications (additions mostly) resulting from the translation process itself, aswering the different demands of French and English syntax, turns-of-phrase, etc. The process of self-translation at work between *Bing* and *Ping*, for instance, while adding nothing by way of vocabulary, idioms etc. to the English variant which had not existed in the French manuscript versions, is no mere *redoing* (repeating) of a text in another language, but rather a *recasting*, reordering of pre-existing textual matter into a new text which happens to be in another language. According to Brian Fitch, the process of recasting is paralleled by the passage between two languages, where the primary text on which the new text system is based is composed of the 'original' French text as both finished product and diachronic process (the successive manuscript versions); the English text deviates from the French one both as to the formal coherence of the latter and to its sequential evolution, returning, in several cases, to manuscript draft versions abandoned in the final French text.[504] If self-translation, in opposition to translation which might be viewed – according to theories running counter to Schlegel's or Meschonnic's concept of translation as autonomous creation, and which would posit the translator's invisibility – as the reproduction of a *product*, is rather to be seen as the repetition of a (creative) *process*, the status and authority of the (chronologically) first version has to be suspended. With the coming-into-being of the second text, the first ('original') is rendered retroactively incomplete, 'unfinished', as if the author had suspended his/her creative enterprise when completing the first text. On the other hand, the second version continues to be seen as parasitical, dependent on the earlier text, its textual changes having no direct relevance upon the latter. The actualized texts in the two languages exist as *variants/variations*, with no 'original' that can be localized (not even the sum total of the textual material, drafts and manuscripts, on which both 'final' texts rely – such assumption would be liable to presuppose an a priori, transcendent authorial intentionality, a fictional heterocosm separable from

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[504] *Beckett and Babel*, 76-77.

either/both languages). The late short prose and the *Trilogy* is a complex fabric of intra-intertextual variations beween French and English, a plural/ double text which, as Fitch claims, survives as the sum of its own variants/ differences, like myth. Moreover, one would even have to posit the existence of a preparatory textual material that is bilingual in character, bringing two languages into a condition of reciprocal interference and interplay – a linguistic and textual interface. *Bing/Ping*, *Sans/Lessness*, *Still/Immobile* are variants of something with no tangible textual existence, but whose existence is founded in their very, bilingual, co-existence. The process, rather than translation, can be called one of writing *across* languages.[505]

The later short prose, a truly bilingual work, none of which came into being in the one language without being written, subsequently or, immediately (and, in some cases, simultaneously), in the other language, is a work *in-between* by excellence. In whichever of the two languages one text is first composed, there is the all-pervasive presence of the other language, with its vastly different expressive potential; moreover, there is some variation in the chronological precedence of one language over the other. The two texts permanently comment upon their alternative version or 'other', present through its very absence, bringing about the assumption of a bilingual authorial corpus which is not only to be read intra-intertextually, but interlinguistically as well: 'each text proves to be speaking of and hence by its very existence, bearing witness to the existence of the other version, without which, one might go so far as to claim, it would, in a very real sense, have nothing to say and the much sought-after silence would finally be realized.'[506]

For a translator, language is not so much a vehicle for ideas as it is a fabric of verbal particularities, differences: a network of localities that does not embody a totalising, all-encompassing system, but segments, articulates and constructs reality in discontinuous ways and in different words. If polyglottism, as observed by Schopenhauer, heightens one's skills of thinking because with each acquired language the concept (wor*l*d) separates itself more from the word,[507] it also enhances the sense of *being-thrown-into-language*, making one conscious of how meaning changes when words change, of the ways in which turns of meaning occur within one language or between languages. The bilingual/polyglot person's constitutive experience

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[505] Ibid., 130-134.

[506] Ibid., 155.

[507] 'Über Sprache und Worte', in *Parerga and Paralipomena* XXV, qtd. in Fitch, 158, note 10.

is thus a certain linguistic distancing where the security, familiarity of one's own language with which one's innermost, most private being is inextricably bound up appears to be more remote, taking on some of the quality of strangeness that characterizes any acquired language.

The bilingual work, allotting its reader a space in-between the two languages, itself occupies a space of oxymoron: the second version functions as an 'authoritative' reading of the own text in a different language – yet, for the native speaker of the language in which the second variant is composed, the first version is suspended, will cease to exist. The self-translating author cannot but be conscious of the tensions at work within his double text: while the first version, in the light of the second, appears to be a *rehearsal* for what is to come, the second version, grounded in the first one, is but a *repetition* of what has gone before – the two coming together in the French word *répétition*, which allows for a space for the work between the rehearsal of a play yet to be performed, and its subsequent repetitions – in other words, a play opening that never takes place.[508] Small wonder that Beckett, like his hero Belacqua Shua, shows 'a *strong weakness* for oxymoron'.

Fitch proposes a new approach to the corpus of Beckett's work, a bilingual one that would read the texts in the two languages, side by side, or as a palimpsest of each other's sentences, in an ongoing dialogue with their 'other', the two tongues reflecting upon each other. Similarly, the critical metatexts should write around, across, the bilingual text-palimpsest, of which he sets the example in interspersing his metatexts in the bilingual sentences of the 'Trilogy'.[509] Even without viewing these sentences fronted by their doubles one has the pervasive sense of the presence, within the language of the one version (here, English), of another, foreign language, never far removed from the language of writing – indeed, of the language in which the Unnamable voices his 'hell of stories' turning into a *foreign* one, one given from without where the (equally unnamed) 'they' turns into the source of authority controlling (the other/any) language.

If the translation of a text into the target-language (one's own, mother-tongue) can be said to imply an act of mediation, appropriation, a bringing of the other closer to one's own, self-translation will counter this movement with one of distancing, *estranging*, even of disowning one's own work into the other language. If the first is a movement of (linguistic) impatriation of

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[508] Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*, 157.
[509] Ibid., 141-161, 193-216.

the other, even in the case of a 'foreignizing' translation (Walter Benjamin, Lawrence Venuti) which operates by moving the target-language reader and the target language itself 'abroad',[510] the latter can be seen rather as a linguistic exile of the own work, without the promise of naturalization, impatriation in(to) the other language. It is not only the target-language that is transformed through translation work, but the mother-language of the work as well, since – according to Walter Benjamin's thesis – translation is the continuing life of the original, its 'ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering'.[511] The final aim of translation, according to Benjamin, is to attain a conclusive stage of all linguistic creation: 'In translation the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air, as it were. It cannot live there permanently... but it points the way to this region: the predestined, hitherto inaccessible realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages.'[512] Translation is not a recovery of essential meanings, of 'the scant cream of sense' (*Dante...Bruno.Vico...Joyce, D* 26) from a foreign text, but rather, a process of transformation of the target language; its role is not to formulate ideas, but more nearly to dissolve them – to 'escape' sense, to use it for the creation of the silent motion of language(s). The condition of the translator is a paradoxical, post-Babelian one: translation is an unending, but necessarily failed, quest for a definitive language, yet a quest which is conscious from the outset that such an idea, of 'definitive language' is a contradiction in terms. The action of the translator presupposes the possibility of passage across languages – i.e., the existence of universal units of meaning (in Benjamin's example, 'pain' vs. 'Brot'); however, if meaning were universal, there would be no need, and no possibility, of translation. The art of the translator is an art of failure (paraphrasing Beckett's statement on the artist, occasioned by Jack B. Yeats's painting: 'to be a translator is to dare fail as no other dare fail') driven by the knowledge that if the condition of translation is difference between languages, it is also the proof of the ultimate impossibility of translation. Translation, rather than a mediation oriented towards an arrival, is an

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[510] Cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, 'Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens' (1813 lecture) announces two methods of translation, what came to be known as 'domesticating' vs. 'foreignizing' translation: 'Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him'. Quoted in Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility,* 19-20.

[511] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 72.

[512] Ibid., 75.

endless movement across the multiplicity of languages, where all arrival is endlessly deferred; a constant matching of fragments, residua of language with each other in the attempt to fashion not an ideal whole, a transcendental 'universal' language into which all languages could be unified, but that which, according to Benjamin, is 'pure language' (*die reine Sprache*): *nothing but language*. 'What is meant' is not something to be found independently *of*, or *in* language, but emerges from the mutual differentiation of the various manners of meaning. This *reine Sprache* would then be the greater whole in which all languages, translation and original, could participate: 'translation.. ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages. It cannot reveal or establish this hidden relationship itself; but it can represent it by realizing it in embryonic or intensive form.'[513] In the essay 'Des Tours de Babel' (1985), Derrida comments on Benjamin's essay, articulating its basic theses as (1) a separation of the task of the translator from the *reception* of the work; (2) translation has no essential mission of *communication* – i.e., there is no communicable content in language which could be strictly separated from the linguistic act of communication, therefore, language has no 'content'; translation has to be conceived of as emancipated from all sense of communication; (3) if a relationship original vs. 'variant, version' can be posited between translated text and the translating text, this cannot be representative or reproductive.[514] On the different languages' intention to attain the condition of *pure language*, Derrida writes,

> ...what [languages] are aiming at intentionally, individually and jointly, in translation is the language itself a a Babelian event, a language that is not the universal language in the Leibnizian sense, a language which is not the natural language that each remains on its own either; it is the being-language of the language, tongue or languages as such, that unity without any self-identity which makes for the fact that there are languages and that they are languages.[515]

The assumption of such a meaningless, expressionless, productive language, in constant motion and under the auspices of impossibility eerily echoes Beckett's cryptic words on the art of Bram van Velde in *Three Dialogues* – an aristic 'program' that can be extended to the Beckettian oeuvre at large: 'The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express,

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[513] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 72.

[514] Jacques Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph E. Graham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 209-48; English translation by Joseph E. Graham (165-207), 179-180.

[515] 'Des Tours de Babel' 201.

nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express' (*D* 139). The bilingual texts of the *Trilogy* and of the late short prose set out in a unique enterprise to pare language(s) down, to escape and neutralize the representational and expressive power of language, to achieve the failure of representation in/through language; Ludovic Janvier even affirms that Beckett's texts which have the nothing for subject have, in fact, language as their subject matter.[516]

> I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be, I was he, I was inside, that's how I see it, it was he who wailed, he who saw the light, I didn't wail, I didn't see the light, *it's impossible I should have a voice, impossible I should have thoughts, and I speak and think, I do the impossible*, *it is not possible otherwise*, it was he who had a life, I didn't have a life, a life not worth having, because of me, he'll do himself to death, because of me, I'll tell the tale, the tale of his death, the end of his life and his death, his death alone would not be enough, not enough for me, if he rattles it's he who will rattle, I won't rattle, he who will die, I won't die... I'll be inside, it is not possible otherwise, that's how I see it, the end of his life and his death *how he will go about it, go about coming to an end*, it's impossible I should know, I'll know, impossible I should tell, I'll tell, in the present ... but he used to want to drown, *he usen't to want them to find him*, deep water and a millstone, urge spent like all the others, but why one day to the left, to the left and not elsewhither, here long silence, there will be no more I, he'll never say I any more, he'll never say anything any more... he'll go on. (*Fizzle 4*, *CSP* 234-235, *my emphases*)

In the fragment above, from *Fizzles/Foirades*, language is thematized as the voice apparently speaking gradually changes 1st person narrative to 3rd person narrative, and with the change of pronouns/entities the location of utterance also shifts, language turning into something that is outside the voice uttering it. The mutation of pronouns, voices, of the sense of 'beginning' and 'ending' is reflected by mutations within language, by language games emerging almost in spite of the voice speaking ('how he will go about it, *go about coming to an end*, it's impossible...') – and, ultimately, reflected by the text's double, in the other language. The withdrawals, self-effacements of language are reinforced by linguistic misuse, the occurrence of a deviant (and therefore, disruptive) phrase, 'he *usen't to want them to find him*' – the invention of a verbal form coined on the modal 'ought(n't) to' as a verbal impossibility. Such impossible linguistic forms are named throughout the 'Trilogy', as

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[516] Ludovic Janvier, *Pour Samuel Beckett* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1966), 241, on *Textes pour rien*: 'ne sont pas pour rien... ont le rien pour sujet: c'est-à-dire que le langage est leur seul propos.'

imagined idioms into which the stories told by the voices might ramify: in his urge to 'get out of this hell of stories' the Unnamable states, 'I could also do, incidentally, with *future and conditional participles*' (*U* 300); Molloy imagines a 'hypothetical imperative' mode in which his compulsion to go on could be uttered:

> But I could not, stay in the forest I mean, *I was not free to*. That is to say I could have, physically nothing could have been easier, but I was not purely physical, I lacked something, and I would have had the feeling, if I had stayed in the forest, of going against an imperative, at least I had that impression. [..] For after the usual blarney there followed this solemn warning… It was in Latin, nimis sero, I think that's Latin. *Charming things, hypothetical imperatives*. (*M* 86-87, *my emphases*)

Textes pour rien/Texts for Nothing, Beckett's major prose work after the 'Trilogy', which does away with all the narrative procedures on which the power of the latter rests – most notably, the quest structure which organizes the narrative into what may be termed a linear progress –, proposing a radically new, non-directional writing, foregrounds the doubleness of language still more forcefully, even if in a manner less assimilated in the Beckett reception. The work, composed of thirteen conspicuously fragmentary non-narrative texts, has been the subject of many aborted critical attempts to impose some overall pattern on it. In this respect Hugh Kenner's early warning that, far from being the expression of a crisis and disintegration in writing, the *Texts* have their own original, and originating integrity, having 'no real subject but [their] own queer cohesion', a cohesion that is a recurrent mode in Beckett's exploits, stands out as prophetic.[517] Already the title of the *Texts* foregrounds translation: the French version brings into play a musical term, *mesure pour rien*, a pause where silence and sound merge indistinguishably – throwing an oblique light on the poetics of fragmentation at work in the text where speech and silence interpenetrate, their oscillation being one of the principal themes of the *Texts*. The English title, on the other hand, appears as a play with the tongue-in-cheek reading and a more 'serious' one oriented towards the Void; the silence of which the French title speaks is lost in translation. In *Text 8*, the sense of splitting between the two languages/selves is explored to an unprecedented extent: starting with a charting of the territory between words and silence ('the tears, I confuse them, words and tears, my words are my tears, my eyes my mouth... it's for ever the same murmur, flowing un-

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[517] Hugh Kenner, *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*, 119.

broken, like a single endless word and therefore meaningless, for it's the end gives the meanings to words', *CSP* 131), the text slowly moves towards a charting of the territory between what may be read as the two spaces of foreignness, the two languages, the two voices speaking the two languages within the voice uttering:

> ...here there is no frankness, all I say will be false and to begin with not said by me, here I'm a mere ventriloquist's dummy, I feel nothing, say nothing, he holds me in his arms and moves my lips with a string, with a fish-hook, no, no need of lips, all is dark, there is no one, what's the matter with my head, I must have left it in Ireland, in a saloon, it must be there still, lying on the bar, it's all it deserved. But that other who is me, blind and deaf and mute, because of whom I'm here, in this black silence, helpless to move or accept this voice as mine, it's as him I must disguise myself till I die, for him in the meantime do my best not to live, in this pseudo-sepulture claiming to be his. Whereas to my certain knowledge I'm dead and kicking above, somewhere in Europe probably, with every plunge and suck of the sky a little more overripe, as yesterday in the pump of the womb. No, to have said so convinces me of the contrary, I never saw the light of day, any more than he, ah if no were content to cut yes's throat and never cut its own. (*CSP* 133)

This in-between space, created as the space of aporia 'dead and kicking', of *both/and* rather than either/or, the entity voicing can be felt to split into two '*mes*', equally false and both 'ventriloquist's dummies': an Irish and a European one which, as the toponymy scattered across the text suggest, can be located in francophone Paris. The two voices mingling in the voice uttering 'I', each other's ventriloquists/disguises, share an existence between ending and beginning (as thematized in most *Texts*, in the hypothesized journey to/from the grave of *Text 9* for instance), in a permanent deferral of meaning-establishing ending, in a hypothetical and *bothersome* both/and of *yes and no*.

Beckett's work as a whole can be seen as a commentary on the post-Babelian predicament – the existence not of a universal, all-encompassing tongue, but of fragmentary idioms, competing versions; the existence not of any ascertained 'true story', grand narrative, but of a plethora of equally relative accounts of what such might be, were it to exist. As Leslie Hill observes, the fictional structure of the 'Trilogy' uncannily echoes the question of translation that lies at the heart of Beckett's writing – that there is no true narrative to be written and no true idiom in which such might be written. The text of the *Trilogy*, existing in the form of the interlingual and intra-intertextual space between the two variants, itself thematizes the notion of language as palimpsest and of fiction as infinite spiral of contending fictions: in this plural, bilingual

text there is no 'truthful' account to serve as foundation for the narrator's ever-failing attempts to tell their own stories, but infinitely multiplied versions which fail to agree on crucial issues.[518] Since translation (and, closely linked with it, the awareness of the insufficiency and impotence of any/all language) is central to Beckett's texts, the possibility of another language, another tale haunts Beckett's fiction- of-language. At a late stage in his life, Beckett turns to stage his own plays in yet another language, German, revising the German translations of his work in the process: the 1983 short play *Nacht und Träume* emerged of this encounter.[519] The attempt to achieve silence which has been seen by the majority of critics as crucial to Beckett's work receives a new interpretation in this light, in the opening and concluding lines of Olga Ostrovsky's sensitive essay 'Le Silence de Babel':

> Into the broad movement towards silence against silence described by Beckett's work another silence – a reduced reflection of the latter – is introduced: that of two languages..
>
> [Beckett's land of exile is situated there] where the distinctions between language disappear and the necessity to name is almost reduced to nothing. That is where the word will be able to find once again its womb of silence, its first and last native tongue.[520]

'The kind of silence one keeps'. Spaces, pronouns of foreignness: *From an Abandoned Work*, *the 'Trilogy'*

> For it is all very fine to keep silence, but one has also to consider the kind of silence one keeps. (*UNN* 309)
>
> 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 in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead. (*M* 31)
>
> Anger led me sometimes to slight excesses of language. I could not regret them. It seemed to me that all language was an excess of language. (*M* 116)

Beckett's slow and tentative move back to English might have been triggered by the demand to translate *Godot* into English (1956); with *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), Beckett resumes writing theatre work in English, involving more directly autobiographical material. At the same time, he begins a new

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[518] Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words*, 51.

[519] Cf. Douglas McMillan, Martha Fehsenfeld, *Beckett in the Theatre* Vol I. (London: John Calder, 1988).

[520] In: *L'Herne* No. 31 (1976), 196, 211, translated and quoted by Fitch, *Beckett and Babel*, 187, note 18.

experimentation in fiction in English, seeking a new departure after *The Unnamable* which materializes in the English-language *From an Abandoned Work* (1958) and *From an Unabandoned Work* – an *actively* fragmentary English-language text, some of which was to grow into Beckett's first major prose work after *The Unnamable*: the French *Comment c'est/How It Is*. The text that marks a 'return' to the mother-language long pushed into the background, to the point of becoming a 'second language' of writing throughout the 1950, is one of the most conspicuously language-conscious of Beckett's prose output: language is everywhere thematized as a (faulty) medium, signalling a creative approach to and, at the same time, estrangement from the own, *un*abandoned tongue. Foreign-language words stand out from this text almost programmatically, as 'holes' in opening up to spaces of foreignness; the multilingualism of the speaking voice or the 'alien voicing' is scrupulously *driven home*:

> This is the only completely white horse I remember, what I believe the Germans call a Schimmel, oh I was very quick as a boy and picked up a lot of hard knowledge, *Schimmel, nice word, for an English speaker*. (*From an Abandoned Work*, *CSP* 157, *my emphasis*)

The closing passage of *From an Abandoned Work* revisits the haunting imagery, abounding with faint, silenced echoes of a distinctly Irish setting, that characterize Beckett's fiction from *Watt* onwards, through the *Trilogy* and *Textes pour rien/ Texts for Nothing*; here again the language of writing is exposed in a doubly metaleptic gesture – not only is the reader reminded that what he/she is reading is a text, read *as if* it were the monologue of an unnamed voice, but also, that it is a text written in a language, English, which functions *as if* it were *the* language of writing and hypothesizes the existence of (an)other, foreign, language(s).

> Harsh things these great ferns, like starched, very woody, terrible stalks, take the skin off your legs through your trousers, and then the holes they hide, break your leg if you're not careful, *awful English this*, fall and vanish from view, you could lie there for weeks and no one hear you, I often thought of that up in the mountains, *no, that is a foolish thing to say*, just went on, my body doing its best without me. (*From an Abandoned Work*, *CSP* 164, *my emphases*)

The first texts Beckett composed in French (*4 Nouvelles – Premier Amour*, *L'Expulsé*, *Le Calmant*, *La Fin*) can be read as a string of unsettlingly subjective fantasies which reinvent narrative (the picaresque pattern of the quest); they also share in common with the *Trilogy,* whose setting they

foreshadow, a description of metaphoric spaces of confinement, telling of birth and death. Their (imaginary) landscapes are constructed as residua of a memory of Ireland: the indistinct bog-landscape through which the hero of *Premier Amour/First Love* wanders is akin to the landscape in *Molloy*. These landscapes ('scullscapes') are emphatically de-realized, turned into fictitious entities with an existence grounded in writing solely; exilic spaces which, in marked contrast to Joyce's re-creation of a space left behind with documentary scrupulousness, tend to efface every recognizable trait, paring it down, abstracting it to an evocative foreignness. Even more so, in the *Trilogy* references to Ireland take the form of an exoticism at once foregrounded and effaced, based on the displacement of Irish allusions and the exploitation of their otherness. Interestingly enough, echoes of Ireland mutate from the French to the English text, acquiring significantly different overtones: in French, they function as assets of foreignness, exoticism, not contained, or localized, and not containable in the language. Irish themes pop up, non-intrusively but with considerable frequency, throughout the *Trilogy*: a number of stereotypes are played on – e.g., the weather is extensively discussed in *Molloy* and *Malone Meurt/Malone Dies*, and so is the pastoral quality of the land which in the English version would necessarily take on a more sarcastic quality, at once attacking long-embedded *topoi* of English/ Anglo-Irish culture and literature, and undermining all possibilities of identifications with an Irish tradition while, at the same time, grounding the (English-language) text in it.[521]

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[521] In *Molloy*, Lousse's servant handles Molloy a kitchen-knife with a handle made of *'so-called* genuine Irish horn' – the English phrase being charged with a cultural-literary reference that is absent from the French text, where it signals merely exoticism and may be read as an allusion to the monetary value of the object (of poor quality, as it turns out): the knife '…had a safety catch, highly dangerous as it soon appeared and the cause of innumerable cuts, all over my fingers caught between the handle of *so-called genuine Irish horn…*' (*M* 45, *Italics mine*) – in French, 'le manche en vraie corne d'Irlande, soi-disant' (Molloy. Paris: Minuit, 1951, p. 67). Cf. Emilie Morin, '"But to hell with all this fucking scenery": Ireland in Translation in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*', in: *Global Ireland,* eds. O. Pilný, C. Wallace, *Litteraria Pragensia* (Charles University Prague, 2005), 223-24. Similarly, the mention of *Irish stew* prepared by Moran's skivvy takes on a widely differing meaning in the French and English texts – whereas in French it is an asset in building up a context of exoticism driven *ad absurdum*, in English it has more localized and also, politically charged associations brought into play: 'I peered into the pots. *Irish stew*. A nourishing and economical dish, if a little indigestible. *All honour to the land it has brought before the world*' (*M* 98, *Italics mine*). Generally, the English text, being closer to the Irish tradition and to the stereotypes of Irishness which function as its subtexts and against which it reacts,

The themes of Irishness, utterly specific within an Irish context, are displaced in the French version where their references become, if not quite bound to French culture as Emilie Morin suggests,[522] functional as a more general space of foreignness. The names that beset the 'Trilogy' – Molloy, Malone – do not *name* in French as they do in English, anchoring their bearers in an Irish context; accordingly, these Irish names in a French context open up 'a space of strangeness, a pocket of otherness, a borderline with Irish English which suddenly begins to exist in French',[523] whose effect is therefore rigorously untranslatable, since they already appear as their own translations. These proper names in a foreign linguistic context can be seen as elements of Walter Benjamin's *reine Sprache*, emptied of conceptual content and meaning, yet inexhaustible for potential meaning, interpretation; they designate rather than signify. Paradoxically, proper names which may pass from one language to another unchanged, without loss, are untranslatable: although they resist incorporation, inhabiting a space on the edge of ordinary language, they have no independent life outside it. These apparently nomadic agents which seem to move freely between different linguistic environments turn out on closer analysis to be utterly untranslatable, since their specific foreignness – their apparent identity – cannot be transposed from one language to the next; consequently, 'Malone' and 'Molloy' will never quite carry the same aura in English as they do in French. As titles of fiction, these proper names – familiar in English as a sign of the English language's 'other', unfamiliar to the point of exoticism in French – alert the reader to the complex play of discontinuities lurking in the text, providing these fictions with a metaphor for its own status, that of untranslatable idiom.[524]

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exposes the Irish themes with an aggressiveness not found in the French text, where most of such allusions are placed in a niche of foreignness: to all appearance, Moran and the narrator of Malone Dies are both exasperated by the landscape ('What a *pastoral* land, my God', *M* 159, *my emphasis*; 'But to hell with all this fucking scenery', *MD* 279).

[522] '"But to hell with all this fucking scenery"', 224.

[523] Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words*, 9.

[524] Leslie Hill, in Chapter 6 ('Naming the Body') of *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words* (100-120) discusses at length some of the Beckett names that travel across the languages, further illuminating Beckett's eccentric position between tongues: the *Trilogy*'s Lemuel (with strong reverberations of Beckett's *own* name, Samuel: cf. 'Sam', *Watt*), an Old Testament name (*Proverbs* 31:8, he who 'should open [his] mouth for the dumb in the name of all such as are appointed to destruction') is given a character who kills off all the characters in Malone Dies with a *hatchet*; Mr Hatchett, a character in *Watt*, emerges at the end of *Malone Dies* as one of Lemuel's implements of execution, through a bilingual pun: 'sa hache' (*hatchet*, not axe, as in the English version) – 'encoding'

Moran, the second narrator of *Molloy* on the heels of his quarry Molloy, digresses on the name which he seems to be translating/ domesticating into a context other than that suggested by the name – since 'Molloy' inevitably appears as a foreign name, channeling linguistic and cultural pressure in the fiction that bears his name. The inflections Moran gives to the name seem arguably to bring it closer to French, the language of writing *Molloy*, heightening the indeterminacy (in French) of what language the name belongs to. The effacement of the name 'Molloy' in this act of 'translation' curiously mirrors the ontological instability, indeterminacy of Molloy the character and, ultimately, the fiction *Molloy*. If the title *Molloy* identifies the protagonist of the novel (cf. *Anna Karenina*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* etc.), then the fiction deviates from the pattern, since Molloy is the protagonist of the first (first-person narrative) part only, becoming the object of Moran's quest in the second. Moreover, while Molloy himself has difficulties in remembering his own name or the name of his town, it is Moran who 'remembers' it (i.e., assigns him a name, of object). In the fragment below Moran appears to occupy an in-between position, of translator (of the name and its associations) into an idiom to which his relationship remains no less indeterminate than Molloy's status in (his, Molloy's own) fiction. Although he states to favour the second ('Frenchified') version – consequently, to perform within the narrative the translation into French, and so to meta-thematize the turning of the Irish-born Beckett to French as the language of writing – he is aware of the distinctness of 'his own' *Mollose* from the (equally fictitious) Molloy:

> Of these two names, Molloy and Mollose, the second seemed to me perhaps the more correct. But barely. What I heard, in my soul I suppose, where the acoustics are so bad, was first a syllable, Mol, very clear, followed almost at once by a second, very thick, as though gobbled by the first, and which might have been *oy as it might have been ose, one, or even oc*. And if I was *inclined towards ose*, it was doubtless *that my mind had a weakness for this ending, whereas the others left it cold*. […] And henceforward, unmindful of my preferences, I shall force myself to say Molloy, like Gaber. *That there may have been two different persons involved, one my own Mollose, the other the Molloy of the enquiry*, was a thought which did not so much as cross my mind, and if it had I should

another name for the author (the exterminator of fictional characters), that of Lemuel Hatchet, alongside the Biblical overlays. The (fictional) last name Hatchet is also an oblique pun on Hatchette, a publishing house which refused Beckett manuscripts on ground of pornographic content. The most exhaustive treatise on Beckett names is Jeremy Parrott's PhD thesis, *Change All the Names: A Critical Onomasticon of Characternyms in the Works of Samuel Beckett* (Szeged, 2004).

have driven it away… *How little one is at one with oneself, good God*.' (*M* 113, *my emphases*)

Characteristically for Beckett voices, that which is passed in silence or pushed aside acquires, by virtue of the 'rhetoric' inherent in all language use, no lesser significance than that which the speaking voice foregrounds: such is the case with the thought that 'did not so much as cross my mind' – disproved by the mere utterance of the sentence. The sense of the doubling of 'Molloy-Mollose', the irreducible other and its domestication into French, of the one that speaks a different language and its/his appropriation into the language of writing or, into the writing's 'familiar' language, permeates *Molloy* and the 'Trilogy' as a whole. In view of this it appears as even more unsettling that Moran should speak an idiom which bears a distinctive touch of Hiberno-English, both in French[525] and English – e.g., 'Pick it up, I said, *till I look at it*'(*M* 155). In line with this, when writing on Molloy he seeks to delineate his background, whereabouts as if explaining it – translating it to foreigners:

> By the Molloy country I mean that narrow region whose administrative limits he had never crossed… This market-town, or village was, I hasten to say, called *Bally*, and represented, with its dependent lands, a surface area of five or six *square miles* at the most. *In modern countries* this is what I think is called a commune, or a canton, I forget, but there exists *with us* no abstract and generic term for such territorial subdivisions. And to express them *we* have another system, of singular beauty and simplicity, which consists of saying Bally (since we are talking of Bally) when *you* mean Bally and Ballyba when you mean Bally plus its domains and Ballybaba when you mean the domains exclusive of Bally itself. I myself for example lived, *and come to think of still live*, in *Turdy*, hub of Turdyba. And in the evening, when I went for a stroll, in the country outside Turdy, *to get a breath of fresh air*, it was the fresh air of Turdybaba that I got, and no other.' (*M* 134, *Italics mine*)

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[525] Emilie Morin points out how, with several instances in *Malone Meurt/ Malone Dies*, it is the French syntax that shows forms of emphasis, fronting, reminiscent of Hiberno-English; the passages invariably concern some points of reference to the Irish nationalist movement in literature and culture at large. Interestingly enough, the English version of these excerpts doesn't use the characteristic fronting patterns but has, as a rule, a harsher tone than the French text, signalling a departure from that ideology that allows for an autobiographical reading: cf. '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. Yes, no reflection is needed, before or after, I have only to open my mouth for it to testify to the old story, my old story, and to the long silence that has silenced me, so that all is silent': '"But to hell with all this fucking scenery"', 231-232.

Bally, Molloy's birthplace is a distinctively Irish toponym: the prefix *Báile*/
Bally appears in a great number of Irish settlements – among others, in *Báile
Atha Cliath*/Dublin, or Ballybrack, a Dublin suburb close to Beckett's native
Foxrock; at the same time, it is an (obsolete) English obscenity. Its 'double',
Turdy (in the French version, *Shit/Shitba*) is another of Beckett's sleight-of-
hand comments on the 'singular beauty and simplicity' of his homeland, while
at the same time bringing into play *Tour Eiffel* – still, substituting one English
word for the other in the French text, it remains lost in translation. The system
of differentiating settlement from its enclosing countryside lapses into wildly
comic absurdity, especially considering the seemingly self-generating rhetoric
of the text – cf. 'getting the fresh air' outside Turdy. It strikes one as intriguing
is Moran's stance that, while giving away his familiarity with Bally and the
'Molloy/Beckett country'[526] in general, of which he himself turns out to be
an inhabitant and native, he oscillates between identifying himself with it
and the other, foreign audience whom he addresses, the foreign context with
which he is equally (un)familiar and in which he may claim to belong with
equal right. The implied dichotomy (backward, pastoral) 'Bally' vs. 'modern
countries' gives some clues to this context, yet not enough to anchor it with
safety; the stereotypes of Irishness, present as idiosyncratic exoticism driven
to absurd extremes in the French text, have a more cutting edge in English
where distancing (from that which, by definition, is closer to 'home') is more
emphatic. The difference between 'Shitba' (in the French) and 'Turdyba'
pertains to the realm of untranslatability: the same (English) word wouldn't
travel into the English version. The difference between the first and the second
(originally 'pastoral' and generic, with a more recent second career as slang
obscenity) cannot be read but in light of the 'translated' English version, while
the more easily decoded 'Shit' in the French-language context opens up a
niche of foreignness that concerns the English language and bears no Irish
associations. Even more interesting is the shift of (generic) pronouns in which
Moran in turn includes himself and his (fictional) audience: the 'we' of 'we
have another system', placed under the sign of heavy irony directed against

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[526] On Irish references in the *Trilogy* see Eoin O'Brien: *The Beckett Country* (London: The
Black Cat Press and Faber&Faber, 1986). Hugh Kenner sees in the doubling Molloy/
Moran a neat division between 'Beckett's Irish/French selves', that of 'gentle comedian'
vs. 'morbid solipsist', making the interesting but rather problematic assumption that
only with the 'hunting down' of the *Trilogy*'s Molloy was the writer liberated to put into
language his whole personality. This reading is based on a psychological, biographical
interpretation of Beckett's choice to sever connections with his homeland: *Samuel Beckett:
A critical study,* 56-58.

the Republic, must be the Irish, yet Moran himself speaks the language (French) of the 'you' into whose terms he is translating this 'we'. In other words, Beckett's voicing alien seems to be enacting a reverted version of what Beckett himself performed in 'The Capital of the Ruins': as a voice in-between, translating the familiar into the other language, for the other (French) audience, while keeping scrupulously clear of any unequivocal self-identification.[527]

However, Moran's translations (of Molloy) do not show the same translator's stance: in encountering Molloy, Moran places himself across the divide – linguistic, of belonging –, seeing Molloy in terms of absolute otherness. This is ironically reinforced by the biblical subtext brought into play, of the multiplication of the loaves and fish:

> His accent was that of a foreigner or of one who had lost the habit of speech. But had I not said already, with relief, at the mere sight of his back, He's a foreigner. Would you like a tin of sardines? I said. He asked for bread and I offered him fish. That is me all over. Bread, he said. (*M* 146)

In a text which seems to be engaged in dialogue with itself in two languages, the Beckett narrator makes the reader witness the place and chance of foreignness, between languages/within the same language. Molloy is recognized as 'a foreigner' beforehand – possibly even before the encounter – 'at the mere sight of his *back*'; his words, although to all appearance uttered in Moran's language, are not Moran's words. The fragment could function as an *allegory* ('alien voicing') for the 'Trilogy' itself – a double text, of foreignnesses which travel in-between the two texts, never quite reaching arrival.

The 'foreigner' Molloy who had 'lost the habit of speech' in (one/both/any) language to the point of being unable to identify either himself or the name of his birthplace, is thrown into 'namelessness'. His linguistic experience, of utter divorce between 'things' and 'names' (as if in *Watt* land), written into the words of a foreign language and 'translated' into the native tongue, is also the experience of language(s) as palimpsest: the experience of 'no names but thingless names' and 'all I know is what the words know'.

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[527] The Irish placename Bally also appears in *The Unnamable* where the voice speaking refers to it as [his] unremembered birthplace; in the context, Beckett's irony is obviously directed at the claustrophobic Catholicism of the Republic: 'They also gave me the low-down on God. They told me I depended on him, in the last analysis. They had it on the reliable authority of *his agents at Bally I forget what*, this being the place, according to them, where the inestimable gift of life had been rammed down my gullet. But what they were most determined for me to swallow was my fellow-creatures (*UNN* 298, *my emphases*).

> I had been living so far from words 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. And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate, as we have just seen I think. And so on for all the other things which made merry with my senses. Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, *there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names*. I say that now, but after all what do I know about them, now when 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 in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead*. (*M* 31, *my emphases*)

The passage also voices the death of the world by language, by 'foul names': word and world are at one ('the icy words *hail* down upon me'), the impossibility of the world's salvation is encoded in language that allows for no outlets. The voice speaking is increasingly confounded with language voicing, the impossibility and obligation of going on, with the impossibility of bringing discourse to an end. In this respect, the Unnamable's condition is that of groping between the words of (two) language(s), between languages, him/(it)self an effect of language(s), *a play of pronouns*:

> …someone says you, it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it's a kind of pronoun too, it isn't that either, I'm not that either, let us leave all that, forget about all that, it's not difficult, our concern is with someone, or our concern is with something, now we're getting it, someone or something that is not there, or that is not anywhere, or that is there, here, why not, after all, and our concern is with speaking of that now we've got it, you don't know why, why you must speak of that… (UNN 404, my emphases)

All naming, establishing of relations is an effect of pronouns; the long-standing critical consensus on the 'Trilogy' as a radical (Cartesian) search for some ultimate self-identity, for the self and the conditions of its survival as *cogito* or bare *cogitare*, without *sum*, in a last instance comes down to a play of language and pronouns. In the above passage, from the end of *The Unnamable* preceding the famous closing lines, the 'I' of the voice mutates into an uneasy sequence of generic pronouns ranging from an unidentified, unidentifiable 'you' to a 'we' equally empty of content and of identification with any other entity. Language dictates the assumption of pronouns that, by an effect of language, become identifications based on exclusion/inclusion. The passage in fact offers a thorough deconstruction of all pronouns that come

within its range, where 'we' and 'you' become interchangeable – assigned by 'someone, or something' that cannot exist but *within* language. What the Trilogy's voices, above all the Unnamable's tortuous *voicing on* dispute is a notion that reality, truth and selfhood can exist as unitary and unmediated; and here Beckett's works seem to contest the central assumption of innumerable studies of the novels.[528] According to what became, for a long time, the mainstream interpretation of the *Trilogy*, the ultimate self, the 'I' of the Unnamable is considered an entity, a truth beyond the range of words which language inevitably fails to represent; as such, the Unnamable is betrayed by language, since its 'true self' is defined as some ideal essence prior to, and outside, all temporal and material conditions. Yet this would mean an acceptance of metaphysical notions of essence and essential selfhood that can be abstracted from all relations of multiplicity, time, and discourse. As Derrida shows in 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials'[529] this would ask for language to transcend its own fundamental condition – that is, to transcend its own discursive formulations which can only raise a barrier to knowledge and 'true self' and invent itself anew, in timelessness and spacelessness. What is at stake in the Unnamable's constant failures ('What I speak of, what I speak with, all comes from them'; 'I cannot open my mouth without proclaiming them, and our fellowship, that's what they have me reduced to') is to pursue, in a project of negativity, the *impossibility* of situating the 'self' outside voicing and outside the relation with others, into a holistic silence of the 'beyond' or, the Void – in other words, the impossibility of separating voice from language (were there a language to make it possible to think of a voice unmediated by language). Rather than exposing the failure of language, this project exposes the concept

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[528] See Hugh Kenner's classic studies: *Samuel Beckett: A critical study* (New York: Grove Press, 1961); *A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett*, 1976; Richard N. Coe's 1964 *Beckett* (Edinburgh & London: Olliver & Boyd Publishers); Anthony Cronin's discussion of the *Trilogy*: *A Question of Modernity* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966) and *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: HarperCollins, 1977), as well as such critical volumes as Raymond Federman's *Journey to Chaos* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1965), Michael Robinson's influential Cartesian discussion of the Beckett oeuvre, *The Long Sonata of the Dead* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969). This view surfaces in more recent critical explorations of Beckett's fiction: in Christopher Ricks' *Beckett's Dying Words* (Oxford University Press, 1993) or Peter J. Murphy's *Reconstructing Beckett. Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (University of Toronto Press, 1990).

[529] In: *Languages of the Unsayable. The play of negativity in literature and literary theory,* eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 3-70; cf. Shira Wolosky, 'Samuel Beckett's Figural Evasions', ibid., 165-188.

of pure (un)attainable selfhood as grounded in impossibility – in divorce from language, time and space, for selfhood takes place, comes into being exactly in these, above all in language.[530] As Shira Wolosky argues, Beckett's texts arrive at a reshaping of the notion of selfhood as *else than* unitary essence, unmediated self-identity, and do so through a tortuous *reverse* process of 'defeating all efforts to achieve self-identity' – in line with the general Beckettian *via negativa*. In struggling against language of and as the other, the Unnamable discovers that 'this language is the only venue to himself, that there is no himself without "them"… Trying to extricate himself from all his "predecessors", denouncing them as "vice-existers", in the end only further entangles him, leaving him unable to assert himself except as other.'[531] Already in his first 'stirrings' in criticism, Beckett seems to lay siege to the 'old ego' as site of coherence, unity and orderly certainties: in *Proust* (1931) he points out how the self is a process in time rather than a fixed entity, and his observations seem to map the strategies of writing-as-process that inform his writing:

> The old ego dies hard. Such as it was, a minister of dullness, it was also an agent of security. When it ceases to perform the second function, when it is opposed by a phenomenon that it cannot reduce to the condition of a comfortable and familiar concept … it disappears. (*P* 10)

Seen from this end, both the incipit and the closing lines that restate the heroics of failure can be read as a deconstruction of pronouns functioning as the linguistic basis of conferring, and articulating, identity in relation to an other; there is no belief left in namable self, as *selfhood is linguistic* – grounded in, conferred by, language(s). As it appears in *Text 12* from *Texts*

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[530] Recent criticism, not informed by the approach broadly termed as 'negativity', such as Carla Locatelli's *Unwording the World* also arrive at convergent conclusions: 'By means of progressive subtractions, the early questions regarding space, subjectivity, and basic realities were transformed into epistemological issues, implying a sense of reality as interpretation, and focusing on language in relation to the crucial problem of the "thing-structure" and "proposition-structure" of reality. Beckett does not provide any answers as to the priority of one over the other, nor does he seem interested in finding such answers, but he keeps telling us how implicated we are with both language and "things".' Locatelli compares Beckett's method of subtraction to that of Husserl but, she argues, Beckett's literary investigation develops in a non-transcendental direction which shows the interconnectedness of language and reality: 'he is not looking for an irrefutable foundation of knowledge, but his "unwording" reveals to him the pervasiveness of language, a discovery which is itself charged with an important cognitive significance' (2-3).

[531] *Language mysticism,* 82-83.

for Nothing, an even more radical deconstruction of 'linguistic selfhood' which starts, as it were, where the Unnamable breaks off, the 'I'/self is forever homeless among pronouns: 'Quick quick let us die, without him, as we lived, before it's too late, lest we won't have lived. And this other now, obviously, what's to be said of this latest other, *with his babble of homeless mes and untenanted hims*, this other without number or person whose abandoned being we haunt, nothing. There's a pretty three in one, and *what a one, what a no one*' (*CSP* 150, *my emphases*). The opening of *The Unnamable* questions, with unprecedented aggressiveness, the content of the grammatical 'I' which soon mutates into a 'you' that resists reading as a generic pronoun, only to switch to an 'it' that parodically reiterates, and reverts, the opening lines of the 'I'. The lines contain in grain the project of (*un*)questioning that the novel is to deploy on hundreds of lacerating pages which come full circle in the realization of the ultimate groundlessness of the 'real'/the self, whose existence is inextricably linked to that of language: 'call that going – call that on'.

> 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...
> *It, say it, not knowing what. Perhaps I simply assented at last to an old thing. But I did nothing*. I seem to speak, *it is not I*, about me, *it is not about me*. (*UNN* 291, *my emphases*)

Similarly, the ending, rather than a heroic shedding of all secondary assets, inventions, fiction-palimpsests ('I shall perhaps be delivered of Malone and the other', 299; 'All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone', 303) in a paring down of the self in order to attain that irreducible selfhood which is beyond the limits of expressibility, in order to arrive at a 'bare *cogitare*', and by which it is possible to finally arrive at silence, reiterates the impossibility of conceiving of such categories outside language.[532] Seen in another light,

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[532] One of the central controversies in Beckett criticism has been the Cartesian vs. 'open-ended' reading of the Trilogy's 1st person narrators. The early, Cartesian exegesis has proposed the unity of the three voices as a single, identifiable consciousness/self (which shares its basic pursuits with other Beckett protagonists, e.g. Watt, Estragon), based on the assumption of a sequential unity between the three texts where the Unnamable appears as the final stage of the Cartesian process of self-discovery/self-dismemberment (beginning with the bodily *sum* of Molloy and ending with the Unnamable's abstracted *cogito*):

the returning questions of the Unnamable ('perhaps I simply assented at last to an old thing'; 'perhaps they have said me already') might be read as a voicing not of the 'I' that seeks to situate itself outside language, but as a voicing of language itself which speaks the 'I':

> …it will be *I*, *you* must go on, I can't go on, *you* must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until *they* find me, until *they* say me, strange pain, strange sin, *you* must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps *they* have said *me* already … where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence *you* don't know, *you* must go on, *I* can't go on, *I*'ll go on. (*UNN* 414, *my emphases*)

The site that the speaking voice inhabits, the Unnamable's impossible *'here' vs. 'elsewhere'* becomes discourse itself – a site of production of meaning. In this discourse, by definition deployed in time, in the time of the self's becoming, a possible linguistic ground of the 'I' is indicated by the the last sentence's (logically) impossible implication, where the past (perfect) and future appear as interchangeable – in line with the later Beckett texts' turning of space, event, voice and implied communication increasingly virtual:

> I add this, to be on the safe side. These things I say, and shall say, if I can, are no longer, or are not yet, or never were, or never will be, or if they were, if they are, if they will be, were not here, are not here, will not be here, but elsewhere. But I am here. So I am obliged to add this. I who am here, who cannot speak, cannot think, and who must speak, and therefore perhaps think a little, cannot in relation only to me who am here, to here where I am, but can a little, sufficiently, I don't know how, unimportant, in relation to me who was elsewhere, who shall be elsewhere, and to those places where I was, where I shall be. *But I have never been elsewhere, however uncertain the future.* (*UNN* 301, *my emphasis*)

It is instructive to read the Trilogy's gradual deconstruction of the position of the speaker against the deconstruction of all subject/object positions inscribed in language, as enacted in Beckett's last 'autograph', *Worstward Ho*. The

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see Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (1961); Ruby Cohn (*Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut*, 1962) also reads the three voices as a sequence of progressive decay. Olga Bernal offers a more refined version of the sequence: with her, the Unnamable corresponds to a state of *cogitare* without a fixed personal pronoun (*Langage et fiction dans le roman de Beckett*, 1969). In all these readings, however, language is treated as the equivalent of consciousness/voice; the silence at which the Unnamable aspires is thus equated with a (transcendental) void outside/beyond language. Recent, non-Cartesian readings of Beckett, however (Hill 1990; Rabinovitz 1992; Locatelli 1990; Trezise 1990; Wolosky 1995; Szafraniec 2007), argue that writing in the 'Trilogy' resists all such totalizing assumptions.

'novel' whose periodically reiterated starting point is 'from now say for be missaid' proposes and, in a dialogical space of meaning-production, disempowers all possible subject/object positions of voicing in discourse: 'h[im] – one – it'. The program of 'unknowing/unwording' lanuage, pursued in the late prose, circles all the questions inherent in language as communication – content, representation, the position of the speaker, the position of the addressee – endlessly trying to eliminate all. Yet the texts enact the ineliminability of representation and communication through linguistic traces, *residua*, where language, however impersonal and of however indeterminate origin, forever reproduces the empty space of voice: 'no words *for it whose words*'. This text, 'unlessenable least – best worse' of linguistic reduction goes against language/word *made flesh*: not only are its words disembodied, but it obstinately reproposes the question: does speech need a subject?

> Whose words? Ask in vain. Or not in vain if say no knowing. No saying. No words *for him* whose words. *Him? One*. No words *for one* whose words. *One? It*. No words *for it* whose words. Better worse so. (*NO* 98, *my emphases*)

The 'Trilogy' maps a project of *critique*, rather than *crisis*, of writing *and* reading: not only does its radical *negative* strategy of questioning attack the conventionality of fiction and the doubtful authority in relation to truth of language itself but, reaching beyond the production of metanarratives/parodies, shows in his *a-novels* the very presence of writing, thus essentially changing the nature of literature as communication. As Carla Locatelli writes, 'Beckett's novels have an essentially critical function, and are rooted in a gnoseological paradox: they aspire to meaninglessness beyond inevitable meaning, and they keep saying that they are longing for silence while they are "speaking"... As a consequence, a different attitude is developed towards, and demanded from, the reader: his or her awareness is called upon to witness a production of meaning, the process of its being produced. The understanding of the text is no longer separable from the process of reading, as much as concepts ar not separated from the process in which they are produced.'[533]

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[533] *Unwording the Word*, 69-70.

(un)Wor(l)dward Ho: On Beckett's late prose work

> Less. Less seen. Less seeing. Less seen and seeing when with words than when not. When somehow than when nohow. Stare by words dimmed. Shades dimmed. Void dimmed. Dim dimmed. All there as when no words. As when nohow. Only all dimmed. Till blank again. No words again. Nohow again. Then all undimmed. Stare undimmed. That words had dimmed. (*Worstward Ho*, *NO* 111)

Beckett's late prose texts, starting where *Textes pour rien/Texts for Nothing* end and revisiting and endlessly reworking the themes and texts of the earlier fiction, seem reduction reduced. Their most striking linguistic and stylistic feature is the apparent absence of style (in the sense of Barthes' *le degré zero de l'écriture*), a stripping of language to the bone – a thorough, radical minimalism that goes in the face of all (apparent or hidden) figuration/rhetoric. As against common language use and the so-called 'literary language' charac-terized by a heightened figuration and denser rhetoric, Beckett's texts *de*create literary works that redefine the act of reading; they constitute *events* by virtue of linguistic surfaces that work as blanks, writings without style,[534]

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[534] As early as 1932 in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (ed. Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier, Dublin: Black Cat, 1992) the claim of 'writing without style' appears with a thematic insistence in Beckett's writing: the early, exuberantly metafictional English prose works are haunted by the realization that English (Anglo-Irish) was ill fit at core for his artistic vision, in contrast with French in which 'it was easier to write without style' (*DFMW*, 48). In the 1937 German letter to Axel Kaun where Beckett, tripping in the wake of Mauthner and Schopenhauer, first formulates his poetics of the 'Unwort', a link between 'style' and 'writing in formal English' appears: 'And more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying beyond it. Grammar and style! To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Biedermeier bathing suit or the imperturbability of a gentleman. A mask' (*Letters* I, 518). As Beckett confided in several interviews, 'stylelessness' could be achieved via French; his chosen language appeared to him as a means to 'cut away the excess' and 'strip away the colour', to 'boost the possibility of stylelessness' and 'reach pure communication': see Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 357, 257. Such 'excess' and 'colour' seem to have been stylistic flaws that Beckett associated with the stylized language and the 'Anglo-Irish exuberance and automatisms' (Knowlson 357) characteristic of Revivalist writers. For a recent discussion of Beckett's resistance to the legacy of the Revival, as well as the multifaceted incorporation of the process of translation into his writing – which also allows for an echoing of the cultural anxieties regarding questions of language/style in Ireland in the aftermath of the Revival – see Emilie Morin, 'Translation as Principle of Composition', in *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness*, 55-95.

permanently striving towards pure denotation, the *perfected present* of writing. This writing permanently *undoes* itself, in the manner of Bram van Velde's painting as conceived by Beckett in the *Three Dialogues*, violently exposing its 'egregious gaps'[535]– akin to the pauses that tear up the musical texture of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, according to the 1938 letter to Axel Kaun: 'Is there any reason why that terrifyingly arbitrary materiality of the word surface should not be dissolved, as for example the sound surface of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is devoured by huge black pauses, so that for pages on end we cannot perceive it as other than a dizzying path of sounds connecting unfathomable chasms of silence?'[536] Self-reduction, responsible for the perpetuation of the work's 'I'll go on', is made into the very subject and motivation of the texts that, according to Derrida, 'make the limits of our language tremble.'[537]

'So again and again': writing progressive self-reductions

The extent to which self-reduction becomes the subject of these writings is best exemplified by the programmatic revisiting, rewriting, ghosting of the earlier texts, which yields a dense network of intra-intertextual relationships in the late work.[538] This (meta)thematization of the text undoing, revoking

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[535] I borrow the term of H. Porter Abbott, as discussed in his essay 'Narrative', in *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett Studies*, ed. Lois Oppenheim (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 7-29.

[536] *Letters I*, 518-19. For a discussion of Beckett's late prose in terms of musical pauses and active fragmentation see Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction in Different Words*, 121-140.

[537] 'This Strange Institution Called Literature: An Interview with Jacques Derrida', in *Jacques Derrida: Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 33-76. In the same interview Derrida justifies his own silence on Beckett on grounds that he feels 'both too close and too distant' to the author to be able to 'respond' to his writing – although the constant preoccupations of his work on the one hand and, on the other hand, his identification of writing with a desire for mastery and, consequently, his claim for resisting this mastery by 'affranchising oneself – in every field where law can lay down the law' in the 'institutionless institution' called literature, in the same interview (36, 41), ring with an all too perceptible resonance of Beckett. For a comprehensive treatment of Beckett and/in Derrida see Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature*.

[538] I borrow the term coined by Brian Fitch, 'Just Between Texts: Intra-Intertextuality', in *The Narcissistic Text: A Reading of Camus' Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 89-108; *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 23-37. Among the seminal investigations of the writing of new texts out of, or folding upon earlier texts, as well as an ever more pronounced intra-intertextual communication across Beckett's theatre and prose works, Susan Brienza's work needs to be mentioned: *Samuel Beckett's new worlds: style in metafiction* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

and, in the event, reestablishing the prior texts tends to become 'a rhetorical turn in itself, generating new substance out of opposition made of resistance, where the tools of resistance become the thing itself.'[539] In this extended intra-intertext, one text may generate the other (the imaginary space of *Imagination Dead Imagine,* 1965, is rewritten into *Ping,* 1966) or may, with a strongly self-referential gesture, 'erase' the other; strategic inversions between works may undo the prior(itized) text and, in the light of this undoing, rewrite the new texts. *Enough* (1965) opens with a passage that 'annuls' the prior texts, but does so with a thorough revocation of any position of authority it might seem to claim:

> *All that goes before forget*. Too much at a time is too much. That gives the pen time to note … When the pen stops I go on. Sometimes it refuses. When it refuses I go on. Too much silence is too much. Or it's my voice too weak at times. The one that comes out of me. So much for the art and craft. (*CSP* 186)

While the first sentence seems to confer on the text a status of priority over all the previous writing, stating its definitive character, the passage revokes all such implications by a dismissal of the text/voice as a source of authority/ meaning – the text appearing, rather, as a continuous becoming whose source is located beyond the control of the voice speaking: 'so much for the art and craft'. At the same time, the text's radical indeterminacy and general grammatical brokenness allows for contending readings of 'forget' (forgot/forgotten), turning 'all that goes before' into both the subject and the object of the act of forgetting, playing on a text that thematizes the failure to remember its own pre-texts.

A reverse movement, of one text generating the other, is at work in the sequence *All Strange Away* (1963-64) – *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965) – *Ping* (1966): the title of the second is the opening of the first, while the second's dialogic opening takes up the situation of the impossible 'imagination dead' where the previous text leaves it off:

> Imagination dead imagine. A place, that again. Never another question. A place, then someone in it, that again. Crawl out of the frowsy deathbed and drag it to a place to die in. (*All Strange Away*, *CSP* 169)
> No trace anywhere of life, you say, pah, no difficulty there, imagination not yet dead, yes, dead, good, imagination dead imagine. Islands, waters, azure, verdure,

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[539] Andrew Renton, 'Disabled Figures. From the Residua to Stirrings Still', in *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*, ed. John Pilling, 169.

> one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit. Till all white in the whiteness of the rotunda. (*Imagination Dead Imagine*, *CSP* 182)

Similarly, the closing image of *Imagination Dead Imagine*, of a 'white speck lost in whiteness', is the starting point for *Ping*: 'All known all white bare white body fixed one yard legs joined like sewn' (*CSP* 193) – as though the exhortation of *The Unnamable*, to *go on*, were gradually transformed into a return to/on the text, to the extent that the motivation behind the late texts, indeed their subject if one may speak of a subject in the case of these *post-narrative* (or, with Porter Abbott's term, *narratricidal*) texts is, how to keep *re*writing.[540]

 This movement towards an ever more pronounced self-referential structure, intra-intertextual communication and continuous self-rewriting, culminating in the three 'novels' of the *Stirrings Still* trilogy – discussed by criticism since the late eighties[541] – produces texts almost entirely made up of echoes, reiterations from the previous prose and drama work. These texts, always underways to becoming a 'sculptural object', of which the published version is but a temporary solidification, deal not with a sought-for objectivity of language but with an '*objecthood* of language'; the ultimate stage in such 'solidification' is that represented by *Worstward Ho*, 'untranslatable' autograph.[542] Both the *Stirrings Still* and the *Nohow On* 'trilogies' seem reproposed, reiterated attempts against (the same) content, converging in their endlessly approached moment before absolute stillness. They reach a non-narrative closure of near-stasis from where it becomes ever more problematic for writing to perpetuate itself:

> Till so many strokes and cries since he was last seen that perhaps he would not be seen again. Then so many cries since the strokes were last heard that perhaps

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[540] Cf. H. Porter Abbott, 'Narratricide: Samuel Beckett as autographer', in: *Romance Studies* 11 (Winter 1987), 35-46. That Beckett's late prose works are to be read in terms of an ever denser self-referential structure and a continuous rewriting of earlier texts is an opinion almost generally shared by recent Beckett criticism; a significant contribution to reading the last 'trilogies', as indicated in the title, is Charles Krance's study, '*Worstward Ho* and on-words: writing to(wards) the point', in *Rethinking Beckett: a collection of critical essays*, eds. Lance St John Butler & Robin J. Davis (London: Macmillan, 1990).

[541] See Susan Brienza, *Samuel Beckett's new worlds: style in metafiction*; Linda Ben-Zvi, *Samuel Beckett* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985) etc. Andrew Renton ('Disabled Figures: From the Residua to Stirrings Still', *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 167-183) discusses, for instance, the texts of the *Stirrings Still* trilogy in its manifold intra-intertextual crossovers with Beckett's drama starting with *Endgame* through *A piece of monologue* to *Ohio Impromptu*.

[542] Andrew Renton, 'Disabled Figures', 170.

they would not be heard again. Then such silence since the cries were last heard that perhaps even they would not be heard again. Perhaps thus the end. Unless no more than a mere lull. Then all as before. The strokes and cries as before and he as before now there now gone now there again now gone again. Then the lull again. Then all as before again. So again and again. And patience till the one true end to time and grief and self and second self his own. (1, *CSP* 261)

…So on unknowing and no end in sight. Unknowing and what is more no wish to know nor indeed any wish of any kind nor therefore any sorrow save that he would have wished the strokes to cease and the cries for good and was sorry that they did not. The strokes now faint now clear as if carried by the wind but not a breath and the cries now faint now clear. (2, *CSP* 263)

…Such and much more such the hubbub in his mind so-called till nothing left from deep within but only ever fainter oh to end. No matter how no matter where. Time and grief and self so-called. Oh all to end. (3, *CSP* 265)

Closure, strongly asserted in all three texts, in fact foregrounds the fact that all ending is hypothetical, virtual only; ending, as thematized in *The Trilogy* already, will always fall beyond the confines of the text: 'oh to end' itself is an enunciation heard/read 'only ever fainter'; the end, as heralded by these texts, is forever entrapped in the domain of 'then all as before again'. The three texts, variations on the same impossible ending, in fact produce an unending, unendable text where refusal to progress, the attempt at absolute stasis, turn the writing into an endlessly self-generating and self-reading text on (*so-called*) ending.

'In a word all the summits': Strategies of defiguration

The language of these late prose works, obstinately refusing figuration through complex strategies of apotropism, is continuously reduced to the physical, purely denotative sense – an 'utterly bare'use of words, a language use displaying a 'hidden literality' and termed 'positivist' by Stanley Cavell, in its wish to escape connotation, rhetoric, the non-cognitive as well as 'awkward memories of ordinary language'.[543] A turning of all figuration into the strictest physical, spatial terms is one of the most striking qualities of the texts of the *Fizzles*, as Shira Wolosky points out. *Defiguring* (with Beckett's term, *voiding*) a long tradition of journey/quest-narratives (a deconstruction of which is already proposed in the anti-picaresque narrative of *Murphy*), *Fizzle 1* maps the tortuous progress of an unidentified human figure in a closed space which resembles an underground tunnel, reducing the

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[543] 'Ending the Waiting Game', in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1969), 117-37.

action and all its temporal implications to a spatial, sequential movement, to the *plotting* of a course through space. The time adverbials 'now, again, yet, until, at last, yet again' measure minimal *spatial* relations, 'exploring just how curtailed and restricted the meanings of such terms can become when allowed to function only within the limits of spatial context.'[544] The overview of this *unworded* journey cuts off almost aggressively all the moral, emotional, religious, psychological implications of progress (becoming), paring down all traditional metaphysical associations to the point that personal 'history'/progress becomes a series of shifts, gropings in space:

> In any case little by little *his history takes shape*, with if not yet exactly its good days and bad, at least studded with occasions passing rightly or wrongly *for outstanding*, such as the straitest narrow, the loudest fall, the most lingering collapse, the steepest descent, the greatest number of successive turns the same way, the greatest fatigue, the longest rest, the longest – aside from the sound of the body on its way – silence. Ah yes, and the most rewarding passage *of the hands, on the one hand*, the feet, *on the other*, over all those parts of the body within their reach. And the sweetest wall lick. *In a word all the summits*. Then other summits, hardly less elevated, such as a shock so rude that it rivalled the rudest of all. (*CSP* 227-228, *my emphases*)

The passage *un*words such words as 'good, bad, outstanding, straitest narrow, fall, collapse, steepest descent' which lose all sense but that of physical dimension/ direction; stripped of all figurative overtones, 'all the summits' becomes an enlisting of shifts of position. This overt denial of figuration creates an absence, a transgression of normal linguistic implications/expectations which does not so much eliminate as *call into being by erasing* such expectations. At the same time, the de-figuration performed by the text returns language to the 'place' where figuration 'takes place' – that is, it brings about a re-figuration which is in its own way representational. The effect of scrupulous paring down rests to no little extent on the traces, the residua of figuration that cannot be eliminated, allusion, cultural encoding which, in a context that refuses any sense but the strictest literal meaning, give the peculiar linguistic humour of these texts: 'Beckett's language is literal because it defeats expected literary figures that it inevitably recalls. It is a humour of absences, of structures erased yet still shaping the utterance that has displaced them.'[545] Such humour may be sensed in the resonance of certain clichés, turns-of-phrase, almost in spite of the text's reductions: in the text above, for instance, in the

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[544] Shira Wolosky, *Language Mysticism*, 52.
[545] Ibid., 53.

juxtaposition of the literal and figurative use of 'hand' ('on the one hand'). Such a residual dead metaphor throws an ironic light on the (explicitly) blind crawling of the character:

> For he might well have succeeded, in the end, up to a point, which would have brightened things up for him, nothing like a ray of light, from time to time, to brighten things up for one. *And all may yet grow light*, at any moment, first dimly and then – how can one say? – then more and more, till all is flooded with light, the way, the ground, the walls, the vault, *without his being one whit the wiser* ... The heart? No complaints. It's going again, enough *to see him through*. (*CSP* 225, *my emphases*)

Such humour, arising from linguistic expectations frustrated and underlined at the same time, constantly turning attention to the way language is conceived of/ meaning is built, is at work already in the 'Trilogy' and *Texts for Nothing*, for instance in the Unnamable's sizing up [his] whereabouts: 'From centre to circumference in any case *it is a far cry* and I may well be situated somewhere between the two' (*UNN* 295) – a sentence that, despite its striving to reduce all sense to the literal (if such a statement is possible at all in the context of *The Unnamable*), foregrounds the nature of the speaker, of *mere voice*. Pure denotation exposes and undermines the appeal to reference as the controlling principle of language use: if our world is defined by the use of discourse, then Beckett's late prose anatomizes discourse as the condition of living in the world/of making sense of the world. The striving of writing against figuration reveals that figuration occurs despite itself, is built in the structure of language:

> Closed place. All needed to be known for say is known. There is nothing but what is said. Beyond what is said there is nothing. What goes on in the arena is not said. Did it need to be known it would be. No interest. Not for imagining. (*F5*, *CSP* 236)

Another aspect of the anti-representational stance of the late prose, closely linked to the more general context of de-figurative devices, is found in the, strangely converging, strategy of making language increasingly mathematical, in the reduction of representation to mathematical formulae and quantities.[546]

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[546] This pervasive trait of both the prose and (late) theatre texts is inextricably linked to the, more general, literalism of the Beckett canon. The mathematical reductions and use of mathematical figures and formulae is congruent with the physical reductions redefining reality, by a programmatic elimination of all secondary qualities, in Cartesian-Newtonian thought – a stable subtext of Beckett's early English fiction, *Murphy* and (especially) *Watt*. These novels, as well as the late short prose where all activity is

While this procedure is already playfully proposed in *Murphy* – in the inventory of Celia's body, or in the movements of the chess game between Murphy and Mr Endon – it comes into its own with *Watt* and, later, *Molloy* where, other than a mere metafictional game, fiction makes an attempt at exhaustively comprehending the 'real'/language through turning everything into endless lists of permutations and combinations: of the dogs systematically starved to eat the rests of Knott's dinner, or Molloy's sucking stones. The late prose works keep paring down and revisiting fictional spaces and shards of narrative (physical movement), turning these to pure (mathematical) extension, geo-metrical dimension. In parallel with his pursuits in the works for the theatre (ranging from *Film*, through the 'dramaticule' *Come and Go* and the television play *...but the clouds...*, to the pure mathematical abstraction of *Quad*), the short prose eliminates everything but quantitative measure – number, figure, magnitude, duration, extension. In *All Strange Away* space is presented in mathematical figures: 'Five foot square, six high, no way in, none out, try for him there' (*CSP* 169), continuing in the mathematization of bodily positions and sexual intercourse. Mathematics takes over in the radically reified, de-realized world, of 'that white speck lost in whiteness', in *Imagination Dead Imagine* and *Ping*:

> Till all white in the whiteness of the rotunda. No way in, go in, measure. Diameter three feet, three feet from ground to summit of the vault. Two diameters at right angles AB CD divide the white ground into two semicircles ACB BDA. Lying on the ground two white bodies, each in its semicircle. (*CSP* 182)
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> Light heat white floor one square yard never seen. White walls one yard by two white ceiling one square yard never seen. Bare white body fixed only the eyes only just. Traces blurs light grey almost white on white. Hands hanging palms front white feet heels together right angle. (*CSP* 193)

This move into mathematical reduction eerily corresponds to the reductions of literalist language: the depiction of plots by carefully calculated math-ematical/geometrical configurations, lists etc., eliminates from the text all emotional experience, rendering (or rather, bracketing) the ineffable through placement/duration – in this respect, harking back to the (similarly Cartesian-minded) exhaustive pseudo-scientific cataloguing of the 'real' in Joyce's 'Ithaca' which manages to highlight emotion through its ostentatious absence.

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systematically reduced to pure (mathematical, geometrical) extension/dimension, have long been exhaustively discussed as forging a language for reproducing the mechanistic world of Cartesian philosophy. For a treatment of Beckett's mathematization of language in the context of de-figuration see Wolosky, *Language Mysticism*, 51-89.

This radical objectifying operates through mathematics and mathematical discourse, which comprises the nonphysical and the nonsensible only, thus situating itself on the 'metaphysical' pole of figuration, transferring meaning to a purely figural plane. The opposite movement, of defiguration, through delimiting meaning to the strictly literal, eliminates the possibility of a figural language/reading.[547]

From 'nohow' to 'nohow on': writing remainders

Beckett's (late) writing comes as close as literature has ever come to eradicate the figural – yet its existence, its 'for to end yet again' is made possible by the very fact that figuration, inherent in language, resists its ondoing, occurring almost despite itself. The work is founded on an impossibility: in the 'obligation to express', the ultimate obligation to figuration (*Three Dialogues*), coupled with the obligation to undo figuration, to resist it in/through writing – this being extensively thematized in the recurring placement of narrative under the sign of ever-deferred ending ('yet again') and ever-deferred beginning. Anti-figuration becomes a figuration in itself; the work does not merely rhetoricize the aporia generated within itself, but in acknowledging that process, struggles against the solidification, or reification, of metaphor.'[548]

A text such as *Imagination Dead Imagine* does not depict, but produces its world as it 'speaks'.[549] Starting with *Texts for Nothing*, we can identify a movement from representation to the representation of (linguistic) representation. Beckett's 'hermeneutics of experience'[550] proceeds by an ongoing unwording of narrative conventions, images, structures and even of (one's own) texts; by so doing, it probes into the elementary structure of our inter-

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[547] Shira Woloskydiscusses Beckett's mathematization of language in terms of Derrida's deconstruction of the structure of metaphor, as the transposition into the realm of the nonsensible of the supposedly sensible, a transposition which rests on the distinction between the sensible and non-sensible as evoked by the terms *literal* and *figural*. Mathematics, in the order of (essentially metaphysical) Western thinking, is seen to both evade and fulfill metaphoric transfer, in its attempt to assert the nonsensible ('metaphysical') pole of figuration only – thus it both completes and surpasses metaphoric structure, accomplishing the transfer of meaning to a purely figural plane (61-64). Cf. Jacques Derrida, 'White Mythologies', in *Margins of Philosophy*, translation and notes by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207-272.

[548] Andrew Renton, 'From the *Residua* to *Stirrings Still'*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 168.

[549] Susan Brienza, '"Imagination dead imagine": The microcosm of the mind', in *Journal of Beckett Studies* 8 (Autumn 1982), 59-74.

[550] Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the Word*, passim.

pretation/construction of reality – our basic mode of being in the world. In the short prose texts and the late 'novels' the (apparent) content of representation is always only given in order to be exceeded by reduction, and 'the destructurization of cognitive patterns becomes a successive cognitive pattern, in incessant dynamism'.[551] The Beckett canon shows a trajectory from negation to subtraction, from silence to 'unsaying', from 'over' to '*un*over'/ 'not–yet–again'. Beckett's work is intrinsically open: 'his communicative strategies question communication as they enact it; his subtractions transform words into echoes, and echoes into pure sound, still speaking; his endless combinations corrode the cultural marking of experience, and his impotence shows ineliminable creativity.'[552]

The opening sentence of *Imagination Dead Imagine* in many ways foreshadows the turning of writing into a dialogical space, towards the dramatization of writing – the realization that writing/ representation is an *event* which produces its world as it speaks: 'No trace anywhere of life, *you say, pah*, no difficulty there, imagination not dead yet, *yes, dead, good*, imagination dead imagine' (*CSP* 182, *my emphasis*). In the *Nohow On* trilogy this dialogic, communicative *event*-nature of writing proposes a reassessment of language/representation as *mis*saying: from *Ill Seen Ill Said* to *Worstward Ho,* a *Sprachgeworfenheit*, a Heideggerian being-thrown-into-language as inescapable condition is compulsively (re)enacted, where the second novel's development towards an unreachable degree zero of representation restates the fact that speech/representation cannot be eliminated, simultaneously with the fact that representation is an event, the mechanism of our being in the world. Language and its use are de-mistyfied, all saying exposed as *mis*saying, representation shown as a chain of semiosis – yet, paradoxically, it is missaying only that allows for a never-ending (negative) perfection of failure: 'Fail again. Fail better.'[553] Accordingly, Beckett's critical epistemology offers a re-evaluation of speech where the linguistic system is played off against communication,

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[551] Ibid., 29.

[552] Ibid.

[553] The 'progress' of better(ing) failure is brought into play by the very title of *Nohow On*/ *Worstward Ho:* the textual trope of progress, grounded in 19th century language of *combat*, harks back to both (19th-century) Christian hymnology ('Onwards, Christian soldiers!') and the ideal of expansion inherent in the great 19th-century exploration sagas. The title itself is a parodic turning inside out of Charles Kingsley's emblematic poem of the Westward course of Victorian Britain, *Westward Ho!* (1855), itself taking up the title of John Webster and Thomas Dekker's *Westward Hoe* (1607). See Porter Abbott, "The Trope of Onwardness", in: *Beckett Writing Beckett*, 32-42.

reference against representation. What is made visible is the event of communication, a communication enacted in an impersonal language, exposing inescapable representation:

> On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.
> Say for be said. Missaid. From now say for be missaid.
> Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A place. For the body. To be in. Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out. No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still...
> It stands. What? Yes. Say it stands. Had to up in the end and stand. Say bones. No bones but say bones. Say ground. No ground but say ground. So as to say pain. No mind and pain? Say yes that the bones may pain till no choice but stand. Somehow up and stand. Or better worse remain. (*Worstward Ho*, *NO* 89-90)

Worstward Ho is, in the Beckett canon, the text of irreducible reductions – of a 'meremost minimum' of missaying. This narratricidal text (H. Porter Abbott) thematizes processes of reduction at work. If John Pilling, as early as 1982, defined the first 'novel' of the *Nohow On* trilogy, *Company/Compagnie*, as a palimpsest of compressions,[554] then the label is all the more fitting for the last prose text Beckett produced in his lifetime – a palimpsest resulting from extreme compression, but also because it enacts communication, positioning an undefinable 'other' in the successive withdrawals of its enunciations. The opening line – starting, significantly, with the word that enacts the non-closure ending of *The Unnamable*, and which undoes any sense of an ending in *Worstward Ho* as well ('Said nohow on.') – infers by its double withdrawal how any entity/condition, proposed as self-standing, independent (of human presence/ will) is linked to, in as far as mediated by, human perception/ linguistic interpretation ('Say on'). In a string of sentences cut back to a grammatical 'meremost minimum' (which make any filling-in of the subject position impossible) the communicative mechanics of the world is enacted: if the 'On' provides a (hypothetical non-human, non-mediated) background to perception/mediation, this exists/can be hypothesized precisely in the communicative movement of 'Say on'. The 'say', the interpretive, perceptive way of being in the world is at one with *being* in the world ('on'); by the mechanics of communication, the articulation of this interpretive way of being-in-the-world presupposes the interpreter's secondary status in relation to language in which all such position is articulated ('*be said* on'). Being can be represented, articulated only as one with perception and specifically as

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[554] John Pilling, 'Review Article: *Company* by Samuel Beckett'. In: *Journal of Beckett Studies* 7 (Spring 1982), 127-31.

one with linguistic perception, to which no subject position can be attached. 'Say' at the same time functions as the basic enunciation, enactment of conjuring up, imagining, fictionalizing – cf. 'say a body', 'say bones...say ground' or, 'imagination dead *imagine*', an impossible imaginative act which states the going on of imagination in the moment of decreeing its death.

This double thematization of being-in-language is referred to a progress from 'somehow' to 'nohow', a 'nohow' which is itself positioned as an effect of language: 'said nohow on'. The condition of 'nohow on' can only be imagined, turned into language, it remains outside the range of experience/of the known. '*Said* nohow on', with which the novel comes full circle, functions as a double withdrawal: on the one hand, 'nohow' can be perceived only inasmuch as encoded in language, 'said nohow'; on the other hand, the very linguistic encodedness of 'nohow *on*' defeats inasmuch as it erases/contradicts the sense of an ending. The impossibility of saying a referential 'nohow' is underlined throughout the novel, connoting it as false (*mis*said nohow), for it hides the position of *being* without which it is impossible to say it; the denotative negation in 'nohow' conceals the assertive position of *being* from which it is said. As an effect of repetition, a hiatus between the 'subject' and predicate of sentences is illuminated, pointing at the impossibility of absolute retraction of what has been uttered: the series of retractions produce a movement of communication, enunciation. Repetition is a prime procedure in these texts for showing semantic, referential instability, thus it constitutes an outlet for semiosis, for excess of language.

What is even more striking in this text is its openness, its dialogic structure: the orientation of the sentences, their conative function plays a more important role than their denotative message; the 'what' of the information conveyed becomes secondary to the 'how' of communication, bound to the subjective positions of addresser and addressee, even if these are inscribed in a text which appears as scrupulously impersonal. The text, while unwording/ 'unknowing' language to its attainable extreme, nevertheless attests to the presence of residua of communication – of an addressee. The presence of this addressee, indefinite and unlocalized as 'it' may be, is nevertheless inscribed in each one of the successive 'better failures', experiences in reduction of narrative content, authorial authority:

> It stands. What? Yes. *Say* it stands. Had to up in the end and stand. *Say* bones. *No bones but say bones.* Say ground. No ground but say ground. *So as to say pain.*

Image, narrative is evoked, enacted and cancelled in an ongoing dialogic relation; image literally takes shape, is *embodied* in/through communication, in a text which obstinately thematizes its constituent basis, the presupposition of an addressee. The text is thus permanently on the way *on*, from a source that cannot be established and that is constantly disempowered, to an equally undefinable destination, in a permanent not-yet-again of arrival, striving for an embodiment which results in a paring down of image / in disembodiment – to a textual knowing as *unknowing*. The fragment stands for the strength of linguistic creation also in charting the process by which the signifier defers the signified, creating a play of meaning. The reoccurrence of the signifier ('stand') accounts for its semantic transformations and thus for the expression of difference: semantic variation produces by-plays of meaning ('stand' is progressively transformed into 'bear'/'remain'); referential variation, similarly, produces play of meaning ('Say bones. No bones but *say bones*') and a combinatory, entirely narrative-textual variation ('Say yes that the bones may pain till no choice but stand'). In this way, from what seems as a thorough linguistic reduction/erasure (which, however, is never turned into a negation of language, rather, into a reaffirmation of the event of communication) a fertile play, multiplication of meaning emerges through the progressive discrepancy between (textual/narative) sign and (textual) referent, and the consequent highlighting of the relation of contextual elements with *co-textual* ones. The text exposes its apparent semantic contradictions and by this act makes its reader aware of its textual enunciations – fictional (pseudo-referents) and co-textual (of the textual space). Out of a *refusal* of absolute negation a differentiation of meaning issues: '...the fact that the "said" and the "saying" are played off one against the other, as in the example above, points to a relevant epistemic reciprocity and to a significant *différance*. In this light, representation must be implied as an event, rather than as an analogy, and language as a communicative act, rather than as a system. In fact, in *Worstward Ho* Beckett often substitutes diegetical equivalents with mimetic repetitions, so that his new conception of language reveals both an uncompromising rejection of metaphysics and an equally strong interest in an *on*going reality, perceived and perceivable as *difference*.'[555]

> Know better now. Unknow better now. Know only no out of. No knowing how know only no out of... No place but the one. None but the one whence none.

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[555] Locatelli, *Unwording the Word*, 241.

> Whence never once in. Somehow in. Beyondless. Thenceless there. Thitherless there. Thenceless thitherless there. (*NO* 92)

The *un*knowing which the text seeks to bring into being, like absolute defiguration of language, is impossible ('Know nothing *no*'; 'No future in this. *Alas yes*', *NO* 91). The attempts to eliminate knowledge, the known from words bring about a self-renewing *linear* narrative, an onward direction of writing beginning again and again, circling the value of progressive approximations ('Fail again. Fail *better*'). The linguistic re-*present*ation of a space that would be merely 'there', with the exclusion of all allusions, suggestions of direction must proceed through a 'backward' movement in language ('Back is on. Somehow on... *Back for somehow on*', 109), through a progress of stripping 'place' of narrative, of movement 'in'/'out of'. However, space can only be defined in its relations, through movement: the hypothesized space of stasis reenacts – in the very elimination of directions, in the act of reduction – what it is seeking to void itself of: that '*thence*less *thither*less there'. The suppression of progress becomes a linear, progressive narrative by excellence about the very impossibility of such suppression. The text shows how *voided* words, terms act as figurations that come closest to accomodating the void; however, since the void cannot be represented, these terms show the *presence* of something that by definition negates the qualities pertaining to the void. The text thus turns into a negative way of pointing at the void, while itself is the sum of traces, residua of this un-representable void: 'It is as though the text can only retain a series of signifiers which have strayed from conventional usage. These terms themselves have been voided, in place of the unavoidable scene described. In other words, this text's attempt to describe nothing generates, in spite of its primary intention, *precisely this text*.'[556]

Beckett's late prose, especially the *Stirrings Still* and *Nohow On* 'trilogies', seem to go in the face of linguistic representation, working against the nature of 'normal' language use by disrupting linguistic expectations – stable reference, figuration, allusion. In this these texts radically foreignize language, making it visible *as* language/enunciation. Strangely, the effect of the rigurous reductions/erasures is a peculiar excess of language: a semiosis where the signifier undergoes semantic, referential and thematic variation. Extreme paring down of language produces an epiphany of language based on the undoing

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[556] Andrew Renton, "Disabled Figures: From the Residua to Stirrings Still", in *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Beckett*, 175.

of the distinction between linguistic figure of communicative phenomenon: the radically open, self-baring self-reflective text is (in) the event reading, even if the reading is not (in) the text.[557]

The event of communication/writing inscribed on the text could best be exemplified by the short piece *neither* (1976) which, by its indeterminacy both of genre and voice (routinely reproduced with short line breaks suggestive of poetry, was intended by the publisher John Calder to be included in the *Collected Poems* but for Beckett's resistance who considered it a prose work) stands for Beckett's writing on the threshold – between poetry and prose, between voices, between languages, between 'impenetrable self' and 'impenetrable unself', (ill) seeing and (mis)saying, in a state of perpetually delayed arrival:

> [*neither*]
>
> to and fro in shadow from inner to outershadow
> from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself by way of neither
> as between two lit refuges whose doors once neared gently close, once turned
> away from gently part again
> beckoned back and forth and turned away
> heedless of the way, intent on the one gleam or the other
> unheard footfalls only sound
> till at last halt for good, absent for good from self and other
> then no sound
> then gently light unfading on that unheeded neither
> unspeakable home
>
> (*CSP* 258)

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[557] Cf. Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the World*, 72-74, 266; Asja Szafraniec, *Beckett, Derrida, and the Event of Literature*, 109-117.