Towards a literature of the unword: a study of the aesthetic quest of Samuel Beckett.

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TOWARDS A LITERATURE OF THE UNWORD:
A STUDY OF THE AESTHETIC QUEST
OF SAMUEL BECKETT

BY

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ABSTRACT

The novels of Samuel Beckett constitute a quest on his part; a quest for a new form of literature, which he refers to as a "literature of the Unword." The quest involves a reduction of all that is "literature" in the traditional sense of that word (plot, characterization, unity), into a literature that expresses its own impossibility of expression. Samuel Beckett's quest is essentially a via negativa -- a search for an art form that affirms itself in the act of negating itself.

The aesthetic quest can be traced in the individual novels to be studied in this paper: Murphy, Watt and The Unnamable. Each of these novels has as its thematic motif, a quest which, either directly or indirectly, bears some relation to Beckett's own quest. Thus, the novels will be studied, not only on their own terms, but in their relationship to the stages of Beckett's literary aesthetic.

Chapter I opens with a discussion of Beckett's small body of criticism that is essential to any study of his works: Proust and Three Dialogues. In Proust, Beckett, although writing about Proust's novels, provides important thematic information concerning his novels and aesthetic quest. He discusses the relationship of Time (memory and habit) to the Self and to Art. In Proust, Beckett reveals his contempt for a naturalistic and realistic fiction.
which represents the world as essentially one containing order and meaning. The artistic work, for Beckett, must depict the world as it is bereft of reason and meaning. In Proust, Beckett speaks of the only true reality as that of the artist's own consciousness. The rest is chaos. Art is the means with which the artist discovers and knows himself. In Three Dialogues, Beckett goes further in his discussion of literary form in relation to the outside world. The world is nothing; there is no world to be expressed, and the self, essentially a nothing, cannot be expressed either. Language, relations of cause and effect and psychology are abandoned. The only reality is the Self which is a Naught, and which cannot be known. Art, according to Beckett, as self-knowledge, should express the inability to know as well as the inability to express.

Beckett's main aesthetic is one of failure. The second part, Murphy, deals with the quest motif present in all Beckett's works. Each quest generates and is built upon opposites. In Murphy, the opposites are body and mind. Murphy's quest is essentially a withdrawal from his body into the inner world of his own consciousness. The quest of Murphy is analogous to Beckett's art form that withdraws from depicting the outside world in the ways fiction has traditionally done.

Chapter II deals with Beckett's second novel, Watt. In Watt, the quest is essentially epistemological -- the relations between the self and the world in terms of language, causal laws and logic are invalidated. The novel,
in terms of Beckett's quest embodies the theme of the artist's impotence to express the inexpressible, the Naught.

Chapter III concludes the study of the quest motif with a discussion of *The Unnameable*. In *The Unnameable*, the epistemological and aesthetic quests merge. The Unnameable's quest is one of self-knowledge and is complicated by the fact that for Beckett, the Self is a Naught or Void. Art as self-expression consists in expressing the inexpressible. The Unnameable's quest is a failure and in its failure embodies Beckett's own view of literature dealing with the impossibility of its own expression. *The Unnameable* is the culmination of Beckett's quest and represents a literature of the Unword.
INTRODUCTION

A close examination of Samuel Beckett's novels from Murphy to The Unnameable shows that his fiction as a whole constitutes a quest. The goal of this quest is given in a letter he wrote to his friend, Axel Kaun, in 1937. In this letter, Beckett writes about a "literature of the Unword" and further remarks: "Grammar and Style . . . appear to me to have become obsolete." These remarks reveal a distrust of the materials of the creative process -- language and form. In fact, Beckett's desire for a "literature of the Unword" implies that his ultimate goal as a writer lies in a renunciation of the artistic enterprise and absolute silence. This is the paradoxical and essential nature of the quest. Needless to say, it is doomed to fail from the start. However, Beckett has clung faithfully throughout his life to this aesthetic ideal. Each work can be seen as a stage for a new form of the novel.

The works to be studied in this thesis are Murphy, Watt, and The Unnameable. They are reflective of

1 As quoted by Laurence Harvey in Samuel Beckett on Life, Art and Criticism, Modern Language Notes, LXX (December 1965), p54.


Beckett's creative evolution and distrust of the traditional art form and show the gradual disintegration of form and content which is essential to his aesthetic.

Furthermore, each of these novels has, as its basis thematic motif, a quest. However, the quest is not the usual one met with in such a work as Homer's Odyssey. Traditionally, the quest involves the hero making a long journey through countries, or a country, in search of a goal. Before attaining the goal, the quester undergoes several adventures. In Beckett's works, the quest is actually an anti-quest. The quest consists of the major character moving away from the outside world into the inner world of the mind. The action is actually a non-action. For the sake of convention, however, I have used the word "quest" throughout. The quest in the individual works will be discussed and related to the form of the novel. Each of the novels will be dealt with separately and in distinct chapters.

Previous to the discussion of these novels, it is necessary, I believe, to discuss Beckett's small work of criticism Proust/Three Dialogues. The work is essential to any study of Beckett's work since he outlines, in greater detail, his view of Art and discusses the themes of Time and the Self that are recurrent throughout his work. Thus, the first chapter of this thesis will include a discussion of Proust/Three Dialogues and Murphy, the second will deal with Watt, and the last will deal with The Unnameable.

5 Samuel Beckett, Proust/Three Dialogues (London, 1965). All quotations are from this edition. To avoid confusion with Beckett's other works, the page numbers will be preceded by PTD.
CHAPTER I

Proust and Murphy

Proust

Samuel Beckett has been particularly reticent concerning his work that has spanned some thirty years. He has not gone out of his way to help critics and readers by providing information and clues to his work. However, Beckett, like his characters, has never been able to remain totally silent. He has written and published two valuable and essential pieces of criticism on the novels of Proust and the painting of Van Velde. These works appeared in 1931 and 1949 respectively, under the titles Proust and Three Dialogues. Since then, but for an occasional interview, he has maintained total silence.

Although the critical pieces are on other artists, they provide the keys to his work, both thematically and structurally, however indirectly. The criticisms will be looked at in their chronological order and for their own sake: No attempt will be made to connect them with the novels at this stage.

In Proust, Beckett presents his views on time, the self, habit, memory and the relation of the artist and art to these subject matters. Time, that "double-headed monster of damnation and salvation" (PTD 11), is dealt with first.
and is intimately connected with the self:

There is no escape from the hours and the
days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday
We are not merely more weary because of
yesterday, we are other . . . (PTD. 11)

Man is a prisoner of time and the effect of time is entropic:
it not only changes him but wears him. Furthermore, the
self, or personality, in time, is in a constant state of flux
and the individual changes each moment under the influence of
time, as do his goals:

The inspirations of yesterday were valid
for yesterday's ego, not for today's. We are
disappointed at the nullity of what we are,
pleased to call attainment. But what is attain-
ment? The identification of the subject with
the object of his desire. (PTD 13)

Beckett seems to have Henri Bergson's view of time here:

From the survival of the past it follows
that consciousness cannot go through the same
state twice. The circumstances may still be
the same but, they will act no longer on the
same person, since they find him at a new
moment of history. Our personality, which is
being built up each instant with its accumu-
lated experience, changes without ceasing.
We could not live over again a single moment,
for we should have to begin by effacing the
memory of all that followed.

The importance of this view of time as ceaseless
flux that modifies the human personality, is in terms of
human relationships and self-knowledge; hence Beckett's
concern with desire and his pessimistic view of human
aspirations:

6 Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution. Trans. Arthur
The subject has died -- and perhaps many times -- on the way. For subject B to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A is as illogical as to expect one's hunger to be dissipated by the spectacle of Uncle eating his dinner. (PTD 14)

Not only has the subject changed at a later time, but also his desires towards the object or goal he chose at an earlier time have altered. This relationship between time and desire is further complicated in human relationships, where desire is between two persons who undergo change:

Exemption from the intrinsic flux in a given object does not change the fact that it is correlative of a subject that does not enjoy immunity. The observer infects the observed with his own mobility. Moreover, when it is a case of human intercourse, we are faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subjects, but independent and personal: two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronization. (PTD 17)

Thus, when a subject is an object of desire, the subject can only accentuate the insatiability of desire, not fulfill it, for it too has changed. The most that can be hoped for in human relations are "partial annexations" (PTD 18).

In this view of time, Beckett briefly states a point that is central to his work and the crux of the trilogy:

But the poisonous ingenuity of Time in the science of affliction is not limited to its action on the subject, that action, as has been shown, resulting in an unceasing modification of his personality, whose permanent personality, if any, can only be apprehended as retrospective hypothesis. (PTD 90)
Beckett touches on a problem that not only has been discussed by philosophers previously (notably Hume) but also forms the core of his later fiction: is there a permanent atemporal Self or is the Self only the concatenation of its appearances in time? Time prevents the self from obtaining even an illusion of an atemporal Self, for under time's influence, the self can only know a multitude of continually changing selves. What was known and certain yesterday is insignificant today, because, immersed in passing time, we are no longer the same but other. This endless series of daily (even hourly) selves creates a ceaseless succession of misrepresentations of the real self (if any at all exists). Furthermore, the past self and its permanent reality are termed "retrospective hypotheses." Both these words are important. "Retrospective" implies memory, hence possible distortion, and in relation to attainment (self-seeking itself) only partial annexation. "Hypotheses" introduces the method of attainment or rather suggests the method; substitute the word "fiction" and you have in one sense what Molloy, Malone and The Unnameable are attempting — the search for and location of the self, which may be fictional (hypothetical), by means of fiction. For Proust, the human essence or self does lie outside time as well as space and can be attained through involuntary memory, which involves a mystical suspension of time and its flux. Thus Proust's solution initiates Beckett's discussion of the "attributes of the Time cancer" (PTD 18), Memory and Habit.
Habit is the minister of dullness and boredom, and according to Beckett and Proust:

Life is Habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals . . . Habit then is the generic form for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects. (PTD 19)

Habit tends to veil the ultimate reality which is given in periods of transition between the compromises of the individual and his world. These interstices represent "the perilous zones" (PTD 19) in the life of the individual and open the door to the real when "the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being" (PTD 19). It is in these perilous zones that the old ego is ousted and replaced by the new. The moments are also the main condition of the artistic experience and the individual is most vulnerable to the action of the "involuntary memory."

Beckett, like Proust, distinguishes between two kinds of memory: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary memory is the memory that is not memory but an extension of habit:

This is the uniform memory of intelligence; and it can be relied upon to reproduce for our gratified inspection those impressions of the past that were consciously and intelligently formed . . . The images it chooses are . . . remote from reality. (PTD 32)

Voluntary memory does not open the door onto the real; it is on the side of habit and gives illusion to the nature of the self in relation to time:

There is no great difference, says Proust, between memory of a dream and the memory of reality. When the sleeper awakens, this
omissary of his habit assures him that his "personality" has not disappeared with his fatigue. It consists in that most necessary, wholesome and monotonous plagiarism — the plagiarism of oneself. (PTD 33)

Thus voluntary memory preserves the illusion of the daily persistence of the old self and its images are connected with the will: "an instrument of reference instead of an instrument to discovery" (PTD 30).

It is involuntary memory that opens up "that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being" where "the essence of ourselves" is stored (PTD 31). The involuntary memory, however, is independent of the will: "It chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle" (PTD 24); and it gives a glimpse of the pure self that lies outside time. However, it seems doubtful that Beckett accepts Proust's prescription for escaping the flux of time and habitual succession of daily selves.

Beckett extends all these considerations of Time, Memory and Habit to that "desert of loneliness and recrimination that men call love" (PTD 54). Love co-exists with the state of dissatisfaction and represents "our demand for a whole" (PTD 55). However, for Proust and presumably Beckett, "No object prolonged in this temporal dimension tolerates possession... only to be achieved by the complete identification of object and subject."

Love, like habit, gives the illusion of unity and continuity:

We imagine that the object of our desire is a being that can be laid down before us, enclosed within a body. Alas! it is the extension of that being to all the points
of space and time . . . But we cannot touch all these points. (PTD 58)

Love is incapable of rendering up the "whole" and, for Beckett, only emphasizes the solitude to which each individual is condemned; however, "at best the failure to possess may have the nobility of that which is tragic" (PTD 63). Friendship is dismissed as the "attempt to communicate where no communication is possible" and is reduced to a "simian vulgarity" (PTD 63).

This impermeability of human beings in relation to each other and the futility of communication is then applied to the artist:

And art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication. Even on rare occasions when words and gesture happen to be valid expressions of personality, they lose their significance in their passage through the cataract of the personality that is opposed to them. (PTD 64)

Beckett's art will not only deal with characters who have trouble understanding each other but also involve destroying the foundations of communication: language and form. Gradually it will be an art concerned with "the only world that has reality and significance, the world of our own latent consciousness" (PTD 13).

Thus the activity of the artist and his art is active negatively and consists in "shrinking from the nullity of extra circumferential phenomena . . ." (PTD 65). The artist must reject the description of the real, which, approaches either empirically or imaginatively, "remains a surface and hermetic" (PTD 74). Beckett shares the same disgust as
Proust for the literature that describes, "for the realists and naturalists worshipping the offal of experience and content to transcribe the surface behind which the Idea is prisoner" (PTD 78-79). Instead, Beckett prefers the "Impressionistic" method of Proust which entails the "non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitudes of their perception" before being distorted into a chain of cause and effect by intelligence. Thus, for Beckett, the world and its phenomena are not determined by laws of cause and effect; but the representation of the world by realists and naturalists in these terms is due to habit. A world described in terms of cause and effect, rationalism and determinism, serves only to veil the ultimate reality, whereas Beckett prefers an art that contemplates the world independently of reason (PTD 87).

In 1949 Beckett had published three dialogues with George Duthuit. By 1949, Murphy, Watt and three short stories that anticipate the trilogy had been published, and no doubt he was at that time already writing the trilogy. The Dialogues go further in defining Beckett's views on art and language and seem to be the summation of his aesthetic. In the first dialogue on Tal Coat he speaks of:

... an art turning from it [the plane of the feasible] in disgust, weary of puny exploits ... of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road. (PTD 103)

and prefers:

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express,
nothing from which to express, no desire
to express, together with the obligation
to express. (PTD 103)

Duthuit counters Beckett with the suggestion that this
expression of the impossibility of expression is just
another occasion of art and his art would thus be express-
ive of this situation. Beckett, unconvincingly I think,
objects. For Beckett "expressionism" as an aesthetic
principle is no longer tenable because its assumptions
(world and self) have been invalidated:

But if the occasion appears as an unstable
term of relation, the artist, who is the
other term, is hardly less so . . . Two
things are established, however, precariously,
the aliment; from fruits on plates to low
mathematics . . . and its manner of dispatch.
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 of all that it excludes . . . (PTD 124)

For Beckett there is no expressing self and no expressable
world: words and language create the illusion of a rela-
tionship between the self and the world, and an art form
issuing from the supposed relation is, at most, a lie.
Beckett seems to demand here that the sole duty of an artist
is to abandon his materials and lapse into solipsistic sil-
ence -- which Beckett certainly has never done, although
he has written a play that uses no words and has produced
a silent film. However, Beckett has spoken of an obli-
gation to express even though there is nothing to express,
nothing with which to express, and this obligation (why
he is obliged is never answered) triumphs over the
desperate logic of his predicament.

Before concluding, one might ask why Beckett posits
the absence of expressible self and expressible world.
In his essay on Proust, Beckett writes of the influence of
Schopenhauer on Proust, especially his theory of music.
Schopenhauer separates music from the other arts "which
can only produce the idea with its concomitant phenomena,
whereas music is the idea itself, unaware of the world
of phenomena . . ." (rTu 94). Thus opera, because of its
use of words, objectifies the idea indirectly through its
use of particulars or phenomena (the concrete, changing
world). Beckett sums up the importance of music for Proust:

"Music is the catalytic element in
Proust. It asserts to his unbelief the
permanence of personality and the reality
of art. (rTu 92)

Yet throughout the essay Beckett has emphasized insistently
the continuing flux of the personality in time and
the inability of art to capture the reality of the individ-
ual behind his many appearances. For Proust involuntary
memory opens the door onto the real; for Beckett it does
not. It can only be concluded that Beckett believes in no
reconciliation between the many individuals appearing in
time and the permanent transcendent atemporal reality of
the self out of time. Presumably Beckett rejects the
notion of "permanence of personality" and views the self
as evolving and changing continually in time; hence there
can be no expressible self but only expressible selves and
the method of expressing these selves (since he is obliged
to express) will be through the "comedy of exhaustive enumeration." His art, especially in The unnameable, will be, in one sense, the cataloguing of the multitude of selves, as they appear in time, in the hope of finally describing or defining the Self that is never given in time, language, or words. Expressions of this self appear in time and are subject to the flux of the personality and can never hope to give an accurate description; thus they are doomed to fail. In an interview with Tom Driver in 1961, Beckett changed his views concerning the inexpressible world and asserts the admission of the "mess" into the world of art. The mess or chaos of the world, however, seems to be destructive and antithetical to the world of art which relies on form. The problem is how to "find a form that accommodates the mess." His final statement is:

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. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.

Beckett's art will be a stripping away of the traditional foundations of the novel in order to admit the chaos of the outside world and will attempt to discover a new form. The process is gradual, however, and Murphy, Beckett's first

8 Ibid., p. 23.
9 Ibid., p. 23.
novel barely initiates the aesthetic quest. However, the novel does contain many of the ideas concerning time and human relationships. In terms of form it is fairly traditional with an explicit setting, plot and action. With respect to the later novels Watt and The Unnameable, it provides an important theme -- the relation between the mind and the body -- which explains Beckett's contempt for a realistic fiction. Murphy's quest, as will be shown, is connected with Beckett's own. It is now time to turn to a discussion of this novel.

MURPHY

"There is a mind and there is a body—" "Shame! cried Neary, "Kick her arse! Throw her out." (218)

"Thou surd! (77)

Murphy, Beckett's first published novel (1938), contains themes that will characterize his subsequent work. In this discussion, the novel will not be dealt with in great detail but will be looked at in those areas that anticipate his later fiction. Besides thematic concerns, a brief look at certain stylistic devices will be given to show that Murphy initiates the eventual dismantling of traditional "realistic" fiction that Beckett so much abhors.

Murphy, like all of Beckett's novels, entails a quest, and the quest is the essential motif of the novel; however, it is a quest of a peculiar kind not often met with in fiction. The nature and goal of the quest are set out in the initial chapter of the novel.
Murphy, an ex-theological student, is introduced sitting in a condemned mew in West Brampton, strapped naked to a chair. The rocking chair is essential to his quest and is the partial means of attaining his goal:

He sat in his chair in this way because it gave him pleasure! First it gave his body pleasure, it appeased his body. Then it set him free in his mind. For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind. And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word. (2)

The goal is a certain kind of freedom which necessitates the gradual withdrawal from the outside world. The direction is regressive. The rocking chair suggests a womb image:

He worked up the chair to its maximum rock, then relaxed. Slowly the world died down, the big world where ... the light never waned the same way twice; in favour of the little ... where he could love himself. (7)

The direction is towards solipsism. Murphy, like the artist Beckett opts for in Proust, is concerned with only the world of his own consciousness. The setting of the novel is part of Murphy's quest and possibly explains the quest:

The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new. Murphy sat out in it, as though he were free, in a mew in West Brampton. Here ... he had eaten, drunk, slept and put his clothes on and off ... 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 off and on, in quite alien surroundings. (1)

The details are important here and understandable in light of the preceding discussion of Proust. The world Murphy is attempting to withdraw from is the world of habit and determinism: "The sun shone, having no alternative on the
nothing new." "The nothing new" implies the world of same-
ness and habit. Murphy sits out of the sun "as though he
were free," thus setting up a contrast between the sun
(determinism) and Murphy (freedom). However, the freedom
is qualified; it is not attained but only hoped for. The
life of Murphy is minimal and habitual and Beckett's rep-
etition of "eating, sleeping and drinking and putting his
clothes off and on" is deliberately redundant and serves
to reinforce the habitual nature of these activities as
well as their insignificance. Murphy's bodily needs are
ritualistically mechanical, and thus parallel the activity
of the sun. The new Murphy inhabits is also a condemned
one and indicates his desired relationship to society --
that of an exile. However, he is not totally shut off from
society, for there is a telephone in the room, a symbol of
the "simian vulgarity." Murphy's attitude towards the
world outside is given in his response to the sights and
sounds that he did not like: "They detained him in the world
to which they belonged, but not he, as he fondly hoped" (27).
Murphy desires to be out of the big world and move into the
little:

... he worked up the chair. Slowly he
felt better, astir in his mind, in the
freedom of that light and dark that did
not clash or alternate, nor fade; nor
lighten except to their communion! The
rock got faster, shorter and shorter --
soon his body would be quiet. Most things
under the moon got slower and slower and
then stopped, a rock got faster and faster,
then stopped. Soon his body would be quiet,
soon he would be free. (9)

For Murphy the big world or the world outside prevents freedom,
especially the mental freedom he desires. Murphy prefers his own light and dark to that of the sun and the moon and the movement of the rocking chair is built up to a maximum of speed that results in a stasis—a result that is contrary to the motion in the outside world where stasis is achieved through slowing down.

Thus, in the opening pages, the nature of the quest is partially given. It involves a movement away from the "big world" of social relationships, determinism and habit, symbolized by the sun, towards the little world of the mind, subject to no light and dark but its own. Before discussing further the "action" of the novel, more information is needed concerning Murphy's mind, which is central to an understanding of the novel. As the narrator continually remarks, Chapter Six gives the complete description of Murphy's mental world.

First of all, Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind (109). As for the relationship between Murphy's body and his mind: "They had intercourse apparently... but he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through what channel the intercourse was effective... He was satisfied that neither followed from the other", (109). Murphy is prepared to admit a partial congruence between the world of his body and that of his mind and attributes it to a supernatural determination. This, however, does not entail a harmony between the body and the mind, for both are irreparably cut off from each other. "He neither thought a kick because he felt one nor felt a kick because he thought one."
Rather his mind is described as a hollow sphere closed to
the world without, a closed system "impermeable to the
vicissitudes of the body" (109). Not only is the mental
world severed from the physical, but also the physical world
is without worth: "The mental experience was cut off from
the physical experience, its criteria were not those of the
physical experience" (103).

Murphy's mind consists of three zones: (1) light;
(2) half-light; (3) the dark (11). In the first zone, the
mind is able to readjust the elements of physical experience.
"Here the kick that the physical Murphy received, the mental
Murphy gave." In this zone Ticklepenny, the homosexual, can
rape Miss Carridjé. The first zone has reference to the
physical world outside; readjustments of experiences implies
memory or imagination as well as the will. In the second
zone are "forms without parallel" (111) in the physical
world; the pleasure consists in contemplation and a minimum
of effort is required. The last zone is the dark containing
a "flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling
asunder of forms" (112). The dark is the realm of willessness
and entails loss of self. With respect to Proust, it is
that area of experience devoid of the impurity of the will
and where exists the purely subjective. The self in this
zone is described as a "mote in the dark of absolute free-
dom": it is not itself but a "matrix of surds" and its cos-
mosology is non-Newtonian, a void without form, a chaos. Thus,
the movement in mind is a movement from light to dark, from
forms with physical parallels (light) to the void of
nothingness.

Behind this discussion of Murphy's body and mind lie two philosophers important to Beckett and his whole work: Descartes and Arnold Geulincx. Their relevance to Murphy will be brought out here.

Descartes posited the separation of body and mind and pictured men in terms of this duality. The body is an extended non-thinking thing in contrast to the mind which is an unextended thinking thing:

... from the fact that I know I exist, and that I am not aware of anything which belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing. I rightly conclude that my essence consists in this alone, that I am a thinking thing... I am a substance whose whole essence or nature consists in thinking.10

Furthermore, Descartes goes on to state that, not only is the mind distinct from the body, it can exist without it.

And although perhaps... I have a body with which I am closely conjoined, I have, on the one hand, a clear and distinct idea of myself as a thinking non-extended thing and... a distinct idea of my body as an extended non-thinking thing. It is therefore certain that I am truly distinct from my body, and can exist without it.11

Descartes, however, joined the mind and body through the pineal gland which allowed the mind to come in contact with the body and account for the actions of the body. However,


11 Ibid., p.99.
as Wylie points out to Murphy, his conarium has shrunk to nothing (0). The conarium is the pineal gland and it is probably for this reason that Murphy attributes the partial congruence of mind and body to a supernatural determination. As David Hesla, in his The Shape of Chaos points out, Arnold Geulincx substituted God for the pineal gland. 12 Geulincx was more radical in his picture of the mind/body dualism. He accepted Descartes' separation of mind and body but instead of using the "cogito" to deduce the existence of God and the material reality, he uses it to circumscribe the "I" within the area of thinking. The "I" consists solely of its own activities and is nothing other than its activities, i.e., thinking. Moreover, the "I" not only knows but knows how it knows its knowledge, and if it does not know how it knows then it does not know what it knows. For Geulincx the "I" is active, free and responsible only when it engages in something it knows how to do -- in other words, in thinking. In activities other than thinking -- such as walking, moving arms or legs -- the "I" is not the causal agency since these activities are non-thinking activities, hence it cannot know how its body acts the way it does. And for Geulincx, according to Hesla, what the "I" does not know how to do it does not do:

The act of thought by which I command my arm to rise is rather the . . . occasion for God himself to impart to my arm in the motion of rising. 13

13 The Shape of Chaos, p. 38.
The same holds for the reverse action: the body cannot affect the mind, and the sensations which the "I" feels are imparted by God to the "I." The consequences of this doctrine are that the "I" consists solely in the act of thinking, and in thinking it is free, even from God; but the "I" does not enter into the world of matter and extension, even its own body. The "I" is rather a spectator, not only of its own body, but also of the world, and is helpless before it. The ethical corollary of this doctrine is quoted by Murphy: "ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis" (178). If the world is worth nothing, it is not worth being desired. Hugh Kenner, in his study of Beckett's novels, quotes another of Geulincx's maxims: "Omnen actionem mean, quatenus mea est, intrà me manere; all freedom such as it is lies behind the eyes." 14

In view of these philosophical principles, the quest of Murphy seems to have some kind of rationale. If the world outside consciousness is not only divorced from consciousness but is independent of it and, in relation to the essential nature of consciousness (thinking), is worthless, what use is there to attempt to live in it? Murphy apparently has accepted his bodytight mind and replaced the God of Geulincx with astrology. However, if the Cartesian dualism reveals the split between body and mind and leads to an escape into the will-less dark, it also, at the same time, forms an obstacle to its attainment. It is the fate of any

Cartesian that he lives in a world of both body and mind, and Murphy's triumph over his bodily needs is complicated in the character of Celia, the prostitute.

Celia first appears in the novel indirectly, through a telephone call which arouses Murphy from his rocking and reveals his schizoidal nature:

He laid the receiver hastily in his legs.
The part of him that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shrivelled up at the thought of her. (8)

Celia, by her profession as well as her attraction to Murphy, is an obstacle in his quest. This is compounded by Murphy's attraction to Celia, which is only a bodily attraction. Celia is pictured only in terms of her body, and the description, to emphasize her thematic weight, is given not in words but statistics (10). She also poses another threat to Murphy, that of a job. Murphy's acceptance of Guelincx's doctrine of mind and world has led him to prefer not only social withdrawal but also indolence, for movement in the mind depends on stasis of the body. Celia appears at Murphy's mew with an astrological chart from a Ramaswami Suk which controls Murphy's actions in the outside world. As stated previously, it is only the stars and the astrological system that Murphy will allow to control his bodily movements. Celia, demanding Murphy get a job and enter the big world, produces the chart. At first Murphy uses the chart only to delay his looking for work.

"Can you work now . . . ?" said Celia.
"Certainly I can," said Murphy. "The very first fourth to fall on a Sunday in 1936 I begin." (38)
and weigh the alternative in terms of his own closed system:

"In the mercantile gehenna," he said, "to which your words invite me, one of these [You, my body and my mind] will go, or two, or all. If you, then you only, if my body, then you also, if my mind, then all . . ." (40)

Murphy's mind analyzes the danger Celia represents, yet his body still clings to her and he sets out on the "job" "path".

The next stage in Murphy's quest is Brewery Road (63) where both Celia and Murphy move. By forcing Murphy to seek a job, Celia hopes to make a man of him (65); she also ceases to resume her own work.

However, a curious and comic reversal in the relationship between Murphy and Celia takes place while Murphy is on the job path, trying hard not to be hired. Celia, like a true Penelope, waits for Murphy in none other than his own rocking chair, a little in the dark facing the open window:

Most of the time that he was out she spent sitting in the rocking chair with her face to the light. There was not much light, the room devoured it, but she kept her face turned to what there was . . . she would not sit for long in the chair without the impulse stirring, tremulously, as for an exquisite depravity, to be naked and bound. (66-67)

If Murphy's explanations as to why he was opposed to work were incomprehensible to her, they are not now: "Thus in spite of herself she began to understand as soon as he gave up trying to explain" (7). By the time Murphy comes to Celia with news of a job, Celia is as disinterested as Murphy was previously:

Finally, his intimations, proudly casual, that a job was his or as good as his at last excited
her to the extent of an "Oh." Nothing more. Not even an "Oh Indeed." (137)

The relationship between Celia and Murphy is an example of the Proustian theory of desire under the effect of time. The Celia who demanded that Murphy go seek a job is not the same Celia who utters a disinterested "Oh" when he tells her he has obtained a job. The comic irony is that what has changed Celia is that she forced Murphy to give up the rocking chair and its implications.

All human relationships in Murphy seems to illustrate Wylie's definition of desire:

"I greatly fear: said Wylie "that the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased another is made worse. (57)

and

"Humanity is a well with two buckets," said Wylie, "one going down to be filled, the other coming up to be emptied." (58)

For Neary (anagram of "yearn") the circle, or closed system, is a symbol of futility in desire and attempts at possession:

Of such was Neary's love to Miss Dwyer, who loved Flight Lieutenant Elliman, who loved a Miss Farren of Ringsakiddy, who loved a Father Pitt of Ballinclushet, who in all sincerity was bound to acknowledge a certain vocation for a Mrs. West of Passage, who loved Neary. (5)

Murphy wandering and looking for a job had not altogether given up the goal of his quest, and it is possible that only half-heartedly is he looking for a job. The clothes he wears indicate that, whatever appearance he gives of looking for a job, his mind is still intent on the quest of the little world. The suit he wears was "... entirely
non-porous. It admitted no air from the outside world, it allowed none of Murphy's own vapours to escape" (72). Even in the big world Murphy is still a closed system and almost non-existent to others:

"E don't look rightly human to me," said the chandler's eldest waste product, "not rightly."
. . . "Thou surd!" (7)

David Hesla traces the etymology of the word "absurd" back to its Latin "surdus" meaning "deaf," and, in relation to music, "unharmonious." The word "surdus" was also used to translate the alogos, the term for irrational numbers. Alogos may be translated "irrational" or "without a name." The full implications of this word are not fully applicable to Murphy. Murphy in his quest must remain deaf to the world outside his mind; the incongruity of his body and mind suggests the essential lack of harmony between body and mind; and in terms of social existence Murphy is a surd, that is, an irrational number. The square root of 2 was the aboriginal surd which, although it exists and performs certain mathematical functions, is impossible to locate and cannot be known. Beckett will develop the implications of surds in relationship to the self in his later novels. In Murphy, however, it can have no deeper meaning than in the context that it is presented; Murphy in the big world is almost non-existent. If pushed to its limits, the word "surd" can relate to Murphy's name which suggests, not only sleep, but also form; and hence Murphy's name contains in itself the quest towards darkness.

15 The Shape of Chaos, p. 7.
(sleep) and the dark nothingness (the void as form). However, Murphy's quest does not seem to involve a quest for the self, but a transcendent form of existence free of the antinomies of mind and body and the conflicts they imply.

As stated previously, Murphy has not given up his quest in his wanderings around Brewery Road, and he abandons his chair, and takes to the horizontal position:

To sit down was no longer enough; he must insist now on lying down... improved out of all knowledge. (78-79)

It is on his job path that Murphy indulges in his "Belacqua fantasy" (73), the first landscape of freedom. The allusion is to Dante's Purgatory and the character in Antepurgatory, who, by lifelong indolence and delay in repentance, is forced to sit for another lifetime before being admitted into Purgatory:

And on our left observed a massive boulder
Which up 'til then we chanced not to see.

This when explored, revealed to the beholder
A group of persons lounging in the shade,
As lazy people lounge, behind its shoulder.

And one of them, whose attitude displayed
Extreme fatigue, sat there and clasped his knees;
Drooping between them his exhausted head

"Brother," said he, "what use to go up yet?
He'd not admit me to the cleansing pain." 16

The allusion to Belacqua is most significant in all the works of Beckett, and most of his characters, from Murphy onwards,

usually end up in the foetal position of Belacqua through indolence, lack of will or physical decay. The significance of Belacqua to Murphy is given by Murphy (or the narrator) himself in the phrase: "... it was the first landscape of freedom" (78). Murphy sees in Belacqua an attainment of his own goal — extreme inaction and "embryonal repose" (78). Murphy's quest has been regressive from the start and the foetal image suggests release from time, the world or the body and mind, into the peace and security of nothingness. Belacqua also suggests the theme of waiting, and throughout the novel Murphy is at the threshold of his release waiting to be born into non-existence. All desired movement in Beckett's novels is backward.

It is also during his wanderings that Murphy indulges in a game that will take up most of Watt: the exhaustion of a series of logical possibilities. Murphy, essentially a rationalist, enjoys the freedom of silent contemplation and makes it a part of his lunch:

He took the biscuits carefully out of the packet and laid them face upward on the grass in order as he felt of edibility. They were the same as always, a Ginger, an Osborne, a Digestive, a Petit Beurre and one anonymous. He always ate the first-named last, because he liked it best, and the anonymous first, because he thought it very likely the least palatable. The order in which he ate the remaining three was indifferent to him and varied irregularly from day to day. (96)

Struck by the fact that his original choice of eating the biscuits limited the number of ways he could eat them, he thinks of giving up his prejudices towards the Ginger and the anonymous after realizing "the assortment would spring
to life before him, dancing the radiant measure of its total
permutable, edible in a hundred and twenty ways!" (96-97).
Unfortunately, Murphy succumbs to a fit of fatigue and is
incapable of eating the biscuits; slowly after, a dog comes
along and eats them. The big world intrudes on the little
world of Murphy's mind. The importance of the motif of per-
mutations is not that explicit in Murphy and doesn't have
the meaning it acquires in Watt. The permutations or exhaus-
tion of series in this episode seem to suggest that Murphy
still clings to the purpose of his quest and that one of the
activities of the zones (either the light or half-light)
attains its pleasure through calculus. The episode may also
be a parody of rationalism solely concerned with its own
processes of reasoning and results, so that its relation to
the outside world is cut off, a closed system that uses
phenomenal mathematical powers on paltry biscuits. As will
be shown, Watt uses his rational processes for different
reasons, for the world of Watt is far different from Murphy's.

The last stage in Murphy's quest is the attainment of
a job at the Magdalene Mental Mercyseat which houses schizo-
phrenics of various kinds. As the name implies it is a com-
bination of asylum/cloister with Bim Clinch as pope:

Bim Clinch had no fewer than seven male relations,
linear and collateral, serving under him . . .
There was nothing old-fashioned or halfhearted
about the nepotism of Bim Clinch, there was no
more resolute and successful pope to his family
in the south of England . . . (166)

The activities of the patients suggest a cloister or
monastery:
Melancholics, motionless and brooding, holding their heads or bellies according to type. Paranooids feverishly covering sheets of paper with complaints... or verbatim reports of their inner voices. (167-168)

The religious analogy of asylum-cloister suggests that Murphy's quest, although not a religious one, is parallel to the mystical via negativa that consists in the renunciation, not only of the outside world, but also of bodily and emotional needs. But for his body, Murphy needs no one. The desired goal of Murphy's is also analogous to religious apatheia, meaning, not apathy, but dispassion.

with Murphy, however, it is apathy and indifference. The quest is a secular ascensis and Murphy is attracted to the patients because of their "self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world which he had chosen for himself as the only felicity" (162). It is at the asylum that Murphy finds his own ideal little world and views the psychiatrists and patients in terms of his own system:

All this... obliged him to call sanctuary what the psychiatrist called exile and think of the patients not as banished from a system of benefits but as escaped from a colossal fiasco... the issue therefore... lay between nothing less fundamental than the big world and the little world... His vote was cast "I am not of the big world, I am of the little world." (177-178)

Murphy, however, realizes that his means so far of existing in the desired peace of the little world have failed, including the rocking chair. He still is bound to the big world. The renouncing of the outside world which is
worth nothing and the pleasure of contemplation were not
enough:

... and showed no signs of being enough. These
dispositions and others ancillary, pressing every
available means (e.g., the rocking chair) into
their service, could sway the issue in the desired
direction, but not clinch it. It continued to
divide him, as witness his deplorable suscepti-
bility to Celia, ginger and so on. (179)

The impassiveness of the schizophrenics, the padded cells,
and his success with the patients stimulate hope in him.
The schizophrenics have cast their vote for the little world
and the padded cells surpass all he had ever "imagined in the
way of indoor bowers of bliss" (181). The cells are of three
dimensions, suggesting both the womb and skull; and the com-
partments are windowless, like a monad, except for the window
in the door, at which a sane eye passes at regular intervals.
The situation is so ideal that Murphy finally abandons depend-
ence and belief in any system but his own:

The more his own system closed round him, the
less he could tolerate its being subordinated
to any other ... They were his stars, he was
the prior system. (183)

The patient whom Murphy is directly responsible for is Mr.
Endon (Greek for "within"), a schizophrenic of the "most
amiable variety" whose only passion is chess. He is the
paragon of the closed system and Murphy feels drawn to him
"as Narcissus to his fountain." Just as Murphy's goal of
the quest requires bodily stasis, Mr. Endon has the compul-
sion to commit suicide by apnoea — self-induced asphyxiation.
Apnoea is "characterized by a gradual increase in the rate of
breathing until it ends in a gasp followed by a gradual decrease
until the respiration ceases."17 The motion of this form of suicide is exactly parallel to Murphy's motion in the rocker; however, Endon uses no external means. The game of chess and the way it is played symbolized Mr. Endon's nature. He plays it as if Murphy weren't there: "Each made his move in the absence of the other... so the game wore on, till evening found it almost as when begun" (187).

At the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, darkness begins to encroach on Murphy. He sees no more stars (188) and is incapable of thinking of Celia (189). He has begun to withdraw from the light with parallel forms. His departure for the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat entailed his leaving his things behind in the big world: "His books, his pictures, his postcards, his musical scores and instruments" (189), as well as his rocking chair. However, during day duty Murphy is happy and feels at one with the patients; left to himself at night he cannot come out of his mind anymore, and on his day off he goes to Celia's to retrieve his rocking chair, thus indicating he has left her for good.

After Murphy has retrieved the chair and settles down into a rock; Ticklepenny arouses Murphy and warns him he is becoming like Clarke the catatonic. Murphy takes Ticklepenny's warning as a sign of hope:

And in effect Murphy's night was good... the reason being not so much that he had his chair again as that the self whom he loved had the aspect... of a real alienation. (194)

17 Clarence Taber, Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary, 11 ed. (Toronto, 1963), p. 78.
By the time Murphy goes on night duty, it is obvious he cannot endure the alienation essential to his quest ("In short, there was nothing but he, the unintelligible gulf and they [the patients]. That was all. All. All. 240"), and he seeks out Mr. Endon, whom he desires to reciprocate his feeling for him.

Murphy in his need for Mr. Endon falls into the Proustian trap of desire. Previously, in his relationship to Celia, whom he needed only bodily, he echoes Beckett in Proust:

"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 . . ." (36)

In love we create our own image, a person according to our needs, and love that image not the person. Hence, Murphy recognizes the fact that Celia does not love him as he is but as she would like him to be -- a man of the world. Love also excludes possession and only emphasizes the absolute impermeability of the other:

All that is active, all that is enveloped in time and space, is endowed with what might be described as an abstract, ideal and absolute impermeability. (PTD 57-58)

The reason for such an impermeability is that the object of desire is not enclosed within its body, but spread out in time and space which it has occupied or will occupy. In the flux of time and life, total possession cannot be attained.

Murphy had seen the psychotics in his own image of them; and even when he felt apart from them and sensed they were not as he thought they were, he disregarded the truth. Mr. Endon confronts Murphy with this truth.
When Murphy, on night duty, sees Mr. Endon setting up the chess board, he feels Mr. Endon "had recognized the feel of his friend's eye upon him ..." (241). The truth, however, is that "while Mr. Endon for Murphy was no less than bliss, Murphy for Mr. Endon was no more than chess" (242). Mr. Endon is Murphy's ideal of what it means to be immured in mind, but for Mr. Endon, Murphy does not exist: "Mr. Murphy is a speck in Mr. Endon's unseen" (250).

It is after the chess game that Murphy experiences the culmination of his quest, temporarily:

... Murphy began to see Nothing ... the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up to the Nothing, which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real. (246)

This is the summation of the quest and the Nothing has been declared its goal — a nothingness that for the rest of Beckett characters is just as real as for Murphy. Richard Coe, in his study of Beckett's novels, sees that this Nothingness or Naught is the direct result of the Geulinxian view of the world, in which the self, incapable of influencing the outside world, seeks significance within itself, in introspection.18 From the beginning of the novel, Murphy has adopted the Geulinxian attitude towards the world as one of irrelevance. However, need and bodily desire have caused Murphy troubles; thus, Murphy must, in order to be free, desire nothing and need nothing: "The freedom of indifference,

the indifference of freedom, the will dust in the dust of
the object ..." (105). However, as Coe points out, Beckett
or Murphy carries the logic further: I quote Coe's conclusions:

Murphy's mind -- the only relevant reality -- is
already turned in upon itself, loves nothing but
itself: but what is its value in itself ... In relation to the outside world, the mind is
impotent and valueless; within itself, it has
value only in relation to God -- but God is
precisely the one Guelincxian concept that
Murphy omits ... Take God away, and Murphy's
mind is ... Nothing: a Nothing forever turned
inward, enwrapped in contemplation of itself.19

This last point is especially relevant to Watt and The un-
nameable; however, Murphy awakens from his trance or brief
bliss in the third zone of his mind and seeks Mr. Endon out.
Looking into Endon's eyes, Murphy realizes the extremity of
impermeability such a quest entails:

The relation between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon
could not have been better summed up than by
the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the
latter's immunity from seeing anything but
himself. (250)

Murphy, seeing the absence of himself in Mr. Endon's eyes,
foresees his own death. Mr. Endon is not only mindtight but
also othertight, more solipsistic than Murphy. Murphy real-
izes this truth, decides to have one more rock in his chair,
and return to Celia; however, he is too far gone: "He could
not get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met
animal or human" (PTD 252). This inability to visualize
another creature suggests that he has withdrawn further
from the physical world than he had realized. The price of
absolute freedom is absolute alienation: "We are alone. We

cannot know and we cannot be known: Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others in himself, and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies" (PTD 66).

The irony of Murphy's death (by gaseous asphyxiation) is that, it is his body that gives him his final resting place and achieves the dissolution of the self. For Endon, apnoea as a means to suicide was a physiological impossibility; so too for Murphy: to live mentally in the Nothingness desired is an impossibility.

The inability to live in this Nothingness characterizes not only Murphy, but also Watt and the Unnameable. The Naught as the realm of non-being remains forever inaccessible. With respect to Murphy, Murphy was prevented from attaining his goal because he lived not only in a mental world, but also a bodily one. According to the Cartesian (or Guédonexian) notion of the mind as essentially free and separate from the world of the body, the mind is capable of existing in the realm of Nothingness; however, it is the body and the bodily needs that situate man in time and condemn him to be bound in time.

In terms of themes, Murphy introduces many that will characterize Beckett's later work. The novel embodies the ideas found in Proust concerning habit, desire and withdrawal from the outside world into the world of consciousness. Significantly, Murphy introduces the problem of Nothingness that will obsess Watt in the next novel.

The direction of Murphy's quest and his contempt for the outside world is parallel to Beckett's "contempt for the
literature that 'describes', for the realists and naturalists worshipping the offal of experience . . ." (PTD 78).

This analogy does not mean to suggest that Murphy is an artist and his quest basically one involving aesthetic goals; but rather, that Murphy's quest is in one sense reflective of Beckett's; i.e., Murphy's contempt for the outside world parallels Beckett's contempt for realist literature (literature describing the outside world).

As for the form of the novel,\(^{20}\) it is for the most part traditional, containing setting (in England as well as in Dublin), plot and action. The narration is omniscient, but ironically, for Beckett speaks of most of his characters as "puppets" (122). Murphy himself is given little description; he has eyes "cold and unwavering as a gull's"(2), a yellow complexion and a black suit. All that Celia can say of Murphy is that "Murphy was Murphy" (17).

The intrusion of the narrator throughout the book adds a comic element and also establishes the narrator as puppeteer: "Enter Cooper" and "All four are now in position. They will not move from where they are now . . . "(233). The effect of this is to establish distance between narrator and character as well as to emphasize that the book aims at no realism but is a piece of "fiction". Beckett, in this ironic distance, seems to be revealing his disgust for what he is

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\(^{20}\) See Robert Harrison, Samuel Beckett's Murphy (1967), pp. 84-96. My basic approach to Murphy and hence to Beckett's other works was provided by Harrison's study although he deals with only Murphy. This discussion of the form of Murphy is heavily indebted to his work.
writing about. The narrator is continually on top of the characters: "Celia's account, expurgated, accelerated, improved and reduced, of how she came to have to speak of Murphy, gives the following" (12). The above example is a device mocking traditional exposition in novels.

Murphy also initiates the breakdown of language in terms of its descriptive powers. Neary's method of heart control is called, variously, Apmonia, Isonomy and Attunement; and with each new name Neary gets tired and sick (3-4).

Murphy questions the word-thing relationship: "What passed for a garret in Great Britain ... was really nothing more than an attic. An attic!" (162). Even the narrator is baffled by the relationship between words and what they describe: "There were no open wards in the ordinary sense, but single rooms, or as some would say, cells, or as Boswell said, mansions ..." (167). Murphy's last zone gives such pleasure "that pleasure was not the word." Occasionally, the narrator addresses the reader: "The number of seconds in one night is a simple calculation the curious reader will work out for himself" (224).

The inadequacy of language occurs, not only in the narrator's descriptions of Murphy's pleasure and in relation to things, but also in conversations throughout the novel between the characters. The lack or absence of communication has already been remarked upon in Proust and is used here to reinforce the theme of impermeability and separation of characters themselves:

She [Celia] 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. (40)

Aposiopesis is used by Murphy in the Magdalen Mental Mercy-seat to suggest inability to communicate: "Have fire in this garret before night or --" Through facial expression Cooper can express much more than in the words the narrator supplies:

...the finest shades of irresolution, revulsion, dog-like devotion, cat-like discretion, fatigue, hunger, thirst ... (205)

In some instances communication is given up: "Celia opened her mouth to proceed, closed it without having done so" (34-35).

The use of omniscient narrator will be dropped and gradually Beckett's characters themselves will be the authors of the fiction they are partaking in. Murphy as a novel does not have language and the relation of language to reality as its basic theme, but it anticipates his later works in the examples given here.
CHAPTER II

In Murphy, the quest was initiated by the opposition between body and mind. Much of the action derived from this mind/body dichotomy and Murphy’s struggle to find asylum or refuge in the bliss of his mental zones. In Watt, Beckett extends the Naught into the outside world. The reality behind appearances is a void and, in confrontation with the void (or the "mess" as Beckett calls it), will be the emphasis on reason or the action of the mind. The novel, Watt, is solely concerned with how man can co-exist and come to terms with the irrational and absurd; it is also the story of the failure, not only of reason, but of words and language in the face of the inexpressible. In terms of Beckett’s aesthetics, the novel destroys the relations between the self and world; the expressible self and the expressible world. It is his farewell to the literature of expressionism (PTD 124); and Watt’s quest into the domain of Mr. Knott is analogous to the second stage of Beckett’s search for a new form of fiction.

Watt first appears in the novel on his way to Mr. Knott’s house. He, too, is on a quest or journey, although the reasons are not apparent: "He is setting out on a journey, said Goff" (12). Watt is presented in relation to the outside world at first, in contrast to the opening of
Murphy. However, Watt appears just as much a "surd" as did Murphy. As Watt's name suggests, he is just as much an enigma to others as to himself. The characters respond to Watt in similar ways:

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... or a roll of tarpaulin. (16)

His first appearance is almost similar to Murphy's; he is in the dark and motionless: "Then it [the tram] moved on disclosing, on the pavement, motionless, a solitary figure, lit less and less by the receding lights, until it was scarcely to be distinguished from the wall behind" (16). As Henri Bergson noted in his study *Laughter*, "We laugh every time a person gives us the impression of a thing." 21 The comic nature of Watt, besides his baggy trousers and hat, suggesting a Chaplin-like clown, stems from the Cartesian view towards the body as a mechanical thing:

... those who, knowing how many different kinds of automata or moving machines, can be made by human ingenuity... will consider this body as a machine which, having been made by the hands of God, is incomparably better ordered, and has more wonderful movements, than any machine that man can invent. 22

In an oft-quoted passage, Watt's way of walking is described:

Watt's way of advancing due east... was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out

his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south... the knees on these occasions did not bend... Watt's was a fumambulistic stagger. (30-31)

The movement of Watt is characterized not only mechanically but also without the presence of mental intentions. Watt's body is more an Occasionalist machine than a Cartesian one. Beckett's or the narrator's rendition of Watt's walk, repetitive in every detail, simulates the nature of what he is describing. One could extend Bergson's view that attitudes, gestures and movement of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine, to the descriptive language itself. The more mechanical and exact the sentences or descriptions are, the greater the comic effect.

Watt's alienation from society and the "big world" is indicated by his appearance as a thing to others; his standing in the dark "lit less and less by the receding lights" (16); and the mindless activity of his body. There are other details in the first chapter that support the idea that, like Murphy, he is of the little world. Watt dislikes the moon and sun (33), the earth and the sky (36). Furthermore, in relation to other characters who know him, such as Mr. Nixon (who has known him all his life), Watt is an enigma except for a few insignificant facts.

... said Mr. Hackett, you might describe your friend a little more fully.

I really know nothing, said Mr. Nixon.
But you must know something, said Mr. Hackett. . . . Nationality, family, birthplace, confession, occupation, means of existence, distinctive signs, you cannot be in utter ignorance of all this.

Utter ignorance, said Mr. Nixon. (21)

By the end of the novel little more is known of Watt, and he is described as "the long wet dream with the hat and bags" (246). Not only is Watt a social exile, but Beckett, in these descriptions and comments, is moving away from traditional means of characterizing the major character of the novel. Watt can be termed an anti-hero, but, he also has the status, perhaps, of a non-character; as a well-rounded, three-dimensional character, he is non-existent.

His passivity in relation to exterior events is emphasized quite early in a parody of a Christian proverb: "He would literally turn the other cheek . . . if he had the energy" (20). When Lady McCann throws a stone at Watt, he "faithful to his rule, took no more notice of this aggression than if it had been an accident" (32). Shortly afterwards, he assumes the favourite position of all of Beckett's characters, the foetal Belacqua position:

But the feeling of weakness, which he had been expecting for some time, was such that he yielded to it, and settled himself on the edge of the path, with his hat pushed back . . . and his knees drawn up, and his arms on his knees and his head on his arms. (33)

Not only is the Belacqua figure reminiscent of Murphy, but also, his journey is regressive, his motion either backwards or horizontal in a ditch: "So, settling his hat firmly on
his head, and reaching forward for his bags, he rolled himself over into the ditch, and lay there on his face . . . " (33). On the tram ride, "Watt preferred to have his back to his destination" (26).

The allusions to Dante's Inferno are significant in light of what takes place later in the novel. The ditch suggests the bolgias of Hell. In the eighth circle are the sorcerers whose heads are twisted so they cannot look behind and, therefore walk, backwards. In fact one of the types of servants Knott employs is described as "... little, fat, shabby, seedy, juicy or oily, bandy legged man, with a little fat bottom sticking out in front and a little fat belly sticking out behind" (58). The ditch may be seen as an allusion to Malebogues in Canto XVIII where the Circle of Fraud is located. As Dorothy Sayers remarks, Fraud includes the abuse of reason and language. The Italian "bolgia" means not only "ditch" but also purse or pouch, and although there is no modern equivalent for the pun, Sayers translates it by the word "bowge" which meant a pouch. It is impossible to know if Beckett knew of this connection with "bowge"; however, not only in Watt are pockets abundant, but also Molloy, in Molloy, distributes his sixteen sucking stones in his calculus exercise through the use of pockets. Beckett, borrowing from Dante's puns,


24 The Inferno, p. 186-188.
associates pockets, ditches, with rational processes.
Throughout Watt's servitude at Knott's house he will, like
a sorcerer, use words and rational processes to exorcize
the void behind events and things.
Watt leaves the ditch and again, in an allusion to
Dante's opening of the Inferno, advances in the middle of
the road to Knott's house where he will "lose his way" (36).
The "losing of the way" occurs immediately upon enter-
ing Knott's house:

. . . Watt never knew how he got into Mr.
Knott's house. He knew that he got in the
back door, but he was never to know, never,
never to know, how the back door came to be
opened. (37)
The repetition of the word "never" in connection with
knowing indicates the essential nature of Watt's experiences
at Knott's house: all knowledge will result in ignorance.
However, Watt, at first, is able to cope with the absence
of any causal relationships concerning how the back door,
previously locked, was suddenly opened and how he entered:

Watt was surprised to find the back
door, so lately locked, now open. Two explana-
tions of this occurred to him. The first was
this, that this science of the locked door, so
seldom at fault, had been so on this occasion,
and that the back door when he had found it
locked, had not been locked but open. And the
second was this, that the back door, when he
had found it locked had in effect been locked,
but had subsequently been opened, from within,
or without, by some person, while he Watt had
been employed in going, to and fro, from the
back door to the front door, and from the front
door to the back door.

Of these explanations Watt thought he
preferred the latter, as being the more
beautiful. (36-37)

As Jacqueline Hoefer in her article "Watt" points out:
"Much of the novel is taken up with this kind of trifling consideration in which Watt painfully puts one mental foot in front of the other . . . "25 In the passage above, Watt is concerned, not so much with the truth of how he entered (notice the poke at Keats), but with the possibilities which enabled him to enter. As Hoefer remarks: "His usual mode of explaining . . . events is to formulate a number of propositions that can be deduced from data available to him."26 Thought and logic are identical for him, and thinking is a process of using language. Watt's simplest language activity is naming things. There are two crucial scenes in Watt's stay at Knott's house that explain Watt's attitude to language and words in relation to what he experiences: the visit by the Galls and the incident with Knott's pot.

The Galls, father and son, came to tune the piano and engage in cryptic aphorisms:

The mice have returned, he said.
Nine dampers remain, said the younger,
and an equal number of hammers.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
The piano is doomed, in my opinion, said the younger.
The piano tuner also, said the elder.


26 Ibid., p. 63.
The pianist also, said the younger. (72)
As Richard Coe remarks, "the haunting quality of these phases
lies in the fact that they seem alternately meaningful and
meaningless." For Watt, the significance of this incident
is not "so much that he did not know what had happened, for
he did not care what had happened, as that nothing had happen-
ed, that a thing that was nothing had happened . . . that:
nothing had happened, with all the clarity and solidity of
something . . . " (76).

Watt is not really concerned with "what happened"
(hence the irony of his name) but in "foisting a meaning
there where no meaning appeared" (77). This mental habit
consists in evolving "from the meticulous phantoms . . .
a hypothesis proper to disperse them . . . For to explain
had always been to exorcise for Watt" (78). As long as Watt
can embrace an incident in words he can dismiss it. The
meaning of incidents lies not so much in the incidents,
for Watt, as in the words he uses; thus his "pursuit of
meaning in indifference to meaning" (75).

So Watt did not know what had happened.
He did not care . . . what had happened.
But he felt the need to think that such
and such a thing had happened then, the need
to be able to say . . . Yes, I remember
this is what happened. (76)

Watt is concerned only with the surfaces of events, not what
lies behind them: if he can formulate an event in hypotheses
and come up with a satisfactory statement in relation to

27 Richard Coe, Beckett, p. 43
them "not in what they really meant . . . but in what they might be induced to mean . . . " (75)

Thus, to summarize, if Watt can formulate a statement about an event, he can dismiss it -- "it happened." Meaning, for Watt, lies in the language or statement, not in the event itself. Watt is not concerned with the relationship between the word and thing, statement and event; or rather, for him, there is no distinction in these relationships. What can be thought and expressed, is. However, the incident of the Galls is a blow to his habitual attitudes towards the world and his depiction of it. He experiences the failure of his habit to readjust to a new situation, the void. The event (of the Galls) is not dismissed but continues "to unfold in Watt's head, from beginning to end, . . . and gradually lost . . . all meaning, even the most literal . . . became a mere example of light commenting bodies, and stillness notion and silence sound, and comment comment" (73). Richard Coe sees this description of the incident as a kind of abstract art, an art turned in upon itself "not related to something in the outside world but symbolic of itself. . . ." The significance, if any, eludes the grasp of rationality and the words diminish in content. With the Galls, Watt moves into a realm of experience that is beyond the formulations of logic and language. The difference between the void or Naught for Murphy and Watt is that, for Murphy, the Naught was a blissful satisfaction.

(though beyond words) of a desire; for Watt, the naught is not a satisfaction but a defeat. The relationship between cause and effect, word and thing, knower and known (subject and object) disintegrates in Knott’s world. The second incident points to this disintegration, for, as the narrator remarks, the incident of the Galls anticipates and is similar to all the other events in Knott’s house:

... he desired words to be applied to his situation, to Mr. Knott, to the house, to the grounds ... 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. (81)

With respect to Knott’s pot:

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. (81)

This disparity between word and thing extends to Watt himself: "... he made the distressing discovery that of himself too he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone" (81). The self is unnameable and therefore inexpressible. Watt is not concerned with any exact relationship between word and thing, word and self; thus his "need of semantic succour [was] ... so great that he would set to trying names on things; and on himself ..." (83). Of a pseudo-pot he would say it was a raven or a shield. Words buttress him from the reality of the void in things and of himself. "But he had turned, little by little, a disturbance into words, he had made a pillow of old words, for a head" (117).
Silence and solitude are his conditions of being at Knott's house, although he longs for a voice like Erskine's, who never speaks, "to speak of the little world of Mr. Knott's... with the old words, the old credentials" (84–85). The desire "to appear and himself appear, in their ancient guise, and consent to be named, with the time honoured names and forgotten" (84), indicates that Watt has, in Arsene's words, "slipped", has suffered in these first experiences in Knott's house "existence off the ladder" (44).

The symbolism of the ladder is important for an understanding of Watt's experiences and it is, at most, an ambiguous symbol.

Arsene is one of the servants at Knott's house and is about to leave as Watt enters. His "short statement" of twenty-eight pages speaks of his joy on first coming to Knott's. Arsene speaks of the "imminent harmony" that he, and no doubt Watt, experiences when he entered Knott's. As in Murphy, this harmony and bliss result in an indolence similar to the Belacqua bliss Murphy experiences:

Having oscillated all his life between the torments of a superficial loitering and the horrors of a disinterested endeavour, he finds himself at last in a situation where to do nothing exclusively would be an act of the highest value and significance. (41)

This harmony "in oneself, by oneself" (42) changes: "Something slipped... What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I have taken it away" (43–44). Arsene connects the change with the "presence of what did not exist" (45) and it is most likely
that what Watt has just experienced, Arsene did: the Naught. He warns Watt that any attempt to "utter or eff the unutterable or ineffable is doomed to fail" (62). Jacqueline Hoefer connects the symbolism of the ladder to a passage in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: She quotes Wittgenstein:

"My propositions are elucidating in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it". 29

Experience off the ladder is the experience of the Naught, and the ladder, according to Hoefer, is one of logical propositions (if ... or ...). Arsene is warning Watt that he must throw away the ladder of logic in face of the Naught, since logic and language cannot express what is inexpressible. The "old credentials" will not suffice to describe the experiences at Knott's. Watt, at first, is content not to express the inexpressible; or rather, the situation does not affect Watt to the degree it will later on:

...but in the first week Watt's words had not yet begun to fail him, or Watt's world to become unspeakable. (85)

In terms of Proust and Beckett's description of Habit, Arsene is telling Watt that once he enters Knott's world, the habitual laws governing experiences and the activities of the mind in relation to experience will not hold. Watt, on entering the envrons of Knott, experiences the dying of

29 As quoted by Hoefer, "Watt", p. 74.
his "old ego" or rather the resistance of his old ego to its death. The old ego is the "minister of dullness" and "agent of security (PTD 21); and in Watt's case, it attempts to foist on the void of events some meaning. The old ego uses hypotheses -- examines possibilities of how, for example, the back door came to be open. It clings to its operation of language or words on things and events (one of dismissal and exorcism). Beckett writes:

When it ceases to perform that second function security, when it is opposed by a phenomenon that it cannot reduce to the condition of a comfortable and familiar concept, when, in a word, it betrays its trust as a screen to spare its victim the spectacle of reality, it disappears . . . (PTD 22)

Watt's experience with the Galls and the pot of Mr. Knott initiate the dying (though not the completion) of the old ego. As we have seen Watt still clings to his habit, although Watt is conscious that, for the first time, he is having difficulty exercising his reason and language.

"What is taking place? The old pact is out of date" (PTD 21). Words can no longer be applied to things. Events cannot be dismissed in a mesh of logical connections. Watt can no more disregard the exact meaning of an event and cling to the meaning within his statements or descriptions of that event. The void forces him to seek a meaning where no meaning exists. This is the paradox and force of the Naught. As long as Watt saw several interpretations in a given situation he could choose one of many and it didn't matter whether the meaning he gave corresponded to the reality of the event. Now, with the incident of the Galls that gave no meaning, he is
forced to seek at least one when there is none. His experience of Knott's pot is described by Beckett:

... when the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance, then and only then may it be a source of enchantment. (PTD 22-23)

In the case of Watt, Knott's pot is a source of tortuous enchantment and Watt, like the creature of habit, "turns aside from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his intellectual prejudices, that resists the propositions of his team of synthesis, organized by Habit on labour saving principles" (PTD 23).

Watt, however, does not turn aside and persists in attempting to organize or elucidate events in Knott's house in terms of his own system. As Hesla points out, if the refusal of things to be named and, hence, to be brought within the power of Watt, is the "paradigm of semantic impasse and epistemic dead end"30 which defines his condition, he is not totally defeated. As long as he is capable of locating a thing or event in a sequence or series and of constructing one or more hypotheses which can account for the things or event, he remains secure.

The source of how Watt deals with the events in Knott's house goes back to Descartes' Discourse on Method. Watt adopts the third and fourth methods as a means of labour-saving devices:

30 The Shape of Chaos, p.66.
The third [method] to conduct my thoughts in an orderly manner beginning with those objects which are simplest and easiest to know, then rising little by little, as though by steps, to knowledge of the most complex. And the last always to make such complete enumerations and comprehensive reviews that I could be sure I had overlooked nothing. 31

Here, again, the symbol of the ladder could allude to the "steps" by which absolute truth or certainty is known. Obviously Watt's following of this method ends as a parody of it. He discovers twelve possible combinations of arranging Mr. Knott's meals.

Twelve possibilities occurred to Watt, in this connexion:

1. Mr. Knott was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that he was responsible for the arrangement, and knew that such an arrangement existed, and was content. (89)

Here is the twelfth:

12. Mr. Knott was not responsible for the arrangement, but knew that he was responsible for the arrangement, but did not know that any such arrangement existed, and was content. (90)

Watt is not concerned which one of the twelve arrangements is correct; in fact, "other possibilities occurred to Watt ... but he put them aside ... for the time being" (90). Rather he is concerned with listing a given number of possibilities in a certain situation. It is a means of exorcism and distancing or veiling the reality of Knott's world, not of describing it as it actually is.

The arrangement of Knott's dinners lead into the

31 Descartes, Essential Works, p. 12.
question of how Knott's leftovers were given to the dog. Watt lists four solutions as to how the dog and the food are brought together and fourteen objections to the four solutions (7). Jacqueline Hoefer remarks: "He only asks how the food and the dog are to be brought together,"32 not why. He constructs a series of possible relationships between the dog and the food only to conclude that once he:

... had grasped in its complexity, the mechanism of this arrangement, how the food came to be left, and the dog to be available, and the two to be united, then it interested him no more, and he enjoyed a comparative peace of mind, in this connection. Not that for a moment Watt supposed he had penetrated the forces at play in this particular instance, or even perceived the forms that they upheaved, or obtained the least useful information concerning himself, or Mr. Knott, for he did not. (117)

Thus, Watt, the Cartesian hero, tries to carry out Descartes' method. His failure is in itself a denunciation and parody of the rationalist method.

Besides language and logic, watt tends to locate events, things and people in mathematical series, such as Erskine's painting of the circle and Knott's events.

The importance of locating events, people or things in series is similar to the use of logic and language.33 While it may not give a meaning or bear any relation to the reality it encompasses, the series imposes a pattern

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33 See Richard Coe, Beckett, p.p. 50-57. I am indebted to his elucidation of the meaning of the series.
on that reality, a pattern of cause and effect and determination. Watt reasons that his stay on the ground floor is not only determined by Erskine's stay on the first floor, but also, by the non-appearance of a servant yet to come, who will replace Watt on the ground floor:

For the service to be considered was not the service of one servant, but of two servants and even of three servants, and even an infinity of servants, of whom the first could not out till the second up, nor the second up till the third in, nor the third in till the first out... this long chain of consistence, a chain stretching from the long-dead to the far unborn. (133-134)

Watt sees the chain of cause and effect operating in both directions. In a series, such as that of the servants, Erskine's length of stay is determined by Watt's and Watt's is determined by a servant yet to come. There is no freedom in either direction: the cause determines the effect but is in turn determined by its effect. Any event, Watt discovers, if faithful to the pattern of a series is rigidly determined not only by a chain of causes leading back to the remotest past ("the long dead") but also by a chain of effects leading into the infinite future ("the far unborn"). Watt applies this notion of cause and effect and series to Time and the hypothetical Tom, Dick and Harry (134), and then suggests the opposite:

But Tom's two years on the first floor are not because of Dick's two years on the ground floor, or of Harry's coming... (134)

The lack of predetermination of the servants is as equally horrifying as the consequences of predetermination, and for
Watt this is "too horrible to contemplate" (134). Yet he must, for he realizes that in Tom, Dick or Harry is some element that evades the series -- that of the essential identity of each:

For it was not the Tomness of Tom, the Dickness of Dick, the Harryness of Harry . . . that preoccupied Watt . . . but their Tomness, their Dickness, their Harryness . . . (136)

The dilemma Watt realizes was put forth in Proust: is there an existence of a self that is both in time and atemporal? Either Tom is temporal and is only a sum of his appearances and subject to rigid determination or else he is atemporal and free and something more than the multitude of dying selves in the flux of time. Watt only raises these questions and never answers them; they will be the principal theme of The Unnameable.

Beckett furnishes the symbol for not only the major theme of the novel but also the form (which will be discussed later). It is the painting of the circle in Erskine's room:

A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken of its lowest point, occupied the middle foreground, of this picture. In the eastern background appeared a point or dot . . . And he wondered what the artist had intended to paint . . . a circle and its centre in search of each other . . . (128-29)

He considers other possibilities concerning the relationship between the circle and its centre: when the circle and point will enter in the same plane; and if the circle and the point will collide. Watt as usual drops the matter
suggesting that it too might be part of a series (131). The broken circle and the point symbolize, in a nutshell, the form and meaning of Watt's quest. The circle symbolizes the speculations and mental acrobatics relating to the point (i.e. meaning) of Knott's establishment. All attempts to formulate a meaning through logic, language and mathematics fail; moreover, the quest for meaning is a circular one, since whatever meaning there is in Knott and his house lies outside the closed circle of Watt's mind. Watt's system, like Murphy's, is a closed one, and, given the tendency of Watt to see meaning of events only in language, the broken circle symbolizes his failure to penetrate the barrier of language and logic and accept Knott's world for what it is -- a Naught.

Nor does Watt during his first stage at Knott's home learn anything about Mr. Knott. Knott presides like a deity over Watt and the other servants, and Watt's desire to see him "face to face" (146) and his few glimpses of Knott "not clearly caught, but as it were in a glass" (147) suggest that Knott could be a symbol of God. Man or God, Knott's identity remains a mystery and his characteristic gesture is symbolic of his ultimate mystery:

None of Mr. Knott's gestures could be called characteristic unless perhaps that which consisted in the facial obturation of the facial cavities, the thumbs in the mouth, the fore-fingers in the ears, the little fingers in the nostrils, the third' fingers in the eyes and the second fingers, free in a crisis to promote intellection, laid along the temples. (212)

The gesture suggests that Knott himself is a closed system --
unknowable, through the senses or the mind. Knott is a more extreme type than Mr. Kendon in Murphy.

In the third section of the novel, narrated by a fellow inmate, Sam, Watt appears in a mental institution and, just as in Murphy the mental institution was described in religious terms, so, too, the place where Watt stays is pictured in terms of an Eden, a paradise. However, it is a cruel parody of such a paradise filled with ditches, rats and insanity (154-156).

The change in Watt after leaving Knott's house is physical and mental. Watt now wears his clothes back to front (162), advances backwards (159), and speaks "as one speaking to dictation or reciting, parrot-like, a text" (156). Sam records: "As Watt walked, so now he talked, back to front" (164). Like Murphy, Watt's quest ends in a regressive limbo state. He can no longer communicate rationally and the experience at Knott's place results in a disintegration of speech: "He spoke with scant regard for grammar, for syntax, for pronunciation, for enunciation..." (156).

The last eight stages of Watt's stay in Knott's house are described in Watt's disintegrated language. The language reaches the extremity of chaos when describing the last stage. At first he inverts the order of words in the sentence and the letters in the word; next, the sentences, then all three simultaneously. Gradually he inverts the order of:
... the letters in the word and that of the sentences in the period, and now simultaneously that of the letters in the word and that of the words in the sentence and that of the sentences in the period. (168)

No example of this last mode of speech is given. The seventh stage is given however:


The symmetry of Watt's statements and their circularity (sid by sid ... sid by sid) contains and is borne by the chaos they express. The non-sense of Watt is a rational non-sense obeying its own rules. Watt's speech reflects not only his experience at Knott's, but the circularity of his quest and ultimate futility to say something of nothing. Watt fails in his effort to get to know Mr. Knott, just as Murphy had failed to make contact with Mr. Endon. Both men at the end of their quest remained alone in absolute solitude. Watt is pathetically alone and fails to establish some kind of human relationship with Knott. He neither speaks nor is spoken to, looks nor is looked at, but remains alongside, close but infinitely distant.

One of Watt's speeches seems to give a reason for his quest:
Of nought. To the source. To the teacher.
To the temple. To him I bought. This
emptied heart. These emptied hands. This
mind ignoring. This body homeless. To love
him my little reviled. My little rejected to
have him. My little to learn forgot. Aban-
doned my little to find him (166).

The word "source" may support the interpretation of the
circle (Watt) seeking its centre (Knott). Watt's quest
here is given in religious terms of renunciation—lack
of world and self. The language with its surface nonsense
and childlike sound reflects the regressive course of the
journey: backwards, to the source, the Naught.

Watt not only deals with the breakdown and inadequacy
of systems of communications and meanings, such as language,
but reflects its main theme in the form of the novel. It
is not until the last chapter that we learn the story is
not told in the order that it happened, although the ill-
usion of chronology is maintained. The four parts of Watt
have a unity and a complementarity. The two outside parts
describe Watt's arrival and departure. The novel ends al-
most as it began: It was summer when Watt set out on his
journey and it is summer as he leaves. The middle sections
can be seen as a complete unit since they tell of Watt's
stay, first on the ground floor then on the first floor at
Knott's house.

However, the unity is only apparent:

As Watt told the beginning of his story, not
first, but second, so not fourth but third,
now he told its end. Two, one, four, three,
that was the order in which Watt told his story.

This too is a lie; for it is difficult to say just who is
narrating the first and last sections, certainly not Watt. As for the real order of events in the novel, the actual progress is from the departure by train to Knott's house (Chapter 1), the stay on the ground floor at Knott's house (Chapter 2), the second stage on the last floor at Knott's house (Chapter 4) and the departure of Watt from Knott's house to the asylum (Chapter 3). By narrating the events of the last two chapters out of their logical order, Beckett creates confusion as to how the quest actually ends. The order is further confused by the narrator's (Sam? or Beckett?) comment that the first two chapters as presented are not in the right order. The addendum, which Beckett says was not included because of fatigue and disgust, suggests that the narrative order is incomplete as well as confused. The implication of these narrative distortions is that the order in which traditional fiction is created by the logical development of a plot with beginning, middle and end, has no place in a fiction created by Beckett. Thus, the norm of the plot, important in conventional fiction, is invalidated.

Not only is the plot invalidated, but it exists minimally. It consists of a departure, a servitude and a departure. Characters, such as Mackett and Nixon, are introduced and never appear again. Gaps of time are left unspecified, such as the exact time Sam is writing Watt's story—shortly after or several years later. Question marks, hiatuses and footnotes, not only point to the novel as solely a work of "fiction"; but also destroy its
continuity. Blank spaces abound in Watt and point to the
teller's own ignorance of his tale and creative impotence:
"The labour of composition, the uncertainty as to how to
proceed, or whether to proceed at all . . ."(156)

The use of the internal narrator as a character telling
the story we are reading adds to the confusion of the novel.
Sam gives the two middle parts of the novel but not the
beginning and end. Who narrates these events is never told
—it could be Sam's fiction, to give his story more co-
herence, or Beckett's. This narration by a character in
the novel is further complicated when the narrator testifies
to the uncertainty of truth his story conveys:

And if Watt had not known this, that Erskine's
key was not a simple key, then I should never
have known it either, nor the world. For all
I know on the subject of Mr. Knott and on the
subject of Watt . . . came from Watt alone.
(125)

This raises the possibilities of inaccuracies in Sam's
story and in the novel as a whole:

Thus I missed. I suppose much I presume of
great interest touching I suspect
Watt's stay in Mr. Knott's house. (167)

The words "missed", "suppose", "presume" and "suspect"
point to the "fiction" of the whole fiction-making process.
The author is not even sure of the validity of what he is
writing.

Thus Beckett extends the theme of the quest (language
in relation to reality) to the form (author in relation to
his creation and fallibility of the enterprise). The
novel, for all its accounts of Watt's speculations concerning
things, events, and Mr. Knott, points to its own failure
to tell its story successfully -- it remains a broken
circle.

With Watt, Beckett reaches a semantic impasse parallel
to Watt's -- how to express the Nothing without speaking of
It as something. The terms of relation Beckett spoke of in
Three Dialogues (PTD 124) have been invalidated. There is
neither world nor self; or, if the self does exist, it is
unknown. All that remains is the acute "anxiety of the
relation itself" (PTD 124). On the level of plot Beckett
pretends to be unable to control the narration; the novel
form is inadequate to picture and give an understanding
of reality and henceforth must shrink "from the nullity
of extracircumferential phenomena" (PTD 65). The new
form will have to embody "the expression that there is
nothing to express ... and nothing with which to ex-
press" (PTD 103).

As Beckett outlined in Proust, the only fertile re-
search is negative, exploring the "only world that has
reality and significance, the world of our own latent
consciousness" (PTD 13).

Thus Beckett's quest, like his individual characters,
is a regression, a return to the source, to the Naught. It
is not accidental that eventually Beckett's own quest merges
with that of his characters and is essentially a via ne-
ativa. He had defined his art as a negative action, an
apotheosis of solitude; and in *The Unnameable* he attempts to define the Self, to affirm the negative:

By knowing naught, he -- beyond knowing -- knows.\(^{34}\)

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CHAPTER III

THE UNNAMEABLE

And I said with rapture, here is something I can study all my life and never understand (169).

The Unnameable is the final state in Beckett's quest for a "literature of the Unword." The novel is an attempt to express and transcend the impasse arrived at in Watt and stated in Three Dialogues:

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express... (PTD 103)

Michael Robinson has said of The Unnameable:

... it is the inevitable and terrifying end to all Beckett's works. It is the most painful of his works, one that has in the best sense... abandoned literature.35

It is terrifying because it deals with those "perilous zones of being" that are the core of the artistic process and which open the door to the real (PTD 19). The real, as we have seen, is the Naught, the Void. Furthermore, Beckett has spoken of the only reality as that of our own latent consciousness; it is a pure subjectivity exempt from the flux of time (atemporal) and boundaries of space (PTD 90). In Proust, Beckett connects the artistic process

with self-knowledge and this connection is established in the first lines of *The Unnameable*: "Where now? Who now? When now?" (291). Thus, the quest motif present in the novels studied so far, is the principal thematic motif of *The Unnameable*.

In *The Unnameable*, the aesthetic and epistemological quests are fused; it is a quest that essentially is a descent into the Self, an apotheosis of solitude, in which the art of fiction is the means through which the Self is discovered. The quest, however, is complicated and inevitably impossible. If, as Beckett posits, the Self is a Naught or Nothing, how can it be known or expressed? Like Watt the narrator must attempt to speak of the Nothing as something. The Naught or Self lies outside time and space, yet it is the obligation of the artist (according to Beckett) to express this Self. Art is the form of the quest and it must reflect the impossibility of expressing its own goal. If the words are to express the inexpressible, the form must abandon literature and carry the words, if not to silence, at least to the threshold.

The quest, again, is essentially, the *via negativa* -- an affirmation of the negative. The way leads, of course, not to God, Who is absent from the world of Beckett, but to the Self, the source of the creative process. Hence, the first lines suggest the Unnameable is both the seeker and the sought for. the narrator and character: "Where now?"
Who now? When now?" (291). He is in complete solitude:
"I am of course alone. Alone" (292). The oral style
suggests that he is no more than a voice speaking, a mind
turned in upon itself and revolving about itself through
the use of words. Like Murphy and Watt, the Unnameable
is a closed system; he has withdrawn from the outer world
and the place he inhabits is a void:

There, now, there is no one more but me, no one
wheels about me, no one comes toward me ... only I and this black void. (304)

He apparently has achieved the goal Murphy and Watt sought;
however, in Beckett's world there are always qualifications.
The Unnameable's existence at the outset is defined in
terms of thinking and speaking; and language is the mode of
his being. Here again, Beckett still clings to the Cartesian
view of his mind found in Murphy and Watt:

I know that I was a thinking substance whose
whole essence or nature was to think, and
which in order to exist had no need of any
location and did not depend on any material
thing.36

and:

Thought? Here I find what belongs to me;
it can not be separated from me. I am. I
exist: that is certain. For how long? As
long as I continue to think, for it might
be that if I ceased to think, I would cease
to exist.37

The Unnameable seems to bear a similar resemblance to these
Cartesian notions of the self. However, he does not share
the certainty of his existence as does Descartes' "Cogito";

36 Descartes, Essential Works, p. 20.
37 Ibid., p. 37.
knowledge consists of total ignorance:

I, say I. Unbelieving . . . I seem to speak; it is not I, about me. it is not about me. (291)

As for the method of attaining self-knowledge, it can no longer be the rationalist one; since, after Watt, that method has been invalidated. The Unnameable must contemplate himself independent of reason. The Unnameable, contrary to his statement about avoiding the "spirit of system" (292), does suggest his method of investigation: "Can one be ephectic otherwise than unawares?" (291). Diogenes Laertius, in his book Lives of Eminent Philosophers, explains the meaning of ephectic and its relation to philosophical scepticism:

All these were called . . . Epehectics or doubters because of the state of mind which followed their inquiry. I mean, suspense of judgement.33

The goal of the Sceptics is insensitivity or, in Béckettian terms, apathy. The Unnameable begins his quest "devoid of feeling" (293); whereas Murphy and Watt ended their quest in that state.

The method of the Sceptics,39 outlined by Diogenes Laertius, partially explains the style of The Unnameable.


39 See The Shape of Chaos, p. 59. Hesla quotes Diogenes Laertius in his discussion of Watt. However, he does not go into any detailed application of the philosophy to either Watt or The Unnameable; nor does he show how the basic principles underlie the narrative style of The Unnameable.
Their method was to enunciate no dogmatic philosophy but to engage in overthrowing other dogmas. The essential statements in their philosophy were: "We determine nothing" and "Every saving has its opposite." The first statement meant an absence of all determination, and withholding of an assent to dogmas, including their own. The second statement meant a suspension of judgment when facts disagree but contradictory statements have the same weight. The consequence was ignorance of truth:

So they were merely using the words as servants as it was not possible not to refute one statement by another; just as we are accustomed to say there is no such thing as space, and yet we have no alternative but to speak of space for the purpose of argument. . . . As to their contradictions in their doubts they would show the ways in which things gain credence, and then by the same methods they would destroy belief in them.40

Beckett's style seems to be partially based on this method; the Unnameable's statement as to how he will proceed in the narrative supports this contention:

What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, how proceed. By aporia, pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered. . . . (291)

The shift in verb tenses reflects the perplexity (aporia) of the narrator, and his final conclusion dictates the dialectical nature of the narrative. Affirmations will be succeeded by negations, which in turn will be succeeded by negations. This, of course, applies to the statement itself. Hence if

40 Lives, p. 491
one were to read this statement and apply the philosophical principle behind it, the meaning would be: I will proceed by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered. I will not proceed by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered. I will ... and so on. The process is a vicious circle that affirms itself in the act of negating itself. Here is an example:

Malone is there ... Sometimes I wonder if it is Mollov. Perhaps it is Mollov, wearing Malone's hat ... Perhaps Mollov is not here at all ... another hypothesis they are here but are here no longer. (293)

Each hypothesis attempts to say something definite and is qualified by the next statement, which is further qualified by the next statement, which is further qualified, until in the end, they are all completely banished. The Unnameable has said nothing really. Even the last statement "they ... are here no longer" is an hypothesis. Occasionally the passages break down:

The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things on which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to. I forget no matter. (291)

This passage almost approaches meaningless babble and appears to go nowhere. It establishes the narrator as an impotent creator unable to maintain for any length of time in space a coherent thought or phrase. The rhythm of the lines corresponds to the attempt at the thought expressed; the rhythm conveys improvisation on the part of the narrator, as if the
story he is telling has no certain direction. The obsessive use of commas, punctuating the struggle to think and speak, adds hesitancy to the discourse. The breath of the voice halts, proceeds, hesitates and finally stops beneath the weight of its burden, which is: "I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak..." (291) This inability to speak is embodied in the form of the passage. The word "fact" (a certainty) is qualified by the conditional "would seem." The next phrase doubts the possibility of speaking of facts; the next phrase states the impossibility of speaking and the last throws doubt on the "I" that speaks. Finally, the whole discourse is abandoned: "I forget, no matter." The passage and, indeed, the whole novel attempt to do away with the grammar and style he considered obsolete. However, as I have attempted to show, there is a method to the madness that informs the style.

This is the method, underlying the style, which informs the mode of the quest — language and art.

The Unnameable, as mentioned previously, attempts to define himself through language; language is the means of attaining his goal. However, it is not only the means; it is the obstacle. The questions at the beginning indicate he will define himself in terms of space and time.

In Proust, Beckett stated that the permanent self can only be grasped as a "retrospective hypothesis" (FTD 15).

This phrase suggests, not only the distortions of memory, but also the questioning of the existence of this self. The questions the Unnameable asks at the beginning of the novel — "Where now? Who now? When now?" (If this chapter does not get beyond the first line, it is to be expected: Beckett at the end of the novel has not gone beyond it either) -- point back to Proust: the relation of space and time to self-knowledge. The questions are also termed "hypotheses" (291) which suggests that not only are time, space and the "I" hypotheses, but also the words are, in relation to their meaning. "When now" may sound redundant; it is not. Words are used to call into question their signification. In terms of the Unnameable's condition of being (atemporal and aspatial), what can the word "now" mean in relation to time and "where" in relation to space? The words signify space and time and they are the only words he has. If he is to define himself, he must use words that do not refer to his reality. Through words he remains trapped in space and time; they prevent him from "being admitted to that peace where he neither is, nor is not, and where the language dies that permits of such expression" (334-335).

Thus his mode of being is in a fictional space and time. This is an important point concerning the relationship between The Unnameable and Proust, and involves the examination of the first stage of the quest.

The Unnameable exists within a dimly lit space of indeterminate size (293). Around him and within this space, circles Malone. The Unnameable mentions that possibly
Molloy may be somewhere and Murphy (293). Later he establishes the fact that he is the creator of these characters:

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 me alone. (302)

The characters were created as fictions in order to define himself. They were produced in order to tell his own story about himself: he calls them "vice-existers" (315):

I thought I was right in enlisting these sufferers of my pains. I was wrong. They have never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing compared to mine, a mere tittle... I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it. (303-304)

The stories the Unnameable told of Murphy, Watt and Malone were failures, because they did not speak of himself. The purpose of The Unnameable, qua story, is finally to speak of himself, and only of himself. Murphy existed in a novel, as did Watt (339), Malone and the others, in order to distance the Unnameable from himself ("in order to witness"). Although the space these characters occupied was in the world of men, it was still a fictional one. If he is to define himself he must do it without turning himself into a fictional character occupying a fictional space. This is the essential dilemma of the quest. The splitting of the Self into a pseudo-self complicates the problem and elucidates the dilemma. Through the split the self posits itself spatially elsewhere; doubling the self creates an illusion of identity, and an interior distance. The Unnameable, through Murphy and Malone, spoke of himself as he was not, i.e., spatial, not as he was, aspatial. Accord-
ing to the Unnameable, he shares no similarities with Murphy and the others. However, that is only a half-truth.

The place the Unnameable occupies seems to be the third zone of the mind outlined in Chapter Six of Murphy and described as a "matrix of surds" (112) consisting of a flux of forms. The word "matrix" or womb connects this zone with the space the Unnameable inhabits. The Unnameable is the source (womb) of characters, the flux of forms, who, from Murphy onwards, have been defined as surds. Furthermore, the Unnameable alludes to Murphy, at the beginning of the novel:

Can it be that one day... I simply stayed in... instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible. (291)

Murphy attempted to gain mental freedom in the third zone through bodily stasis. The body confines man, not only to time, but also space. In order to attain his goal, Murphy had to face the impossible task of completely detaching his consciousness from the outer world in order to become one with himself. Watt introduced the linguistic dilemma. Language cannot say the Naught. Language is oriented to the outer world of space and time. It cannot express the spaceless self. Sam, the narrator in Watt, concludes that the only way to speak about nothing is to speak about it as if it were something. The Unnameable has come to the end of the journeys of Murphy and Watt:

Enormous prison, like a hundred thousand cathedrals, never anything else anymore... and in it, somewhere, perhaps, riveted, tiny, the prisoner, how can he be found? how false this space is... (409)
Presumably, the Unnameable has withdrawn completely from the outer world. However, as Richard Coe points out, the Unnameable is "an anomaly, a logical contradiction."\(^{42}\) He is aspatial but does not possess the words to describe his self without fictionalizing it. If he can only speak of himself in space, he has failed to define himself. The stories and the words lie. As he states: "Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak. No one compels me to, there is no one." (365)

The "words of the others" are the words of his vice-existents and contain the stories of the outer world. Thus, his being is constituted by words that relate fictions and not himself:

"It is not surprising that the Unnameable chooses to define himself as the centre of a circle:

... the place may well be vast, as it may well measure twelve feet in diameter...
I like to think I occupy the centre, but nothing is less certain.

The circle is the symbol of his solipsism, futile quest, as well as the style and form, which negates itself in the act of affirming itself. It also establishes the relationship between author and character."\(^{\text{36}}\)

The Unnameable imagines Malone circling around him at regular intervals. Malone, the fictional hypothesis of the

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42 R. Coe, Beckett, p. 70. Coe views the Unnameable as having a body or at least a physical form. My view is that the Unnameable has no body, is the Naught, but must speak about himself as a body in order to define himself with spatially-oriented words. It could be a matter of logic but it seems to be more a matter of words.
Unnameable's self, is depicted in relation to the Unnameable as the circumference of a circle. The Unnameable is the centre (295). In order to speak about himself as a centre, the Unnameable needs Malone as his circumference. If he did not have Malone, or the others, he could never describe or define himself as a centre. The subtlety of this symbol lies in the author's dependence on his character in order to define where he is. The Unnameable needs his fictions in order to define himself, yet the fictions never do this. The centre of a circle is a dimensionless point, that can be approached but never reached; it will always be circumscribed by ever-narrowing circles until finally the point merges with the circle and both negate each other. The circle cannot exist without the centre; the centre cannot exist without the circle; nor can they be one. Hence, the Unnameable can only speak of himself in relation to Malone or other fictions. This is exactly what he intends not to do. The author is dependent on his own creation in order to define himself, yet this dependency prevents self-definition and self-expression. Unable to describe his aspatiality, he portrays Malone as a spatial entity, revolving in a finite circle, in order to locate himself as a centre. Malone, however, being finite and bounded by his orbit, would be antithetical to the Unnameable, free and boundless. Thus, the circle and the centre are symbolic of the failure of the quest.

43 R. Coe, Beckett, p. 70. Coe deals with the symbol of the circle in relation to time. I have applied his interpretation to space.
However, the Unnameable persists in foisting some kind of spatial location on himself in order to know where he is. He hypothesizes that he is in a skull, "straining against the walls, with my head, my hands, my feet, my back, and even murmuring my old stories" (303). The skull suggests both birth and death, a naught that exists, that tells stories. If he was the centre in relation to Malone, he is now the sphere in relation to himself: "An egg . . . No, no, that's old nonsense, I always knew I was round, solid and round . . ." (305). None of this is the truth, however, and he resorts to telling stories again.

The Unnameable is unable to cease telling his stories. The possible reason for this is in the symbol of the circle. In relation to Malone he described himself as a centre. The centre and circumference can never meet except within himself as centre and himself as sphere. The stories are taken up to seek out the validity of this hypothesis. If the Unnameable tells a story about himself as author, possibly that story will end up being about himself — author and character will merge.

Thus, he invents the story of Mahood, who arose from Basil:

Decidedly, Basil is becoming important. I'll call him Mahood instead, I prefer that. I'm queer. It was he told me stories about me, lived in my stead . . . (209)

The story of Mahood beings, at first, with a clear cut distinction between narrator and character: "And I see myself slipping, though not yet at the last extremity,
towards the resorts of fable" (308). The danger, however, is the merging of the two voices:

It is his voice which has often, always, mingled with mine, and sometimes drowned it completely. (309)

The Mahood story tells about the outside world. Mahood possesses a body but is in a state of decay, approaching death: "... perhaps I had left my leg behind in the Pacific" (317). Mahood's voice proceeds to drown out the Unnameable's as Mahood tells of his return to his family -- "My missing leg didn't seem to affect them, perhaps it was almost missing when I left" (317) -- and his subsequent decay:

But in reality I had sunk to the ground on my own free will... The simplest thing to do is to fling away the crutches and collapse. This is what I did. (321)

The Unnameable breaks Mahood's narration and, as author, commenting on his own work in the process of speaking it, adds:

I must really lend myself to this story a little longer, there may possibly be a grain of truth in it. Mahood must have remarked that I remained sceptical, for he casually let fall that I was lacking not only a leg but an arm also. (321)

The story approaches some validity because of the supposed identity of Mahood and the Unnameable: also, the voices merge to the point where the Unnameable has to interrupt:

But what shocked me profoundly, to such a degree that my mind (Mahood dixit) was assailed by insuperable doubts... (321)

Eventually, Mahood in his story reaches a restive place that brings him close to the Unnameable's habitation -- non-
existence or existence of Naught and close to silence:

Stuck like a sheaf of flowers in a deep jar, its neck flush with my mouth . . . I am at rest at last. (327)

However, as a head stuck in a jar and speechless, the story is a metaphorical rendering of how the Unnameable arrived where he is at. 44 In order to speak of himself as aspatial, he tells a story that involves a character moving around the world (vast) and finally, motionless in a jar (determinate, immobile). Subject Mahood approaches and almost defines the spatiality of the Unnameable. The reduction of the head suggests that it, too, is a metaphor for the Unnameable's compulsive thinking and seeking. Mahood's story ends with Mahood at the point where existence ends and non-being begins:

But already I'm beginning to be there no more, in that calamitous street they made so clear to me. I could describe it, I could have a moment ago, as if I had been there, in the form they chose for me, diminished certainly, not the man I was, not much longer for this world, but the eyes still open to impressions, and one ear sufficiently, and the head sufficiently obedient, to provide me at least with a vague idea of the elements, to be eliminated from the setting in order for all to be empty and silent. (334)

Mahood's condition of being approximates the Unnameable's nonexistence. Mahood cannot describe the street (spatial location) he existed in a few moments ago. He doubts his own past existence ("as if I had been there") and attributes to himself a form imposed by the "they" which echoes the

44 See Shape of Chaos, p. 118.
Unnameable's reference to his vice-existers as a "they."
As a conscious being, however, he knows he still exists,
even minimally. He has an ear, and his eyes indicate that
he has not yet entered into the realm of non-being. His
movement from death (physical decay) towards birth into
the Naught, is not complete. The elements to be eliminated
are those of location which situate him on the side of
spatial existence. It is for this reason possibly that
Mahood's story is abandoned by the Unnameable. Mahood's
story fails to speak and define the Unnameable's aspatial
self. "The stories of Mahood are ended. He has realized
they could not be about me, he has abandoned, it is I who
won, who tried so hard to lose . . ." (345). Also Mahood,
in speaking and thinking, suggests that the Unnameable's
voice has merged with Mahood's. The two are indistinguish-
able. There is the possibility that the Unnameable in tell-
ing a story about himself in the fiction of Mahood has
spoken about himself in Mahood's words and, therefore, told
a story not about himself but only of Mahood. Yet as we
have seen, Mahood is not the Unnameable.

From this point onwards confusion reigns. For, if the
Unnameable, in telling a story about Mahood, in the hopp
that Mahood's story will define himself, has failed, he must
create another character, another vice-exister, who will take
Mahood's story further. The Unnameable does this in the
character of Worm:

But it's time I gave this solitary a name,
nothing doing without proper names. I there-
fore baptise him Worm ... It will be my name too ... when I needn't be called manood any-
more. (336)

It is difficult to know who is speaking here. The unname-
able seems to have adopted Mahood's voice in order to speak
about himself as worm, not mahood, nence the Unnameable.

David Hella offers a plausible explanation of this confus-
ing shift of identities:

... The unnameable had hoped that by naming
himself Worm, and then telling himself (in
Mahood's voice) a story about Worm ... he
could achieve his ultimate purpose -- to
speak about himself.45

The unnameable attempts to speak of himself as both
author and character, and thus avoid the failure of his other
stories. The process seems to be circular and a game of
mirrors: The Unnameable calls himself Worm. By using his
character Mahood as an author (which the Unnameable is) in
order to speak about himself as a character (Worm) in a story
which he (the Unnameable as Mahood--voice) is the author of,
he will ultimately define himself. This seems to be the
plan:

... I have to speak in a certain way ... first of the creature I am not [Manood], as
if I were ne, and then, as if I were ne
[Mahood] of the creature I am [Worm or the
Unnameable]. (335)

Worm is different from the other vice-existents or char-
acters the unnameable had created previously to define him-
self. Mahood although immobilized had spatial location and
spoke constantly. The Unnameable needs to create a vice-

45 The Shape of Chaos. p. 19.
exister who is a Naught comparable to himself. The Unnameable comes closest to defining himself in the personage of Worm. As his name suggests, he is closer to the source of the evolutionary scale. He embodies the foetal urge of Beckett's other protagonists (Murphy, Watt and manood) which consists in a regression towards death, which is the birth, into the Naught. Worm's spatial location is indeterminate as was The Unnameable's at the beginning of the novel:

For this feeling of being entirely enclosed, and yet nothing touching me, is new. The sawdust no longer presses against my stumps. I don't know where I end. I left it yesterday, Mahood's world, the street . . . (359)

Worm's apparent aspatiality as well as his ignorance equates him with the Unnameable. He is described as a "tiny blur, in the depths of the pit" (358), and as "at the centre . . . it matters little to what" (346). Of himself Worm knows nothing:

Worm to say he does not know what he is, where he is, what is happening, is to underestimate him. What he does not know is that there is anything to know. His senses tell him nothing, nothing about himself, nothing about the rest, and this distinction is beyond him. (346)

Worm then is the unnameable as he is, the Naught. Worm is a vice-exister who is and is not, at the same time.

However, Worm is born with two defects which place him on the side of existence rather than the Naught. He can hear: "The rascal he's getting humanized . . . he hears, true . . . Worm hears . . ." (360), and he possesses an eye and can see lights (359), suggesting that he is in some special location. The Unnameable concludes that Worm is
another failure: "I'm Worm, that is to say I am no longer he, since I hear" (349). Worm, therefore, must be just as much a fiction as Mahood. The Unnameable gives the main reason for his failure to be Worm:

Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless, but not for himself, for others, others can conceive him and say, Worm is . . . if there could be no being but being conceived, if only by the beer. (346)

The Unnameable returns to where he began: the impenetrable barrier of words and language that prevents him from defining and thus knowing himself. By conceiving another in an image or himself, he only creates another fiction (Mahood or Worm). Author and character, as projection (or retrospective hypothesis) of the author's self, do not meet. In the symbol of the circle, which opened up this discussion, it was suggested that if the Unnameable could be both actor and character his quest would succeed — the centre and the circumference would meet. However by turning itself into a pseudo-self the self posits itself as another self. Interior distance is created that cannot be traversed — the Unnameable cannot become both author and character. If he became Worm he would cease to be himself; the Naught, for worm is. Worm is also a fictional projection of the Unnameable; hence, by becoming Worm, the Unnameable would cease to be the self (the only reality); become his own fiction of himself and cease being himself; he would destroy himself without knowing himself. What eventually results is the "exhaustive enumeration" of fictional selves in space (and time) discussed in Proust and illustrated in The Unnameable:
At no moment do I know what I'm talking about, nor of whom, nor of where, nor how, nor why, but I could employ fifty wretches for this sinister operation and still be short of a fifty-first, to close the circuit... there might be a hundred of us and still we'd lack the hundred and first. We'll always be short of me. (339-340)

The fictions of the Unnameable were "retrospective hypotheses" in order to define and know himself, in space and time. It will be remembered that in Proust, Beckett dealt with the problem of whether the self was just the sum of its concatenation or successive appearances in time and space, or whether the self was a transcendent being lying outside its manifestations. The Unnameable seems to answer the question but also takes it further. The self, as we have seen, is a Naught, aspatial and atemporal. It is exempt from the flux of time and movements through space. However, in Proust, Beckett meant the self in relation to real time and real space; the Unnameable deals with the self in relation to itself. The space in Proust was exterior and in terms of physical existence. In The Unnameable, we have seen that the quest for self-knowledge deals with the problem of interior space: the self doubles itself and creates an interior distance. The self as subject posits itself as object or as a succession of pseudo-selves appearing before itself. The Unnameable splits consciousness of itself into two, then three, and so on. The process can, it appears, go on for ever. The Unnameable presents the appearances of his self as fictions which offer only "partial annexations" (PTD 18) in defining the self. Fiction, in terms of Beckett's aesthetic
quest as self-knowledge, is a process of cataloguing the self in its fictional manifestations or appearances to itself. These fictions do not terminate but exclude the self from its own fictions. The Unnameable, as author, is absent from the stories, not only about Murphy and Watt, but also from the stories about Mahood and Worm. The final space he occupies is a language-space:

I'm in words, made of words, others' words, I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words... coming together to say, fleeing one another to say, that I am they, all of them... and nothing else, yes, something else... a wordless thing in an empty space where nothing stirs, nothing speaks... (386)

Any description of aspatial world would cause the Unnameable to return to the novels that he created in his fruitless search for himself. There is no escaping from the words in which the Unnameable is trapped: they are a lie, a fiction, a verbal prison that condemns him to failure as an artist in search for self-knowledge and self-expression. Words also condemn him, as a speaking and thinking thing, to Time.

As an artist writing a novel or telling stories about himself, the Unnameable condemns himself to time. Thinking consists of time as does speaking. As a consciousness reflecting on itself, thinking about itself and expressing itself, the Unnameable is in time. The relationship of time to the self and artistic expression is the same as that of space. While it is possible that the Unnameable is aspatial, the fact that he thinks condemns him to time. The temporal dimension he occupies is, as Richard Coe points out, an
eternity of finite sequences of time, time is repetitive and cyclic. Time as flux, with beginning and end, is a fictional time:

For I am obliged to assign a beginning to my residence here, if only for the sake of clarity. Hell itself, although eternal, dates from the revolt of Lucifer. It is therefore permissible in light of this distant analogy, to think of myself as being here forever, but not as being here forever. (296)

The Unnameable, as a Naught, is outside the flux of time, out, in order to express himself, he assigns a fictional beginning. The words he has, again, are temporally oriented and therefore the tenses point not to his atemporal condition but to temporality. Time as flux is a fiction arising from the words or others: "years is one of Basil's ideas. A short time, a long time, it's all the same" (309). The stories of Basil, Manooch and Worm take place in time; the characters occupy a fictional time just as they occupied a fictional space, in relation to the Unnameable, who is a temporal. It would only be repetitive to follow this through as I did with the spatial quest. Therefore, I will present a briefer summary.

Basil, Mahood and Worm are stages in the Unnameable's

46 Richard Coe, Beckett, pp. 70-71. Again Coe sees the Unnameable as existing in time and out of time. He assumes that, because the Unnameable thinks and speaks, he is condemned to the flux of time and hence occupies the dimensions of atemporality and temporality. However, he does not seem to have noticed that time or flux is the idea of his fictions, e.g. Basil, and hence fiction. My position is that, just as, in relation to space, the words could not indicate his apatiality, so too the words cannot relate his temporality. The temporal dimension the Unnameable occupies is a temporal. In order to speak of it he uses words which refer to the outer world, passing time; thus they lie. The time that passes in the novel is a lie, a fictional temporal flux.
description of himself as an atemporal being. The stories occur in time, albeit a fictional one, since the stories are not about the Unnameable. Words and fictions condemn the unnameable to speak of himself as if he were in time and as if time were passing; this, however, as he states, is a lie: "... time is one thing, I another, but the question may be asked, why time doesn't pass, just like that, off the record, en passant, to pass the time..." (389). The stories are to pass the time that doesn't pass; they are in itself the embodiment of the inability to speak about himself in relation to time. Through words the Unnameable is incapable of expressing the inexplicable — his atemporal self.

The final stage of the quest is in terms of words which prevent him from fulfilling the goal of his quest: "The search for the means to put an end to things, an end to speech, is what enables the discourse to continue" (396).

His story is borne by his inability to tell it. What he desires in the last stages of the novel is a word that refers to himself alone. Trapped in space and time, through words he seeks the Word that will liberate him from his failure. The final impasse is the word itself: "... It's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that..." (399). The Unnameable is not the same person or being in the objective case as he is in the nominative case; this is the dilemma of language:

... someone speaks, someone hears, no need to
go any further, it is not he, it is I, or another, or others. what does it matter, the case is clear, it is not he, he who I know I am, that's all I know, who I cannot say I am ... to know nothing, to be capable of nothing, and to have to try ... (402)

As soon as he speaks of himself in the objective case, he no longer speaks of himself as an "I", but as a "me." Thus language, from the grammatical point of view, fails him. Yet language, in the end, is all he has; his attempt to speak his self, the inexpressible, will be successful when "I speak no more" (302). In the end, the Unnameable, in utter failure, is left at the door to Silence and the antithesis is between words and Silence: "... the words ... remain ... through the door, into the silence, that must be it ..." (413).

The novel ends as it began, in utter ignorance and failure. Silence is a desired goal, the ultimate expression of his Self, from which he is exiled by language. There is no way out, there is only going on:

I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me ... it will be I, it will be the silence, 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. (414)

The words are a tumbling confusion of pronouns: atoms whirling around a nameless void, referring to no one but themselves; a torrent of changing tenses expressing possibility, hope and despair. Above all, they are the expression of the failure of one who, with nothing to express, nothing with which to express, expressed the very impossibility of express-
ion. Their form approximates the formlessness of that which they cannot express, the Silence.

In *The Unnameable*, Samuel Beckett has achieved his aesthetic quest: He has failed to express anything but the inability to express. His failure remains a failure, for the work lies on this side of Silence. But perhaps in the last words of *The Unnameable* can be heard weakly, but forcefully, the Silence -- and thus, a literature of the unword.
CONCLUSION

Beckett, throughout the novels discussed here, has been fairly consistent with respect to the basic themes -- time, self and the incompetence of the artist. The Unnameable represents the summation of those ideas discussed in Proust and Three Dialogues, as well as the culmination of his quest for a literature of the Unword.

One could surmise that, after Beckett completed The Unnameable, he was faced with the decision whether to write or not to write. In Three Dialogues, he spoke of an obligation to express in spite of the inability to express. The last lines of The Unnameable point to the persistence of this obligation: "I can't go on. I'll go on" (414). However, with respect to the ideas found in Proust and Three Dialogues, The Unnameable seems to have exhausted Beckett's pursuit for a literature of the Unword. The dilemma facing Beckett is most obvious in his next work, Texts for Nothing. The basic similarity in theme and style of these "texts" to The Unnameable reveals that Beckett had reached an impasse. The problem is not so much to "go on", but how to "go on", without further repetition.

In his last works, How It Is and The Lost Ones, Beckett seems to have overcome the impasse.

How It Is represents a move away from the style of


All quotations are from this edition.
the trilogy, although the themes remain the same. The novel consists of blocks of passages, irregular in length and without punctuation which makes difficult reading at first and tends to convey the impression of chaos:

voice once without quaqua on all sides then in me when the panting stops tell me again finish telling me a invocation (7)

The punctuation, however, can easily be supplied by the reader and sense given to the passages. The "sense" or themes of the novel are reminiscent of The Unnameable. The speaker is quoting a text that will finally speak of himself and the last stages of his life:

My life last state last version ill said, ill-heard ill-recaptured ill murmured (7)

The speaker is unknown and the words he speaks cannot be attributed to him. He is the instrumental voice of an unknown author -- "an ancient voice in me not mine" (7) -- and the novel is one long quotation: "how it was I quote, before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is I say it as I hear it" (7). The concern over the identity of the self or speaker is abandoned in this novel: "and me if its me no question impossible too weak no importance." It will be remembered that, in Proust, Beckett stated that art should be concerned with the only reality that of the self. How It Is is the turning point in Beckett's thematic interest. In the interview with Tom Driver, he spoke of finding a form that would admit the chaos of the outside world. How It Is can be seen as Beckett's attempt to create a new form that would reflect the "chaos." Thus the basic tension in this novel is between form and chaos, not
words and silence. Beckett turned away from his view that art should be solely concerned with defining the self. He sought to create a form that would deal with the world outside the self -- the chaos. What is important in this novel is Beckett's experimentation with a new form. He is no more concerned with a literature of the Unword and his aesthetic quest seems to have ended with *Texts for Nothing.*

In his latest work, *The Lost Ones,* Beckett abandons the style of *How It Is,* and returns to a more conventional style. The story describes a group of nameless characters, roaming inside a flattened cylinder, searching for their "lost ones":

> Abode where lost bodies roam each searching for its lost one. Vast enough for search to be in vain. Narrow enough for flight to be in vain.(7)

The "Lost ones" are the searchers and the searched-for. Through the use of ladder propped against niches in the vault-like cylinder, the lost ones attempt to find a way out. The "existential" situation is similar to the situations in the previous novels -- confinement, impasse and waiting for release.

It is difficult to define the work as a story -- it is not only a story, but also a parable, and the world inhabited by the lost ones is similar to a Borgesian anti-world. One could view the story as a Kafkaesque parable describing a Beckettian purgatory, where the damned exist in a tomb-like universe, seeking the "way" out.

Thus, the change after *The Unnameable* is in the art-
istic form, not in the vision of man and the world. The key word throughout Beckett's career as an artist is "failure." His work from the beginning was a Sisyphean labour— an attempt to overcome the barriers of language and traditional art form. In my opinion the trilogy, and especially The Un-nameable, is his greatest work. Albert Camus, speaking about the artist in the post-war period, sums up best the accomplishment and value of Beckett's works as a whole:

At the moment of death, the succession of his works is but a collection of failures. But if those failures all have the same resonance, the creator has managed to repeat the image of his own condition... Creation is also the staggering evidence of man's sole dignity; the dogged revolt against his condition, perservance in an effort considered sterile. It calls for daily effort, self-mastery... It constitutes an ascetic... But perhaps the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity it provides him of overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality.48

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