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# Without a Place but Always Trying to be Placed: Between Hope and Impossibility in Samuel Beckett's Molloy

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**Without a Place but Always Trying to be  
Placed:  
Between Hope and Impossibility in  
Samuel Beckett's Molloy**



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Table of Contents

**Introduction.....2**

**Chapter 1: Beckett’s Approaches to Being: A Disorientation.....7**

**Chapter 2: Duality of Context: The Temporal Landscape of Inside and Out in Beckett .....22**

**Chapter 3: The Complication of Language and the Place of Fiction in Beckett.....35**

**Endnotes.....49**

## Introduction

In reading Samuel Beckett's Molloy the largest difficulty I encountered was placing the character Molloy. This term placing does not have a set definition and is subject to change but largely relates to understanding Molloy in relation to a larger narrative. In my attempts, I found myself trying to decipher the context in which to approach this character. This search brought me over and over to the minimalist context of Molloy and his direct interaction with the external environment. This interaction is at times horrific, at times comical, and is always perplexing but it also seems to deny, or undo, a larger conceptual or historical context. Without this larger context, I discovered that a more minute understanding of identity throughout Molloy also became difficult. *Identity* throughout the text seemed to relate more to the particular and hap-hazard method of interaction with the current stimuli and not necessarily a larger unifying pattern. These stimuli are presented several times throughout the work and seem to always create an unclassifiable outcome. The incontinency of self for the character Molloy created for me the feeling of trying to grasp a handful of sand only to feel the small particles sift through my fingers. The unrelenting continuation of these interactions seemed to create a promise that would always go unrealized within the text—the promise of “being” and its constant degradation toward marginality and non-being. It is at this point that I became interested in the external environment of the story, in particular the landscape and it's bearing on the searching Molloy. In the vastness of setting we are offered the partiality of Molloy within a larger “enclosure” of the story—in this setting the individual himself operates as metaphor or a character within a larger setting of “mind” that is the environment and the entirety of the work itself. *Molloy* the concept is constantly approached, compared, and manipulated (by the being called Molloy) only to dissolve (like a mirage) upon approach. The “story”-fication of the character is brought to the forefront of the metaphor and manages to always be un-done before we can reach a point of destination or climax. As we approach being we constantly lost in conceptuality which undermines the possibility of actual being. In the two stories that compose Molloy

both Molloy and Jack Moran set out on journeys for which there is perhaps no destination and for which they will inevitably return unsuccessfully—both character's are doomed to exist within a state of unfulfilled identity—where the hope of being and the possibility of actual being converge in a place of unknowing. It is at this place where writing occurs for both of the characters and it is through this unfulfilled journey that the very practice of writing is re-asserted as a practice of partiality within an attempt for entirety. However, this is an enclosure that proves to have shifting borders and will thus never be whole. So writing becomes constantly working for something that can never be achieved and the reader of Beckett will constantly be returned to the bare essential minutia that composes being, perhaps without any greater end—futility then, but then why continue?

As a writer, Samuel Beckett's apparent denial of any clear or decisive truth in his extensive body of writing has resulted in an analysis of his work that is often couched in, or subjected to, post-modernist rhetoric<sup>i</sup>. This categorization makes sense when approaching the sameness and blurring of conventional forms of distinction (name, age, sex, and location), value, and form that appears throughout Beckett's Molloy. At the same time, Beckett approaches the place of the writer and the very act of writing in the face of nothingness—or something approaching nothingness<sup>ii</sup>. Or what I will argue in this paper, the struggle, futility, and inane-ness of reading (searching) in the face of an utter lack of orientation or reliable approach to the problem of being—how and why do we think when we have no promise or gem of truth (or belief) on which to hold or for which to work? And how does a reader approach a text that is conscious of this futility?

This paper will examine the manifestation of this disorientation of an approach to being within Beckett's text. Throughout this, It will attempt to establish the plight of the "I" in the story (later called Molloy) as well as the plight of the reader as that of the constant (and at times desperate) searcher, wanderer, and thinker. From here the paper will contemplate whether we can approach the first section of Molloy as a larger mechanism meant to disorient to the point of silence—a silence which

Molloy craves throughout the story, but a silence that is impossible within the narrative. In this, I will establish both the disorientation in which the narrative exists as well as the disorienting method, or ability, of the work as a whole.

In Dante's *Inferno*, The poet Virgil says of the souls in a particular realm of hell "And if they lived before Christianity they did not worship god in fitting ways. And of such spirits I myself am one. For these defects, and for no other evil, we now are lost and punished just with this: we have no hope and yet we live in longing."<sup>iii</sup> Similarly, In Anne Atiks Memoir of Samuel Beckett entitled "how it was" she speaks of reading a passage of Keats to the elderly Samuel Beckett, "'when I came to 'when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' he became tense with attention, suddenly sitting bolt upright a though pierced by an electric current, and asked me to read it again at the table, and repeated excitedly, 'irritable reaching after fact and reason—that's it, capable of being in uncertainties'. He didn't have to explain why he found this so important; the link to his own work was so obvious."<sup>iv</sup> It is within this futility of a place between hope and impossibility that we continually find the character Molloy. But this is a futility that Molloy refuses to accept.

Beckett's text continually brings us to the point of impasse and then forces continuation in the face of the futile, as Beckett stated "All writing is a sin against speechlessness. Trying to find a form for that silence. Only a few, Yeats, Goethe, those who lived for a long time, could go on to do it, but they had recourse to known forms and fictions. So one finds oneself going back to vielles competence—how to escape that. One can never get over the fact; never rid oneself of the old dream of giving a form to speechlessness."<sup>v</sup> A comment which brings us to the very point of contradiction at which Beckett's writing exists—the desire to create silence through a medium that is an essential perpetrator against silence. But within Beckett perhaps there are different kinds of silence and perhaps the silence for which

Beckett strives is not simply the absence of noise but something more vast and external—something that exists constantly on the peripherals of being—a silence of unknowing from which writing can occur.

My paper examines the first half of Samuel Beckett's Molloy in a three chapter process. The first chapter sets out to establish the contextual disorientation that Beckett creates throughout his work. Through an anti-narrative literary form, this chapter will argue that Beckett constantly removes the reader from a distinct and subjective approach to being (and self) in Molloy. In this, the distinction of self and the materiality of being are dissipated into conceptuality and nothingness which will set up the discussion (and impossibility) of knowledge for the searching Molloy that occurs throughout the novel. The second chapter will examine what is created by Beckett in lieu of the conventional context of narrative. This section will examine specifically the precise instances of void that occur within (and throughout) the landscape of the mind—a constant desire for being in and within silence that is never completely realized. Finally, the third chapter examines the need for language, thought, and conceptualization displayed by Beckett as the phenomena that constantly complicates this desire for silence and instead drags the character Molloy towards a futile (and comedic?) search for understanding, which eventually offers a rethinking of Beckett's "place" of writing that sets the base of his trilogy—how literature can work in the face, or reflection of a greater external silence. In this, fiction will come to exist within the unknowing that separates the possibility of complete being and complete non-being—the place between hope and impossibility in Samuel Beckett's Molloy.



**Chapter 1**  
**Beckett's approaches to Being: a Disorientation**

"I confuse east and west, the poles too, I invert them readily. I was out of sorts, a deep ditch, and I am not often out of them"<sup>vi</sup>

Throughout the first section of Samuel Beckett's novel Molloy there are obvious instances of disorientation which create the need for a destination of both a physical and conceptual place of identity that is twisted and confused. These instances include the construction of the story in an almost anti-narrative method: the work begins with the place of the end (the place from where a need for stories arises<sup>vii</sup>), which brings us to the beginning (search for purpose), the middle (subjection to confusion) and which will eventually bring us back to the end from which the entire process will restart. This disorientation also includes the apparent confusion and isolation from which the text arises (the initial area of waiting), as well as the namelessness throughout the text. However, this paper will examine the more subtle instances of disorientation that occur mainly in the inconstancy or impossibility of limits of self in the character Molloy, the moments of perceptual dissipation away from materiality (and the importance of these objects in the text), and the recurrence of sameness in the text. These instances serve to disorient Beckett's character from a decisive approach to being and instead create a partiality of being that makes an attempt at wholeness.

In Molloy, Beckett initially leads us to a place of narrative, only to leave us suspended in essential and unanswerable questions of self. The Beckett character is never defined because its being is always opened into the external environment that it perceives, an openness that makes self-understanding a tempting but impossible task. Alain Badiou argues in his work "On Beckett", "rather than bracketing or suspending the world in and for consciousness, Beckett *suspends the subject* in order to see what happens to being *per se*."<sup>viii</sup> That Beckett in essence "de-centralizes" the being. The "jar" of self is opened in Beckett and the limits of the being are undefined. The consciousness of the being is then not the unchanging orienting device of existence, but is instead the dissipating (disorienting) plight

of man in the face of a larger more static externality or environment. In this environment, the only possibility of attaining constancy is silence or death (which will be explored later). In this environment the individual is left in a perpetual state of searching in the face of the impossibility of attainment. Consciousness of being does not orient a self's existence, but instead lays it open to an environment which persists in dissipating it, so that the individual is left in a perpetual state of searching for constancy and recognizing the impossibility of this search.

In an extension of Badiou's claim, in Beckett, the reader is given to a being (Molloy) who is perpetually unable to surely perceive himself, or who is unsure of the direction from which to approach self perception—the past? The immediate? The future? A larger sense of historical or familial place? Without the fundamental “bracketing” of consciousness, the character (and any approach to self) is in a state of movement. Molloy's consciousness is not a landmark of orientation in the pursuit of thought because it is always subject to change—and this flux does not offer a platform from which subjective (or believable) perception can occur. This is noted when Molloy reflects, “But a man, a fortiori myself, isn't exactly a landmark, because I mean if by some strange chance he were to pass that way again, after a long lapse of time, vanquished, or to look for some lost thing, or to destroy something, his eyes would search out the rock, not the hap-hazard in its shadow of that unstable fugitive thing, still living flesh.”<sup>ix</sup> In relation to the heavy inlaid stone that Molloy stands next to, his humanness (from his flesh to his thought) makes his being the fortiori (weaker argument) against the constant and unchanging stone. He is not a reliable landmark for the perceiver (who in this passage is the undefined traveler) and who will eventually prove to be Molloy himself. This traveler, the un-place-able other, creates the interface of possible being (or the limits of this being) that becomes paramount to the text. The traveling figure will remain, upon careful inspection, a hope for a distinct identity that can never be stabilized long enough to be realized. And the two characters will remain (to each other) unable to be placed in any lasting way (hap-hazard). They will remain to each other inconstants against a more solid backdrop.

In Beckett, instead of an all encompassing self where the entirety of the being and his world lies in his perception, we are given the possibility of an unforgiving-ly partial being who is minimally contained or released by his larger interactions with the more constant material (and natural) environment around him. There is the promise (or expectation) of an entirety (or containment) of this being, but this is elusive. When Molloy is at the sea-coast he is initially comforted that he has found a limit—a side for which he can go no farther only then to undermine himself by saying, “but don’t imagine my region ended at the coast, that would be a grave mistake. For it was this sea too, its reefs and hidden islands, and its hidden depths,”<sup>x</sup> He then goes further to conjure an imaginary voyage from which he states (perhaps) he has never come back. There is a place perhaps, where Molloy has already lost some part of his being and perhaps this is the place of separate for which he now strives. But even the landscape, as described earlier as the reliable orienting device, becomes a consuming mass of suspect and change. As the environment becomes a fundamental part of the being through perception of the external world, does Molloy assume these external phenomena as part of this being’s entirety of mind, or does this being dissipate into the places it has been? There is no point of distinction to make either claim and we are left between the dilemma and dual possibility of partialness or all encompassing wholeness. This dividing place of unknowing perpetuates the fiction that the character recounts.

In Beckett, individual consciousness exists at a place of distinction or separation. The limits in Molloy can be defined as a distinction or a border of self that asserts that a self does or can exist. Without limits we are unsure of where one region ends and another begins (Which perhaps can be seen when Molloy notes the traveler’s anxiety, or is it Molloy’s anxiety “overtaking” the traveler?) We are left with a mental openness in Beckett’s story (especially during this time of traveling) that denies or cannot surly find limits. Without limits, we are robbed of subjective distinction from which an assertion can be made—and without provable assertions we are disoriented from any rules of logic or sense.

The approach to self is further disoriented from a distinct approach by the blurring of limits of time, or the perception of time, in Beckett's reference to the "mythological present"<sup>xi</sup>. In Beckett's place of story, we are never given a present "self" of Molloy; we are given only the limited depiction of his past and forward movement into the future. Without this present, Molloy is unable to compare himself to the past—the story exists in an amalgamation of tense—a tense which would serve to separate past, present, and future. Beckett's character tells his story from his mother's room, the place of the current (or the continued future). His story is of the past but exists concurrently with this future. Thus, the future constantly exists in, or is perpetrated by, the past (memory). Linear narrative is dissolved in this indistinct time-scape. The reader is left with a relentless lateral searching self who is uncategorized and thus wanders in this void of environment—A being who is in a perpetual state of intellectual and physical searching, or wandering, in the hope or promise of self (a promise which exists in language and will be discussed in chapter 3).

This area of lateral searching would seem hopeless, but within these indefinable regions we are given to uncontrolled contemplations, commentary, and theoretical searching of Molloy that create the possibility for continuation past this distinctionlessness. This "mental searching" exists on the level of metaphysical inquiry that drags us into the dilemma of self-perception and self-knowledge which almost brings Molloy past these areas of impasse only to collapse—this inquiry seems to not be built on a solid structure of distinction or a subjective self and thus fails.

In a series of lectures on Samuel Beckett, Simon Critchley identifies this time of metaphysical inquiry in Beckett, the time of searching, as the time of living—the time before the break-down into endless waiting, or living as the time of attempted building before all is exhausted. Before the self is completely undone, "The time of narrative and possibility, where the voice is able to lay hold to time and invent, continually breaks down into an un-narratable impossibility, a pattern typified by Beckett's entire syntax of weakness that can be found in a whole series of self undoing phrases in the trilogy."<sup>xii</sup>

This time described by Critchley is the time of question, or when questions are still asked. It is during this time of physical and metaphysical movement we experience not self, but the hope of self—a hope that in the story seems to be undone when Molloy is (forcibly) removed to the place of waiting, a place beyond this hope of knowing. But contrary to Critchley, in Beckett this time of living is defined by both the hope of understanding and the apparent impossibility of this understanding. During the time of living we are faced with the dual impossibility of completely overcoming or embracing what seems like the impossibility of self (an acceptance of void that will be discussed later). The closest Molloy comes is within the confined place of waiting where we are taken to the impossibility of search. But as this is the place from where which the story originates, we are re-offered the lateral conceptual search through the story teller. Is this place any different? Even when physical movement is impossible, to not “move” in some sense, becomes equally impossible.

The movement within ‘living’ (creating the inconstancy or impossibility of the individual) defines the second and third portion of the narrative (after the initial time of waiting displayed in Molloy waiting in his mother’s room). In this second portion (the “beginning” of the beginning) Molloy (who is initially nameless) is driven by a singular desire to see his mother (a desire for wholeness?), or what Philip Howard Solomon calls a desire to return to the place from which he first began to exist. The time of ‘living’ discussed by Critchley (or the attempt of finding an approach to being) can be dissected into two attempts—the search for logical understanding (justification of being) and the following attempt to embrace complete senselessness, purposelessness of being.

The first section of this time of living is the search for a logical justification of self. The time in which Molloy attempts to retrieve a clear purpose or conviction in the face (or backdrop) of unknowing and doubt, “I needed, before I could resolve to go and see that woman, reasons of an urgent nature, and with such reasons, since I did not know what to do or where to go, it was child’s play for me, the play of an only child, to fill my mind with all other preoccupation and I seized with a trembling at the

mere idea of being hindered from going there, I mean to my mother, there and then.”<sup>xiii</sup> The act of doing, and the search for justice in doing, is propagated by compulsion—a compulsion which perhaps creates a purpose, which affords an approach, or categorization, or acceptable perception of being.

But this initial assumption of purpose (“It’s so nice to know where you’re going, in the early stages”<sup>xiv</sup>) quickly falls victim to the syntax of weakness described by Critchley, or this debilitating “aporia”<sup>xv</sup>, or the place of grey black described by Badiou<sup>xvi</sup> that in the face of desire deflates any active conviction within the being called Molloy. To create a goal (purpose) is a matter of subjectivity, and in Molloy, the lack of limits does not afford the structure needed to sustain lasting subjectivity. Instead, Molloy fades into to the subject-less impasse. The dual contradictions of a singular possibility melt into each other and Molloy and the reader are left in this place of the “sameness” (“For there seems to be two ways of behaving in the presence of wishes, the active and the contemplative, and though they both gave the same result it was the later I preferred, matter of temperament I presume.”<sup>xvii</sup>)—actual action, desire, is deflated, or compulsion is confused in the want to go and actually going—in contemplation desire is already achieved and consummation becomes irrelevant. We then begin to approach one of the larger issues of text—is being in Molloy an active or passive endeavor?

Is the being an entire, temporal thing that is built by the instances that befall it or is it something separate, distinct, and thus able to act? The text demands: how can the “I” do anything when the individual is unsure of the context (or the limits) of this “I”? The impasse neither denies nor allows the possibility that Molloy faces; instead it creates the unanswerable question—the place of unknowing between—into which Molloy might melt into irrelevance. But is this melting possible? The kinetic energy of the unknowing of being (the spirals) instead, seems to perpetuate the character into lateral movement.

Within Molloy we see both an attempt to attain narrative and the process of undermining this narrative. We are given the desire for constraint that falls into the openness of dissipation from

“matter”. This “matter” is confused by both relating to conceptual purpose (“of no matter”) and speaking directly about the material objects that offers momentary constraints that “hold-down” the narrative. Beckett creates a perceptual dissipation of matter that further disorients the reader from the place of the character, the intentions of the piece, and the concepts portrayed. This is because, in Beckett, we are always exposed to the continuity of chaos—and thought is lost in the immense spatiality of the current of being (wherever he is); the material (even of the words that compose the text) is also lost in the possibility of losing perception.

In On Beckett, Alain Badiou discusses a recurrent aspect of Beckett’s literary works—the place of confinement and the places of openness as those that contain the narrative (the place of waiting) and those that face movement toward dissipation. He argues, “In these open places the arrangement of the fiction seeks to capture in language the ‘conversion times’ of being into nothingness. Therefore, it is not by controlling its elements that prose adheres to being, but rather because it flees as fast—or even faster—than being”<sup>xviii</sup> Perception within Beckett is not the great organizer of the external but is more likely the phenomena of the interaction of loss as the external becomes present—a consideration that relates to the very state of the words of text interacting with externality of the reader as they dissipate.

In discussion of these “conversion times”, within Beckett’s literary realm, we are opened to this story (Molloy is the narrator who is telling this story of his past). In a literal sense, this conversion time is the movement of the story from recounted narrative (of the past) to the “actual place” of the waiting Molloy. This point is also time of the dissipation of perception (the being) into the larger external environment (perception is the phenomena of the escape of being into the conversion time of void). But most importantly Badiou’s statement brings us to an understanding of perception (and storytelling) as fleeting—or the fleeting of the conceptual from the material that can exist on the level of systemic categorization (narrative), and the immediate (things disappear when we no longer see them) that denies conceptualization—which calls into question the direction from which we approach the mind’s

place in being, all encompassing or completely separate. Or what becomes most clear and futile—a place between both.

The story begins within a state of nothingness imposing only the physical and material constraints of the narrator. As Badiou proposes, “In all these cases, the set-up of the fiction establishes a strict control upon place, constructing a universe sufficiently finite so that when the prose wants to seize being its escape can be temporarily blocked.”<sup>xix</sup> It is these physical constraints in the place of waiting that allow the immobile individual to “hold on to” a specific individuality—a place within a larger narrative. This same constraint persistently escapes the traveling Molloy (who travels throughout the openness of the countryside, the place of wandering described by Badiou). It is essential to consider that Molloy remembers his name when he is briefly imprisoned—within the physical enclosure of the jail-house and societal “narrative” that accompanies this enclosure (there are not two laws). In openness, Molloy’s being is undefined, or the composition of his being lapses into a confusion of nothingness—the impossibility of knowledge and the deflating “aporia” of the theoretical. Beckett creates an existence that is impossible to be claimed. Instead every moment expands into nothingness as the next moment arises—actual knowledge cannot be built.

Perhaps we can make a connection with Badiou’s ‘conversion times’—the movement of “being into nothingness”—and Christopher Ricks’ discussion of ‘matter’ in his book, “Beckett’s Dying Words” (initially speaking of Jacques Moran’s legs):

“For it was shortening, don’t forget, whereas the other, though stiffening, was not yet shortening, or so far behind its fellow that to all intents and purposes, intents and purposes, I’m lost, no matter.’

The solicitous admonition ‘don’t forget’ lags far behind those disabled ‘intents and purposes’. And on these occasions *no matter* undertakes what is variously done by Beckett’s French ‘ca ne fait rien’ or ‘enfin’; ‘no



matter' being a casualness as well as a casualty, a mind imagining its final triumph over matter, while having to imagine from one perspective mind *is* matter."<sup>xx</sup>

Here we are given to a material phrase that at once shoots into the oblivion (openness, of the theoretical), implying this 'something' above physical matter, and at the same time establishes this consciousness' lodgings within the matter it contemplates. We are opened to the theoretical possibility (rising above materiality) that is just as easily moved past, or lost within this materiality. In this we are exposed to a subtle disorientation of the self and purpose in Molloy—the story is removed to its ideas outside of materiality, which only further reminds us of the essential immateriality of the story, which draws into question the materiality we rely on as an anchor. As the mind consists of matter, and conceptualization exists within the mind, and matter exists as a concept within this mind we are referred to a place of being and non-being that is separated by profound unknowing—in here we have the "fiction" of being and the futility of this "fiction" ever completely existing or non-existing.

As we are removed from the constraints of the story and left with openness that denies clarity and direction—any concept of time lapses into an indistinct amalgamation of time and place. A denial that resonates on the level of the story-teller, the reader, and the plight of the very story we are reading—we the reader our acting within this same unconfined openness as the wandering Molloy and this fiction exists as the plight of identity for the reader.

Although the passage of Molloy quoted by Ricks appears in part two of the story, we can see similar instances in the first section, in which the narration is removed from the matter from which it is derived—and again brings us through a sweeping uncontained current. After Molloy examines the travelers A and C on the country side, specifically the material details that surround their being, he states, "And perhaps it was A on one day at one place and C another at another, then the third a rock and I, and so on and so on for all the components, the cows, the sky, the sea, the mountains. I cannot

believe it. No, I will not lie, I can easily conceive it. No matter, no matter, let us go on as if all arose from one and the same weariness, on and on, heaping up and up, until there is no room, no light for any more."<sup>xxi</sup> After being presented with a narrative, the entire narrative disintegrates into openness—the orienting devices—the characters, the rock, the I, the environment, and any semblance of time, context, or character relation are all cast into oblivion—*no matter* proposing that both that the details are not of importance and that the matter itself is inconsequential or non-existent—or all exists in the quicksand of perception and conceptualization that cannot remain as a constant or concrete thing.

If not in context, where then does the being of the work lie? We are given to a material collection that composes the story (like words) and reminded that these devices are constantly made suspect, or lost into the current (the movement of the being). Once this general story is built, the material 'things' of the story are cast off—or the story leaves the material things—we are left with only objects and no larger narrative, or only a larger narrative and objects that don't exist, or no longer exist—and the importance of the "I"'s current position is re-centered on the constraints that surround him—the object constraints of the mother, through which the individual now exists become the sole orienting device—the narrative exists not in the individual but in the surroundings, which all exists through the individual, and which are all thus fundamentally undermined.

This aimlessness, or removal into conceptualization and unknowing of the perception of self occurs later in the fields when Molloy states "And I identified the bleating too, without any trouble, the anxious bleating of the sheep, missing the dog at their heels. It is then too that the meaning of words is least obscure to me, so that I said, with tranquil assurance, where are you taking them, to the fields or the shambles? I must have completely lost my sense of direction, as if direction had anything to do with the matter."<sup>xxii</sup> Direction is aimless without orientation. But without a base platform of believed knowledge, we have no orientation. Are we being taken to be nourished or to be slaughtered? Here we see a dilemma of thinking, without any orientation (in the midst of nothingness), the "direction" from

which we approach being could take us anywhere—to our continuation or to our demise? We flounder in openness. And in Beckett, the only possibility of enclosure lies in the distinct and constant material, which are impossible to keep, but past these constraints we are lost.

Objects in the story offer the temptation of the subjectivity and separation. Objects become for Molloy and later Jacques Moran attempted orienting devices from their undefined places of being, or as a more constant indicator of their inconstant selves. When Molloy is in the confined space of his mother's room, he is literally within his mother's possessions—he has, for all purposes, become his mother's self, or the being his mother once was. And Beckett asks, why not? What has separated him from becoming his mother? When Molloy is completely surrounded by these materials in an otherwise un-subjective self, the orienting factors that 'tie' him to the world are these souvenirs that once did the same for his mother—has he thus “become” his mother? Where can the separation be made?

Or the fastening of Molloy's hat to his physical being as if this hat served as an anchor, “It is fastened, it has always been fastened to my buttonhole, always the same button hole, at all seasons by a long lace. I am still alive then. That may come in useful.”<sup>xxiii</sup> In this transiency of uncontained being created by Beckett, man may not know life from death. Instead he holds onto (or is assured) his current form only through these little objects that surround him, or that are literally fastened to his body. These orienting landmarks tell him he is still alive and identified.

Critchley makes a similar claim, “Beckett returns us to the condition of particular objects, to their materiality, their extraordinary ordinariness: the gaff, the handkerchief, the toy dog, the sheet, the pap, the pain-killer [. . .] Beckett thus returns the existentialist concept of situation to ‘its actual content’ (NL 294/NL 252) by refusing to transfigure it into a meaning.”<sup>xxiv</sup> In this line of thinking, it is the simplicity and ‘namelessness’ of the immediate object that so transfixes Molloy and for a moment suspends this compulsion to search. Beckett breaches a similar idea of the return to minutia to restore a sense of the immediate, “it is the role of Objects to restore Silence”<sup>xxv</sup> But it is impossible for being to

remain contained in these minuscule and irrelevant (?) objects because, in Beckett, there is always this unconfined dissipation and movement away.

In her Essay, “Transitional Objects and the Isolate”, Kathleen Woodward offers a psychoanalytical reading of the Beckett trilogy (specifically in regards to Winnicott) in which argues the existence of the “transitional object” within Beckett, “the transitional object exists, magically, in the fluid locus between the inside and the outside. The child construes it to be both a part of himself and not a part of himself at the same time.” Woodward continues that the infant uses this object to transition from the “magical” control of its mother (the mother responding to its every need) to illusionary control “by manipulating an uncomplaining object”<sup>xxvi</sup>. Although this paper does not attempt a psychoanalytical reading, this claim is beneficial in an examination of the meticulous and material as an attempt at orientation, subjectivity, and control in the assertion of being for Molloy—as assuming the constant object that holds the individual in place.

Such an attempt at control can be seen when Molloy states, “But it is neither of my hat nor of my great coat that I hope to speak at present, it would be premature. Doubtless I will speak of them later, when the time comes to draw up the inventory of my goods and possessions. Unless I lose them between now and then. But even then they will have their place within my inventory of things.”<sup>xxvii</sup> Molloy’s becomes a story of collecting, or attempting to collect, what he inevitably cannot keep. Attempting to manipulate the ever-elusive and create an inventory of enclosure—in simplest form, Beckett longs for something on which to hold to the present.

As objects restore silence, a silence which is desired but impossible for the living, can we say that objects exists perpetually in a place of the present (which is impossible for the living, forward moving being), and thus pre-occupy Molloy because of their promise of the present—does Molloy exist in relation to these objects? This inventory becomes the essence of the beings time of “living”—and although materials are often thought of as inconstant, it is these materials that prove far more constant

in the telling of the being—at least on a particular plain—one from which the inconstant being is often departing and will one day leave for good. It is a fixation of the overwhelming realness or wholeness of the object that reminds Molloy of his own inability to be whole. This state of wholeness can only be achieved through death (which Beckett then inverts, implying that this state of wholeness (death) is actual life), as death is the objectification of the body. Beckett continues to deny conceptual orientation and we are instead left with the fascination of objects and the current—in trying to establish the most base anchors of being.

As Molloy makes the transition from pursuer of purpose to pursuer of confusion—in an attempt to embrace nothingness and achieve complete objectivity (disorientation in the forest), he latches on to one particular object—a single object whose purpose he has been unable to discern. In this choice, Molloy embraces the confusion of this object that comes to define the transition of his pursuit from the compulsion to go to his mother's house to the compulsion to be lost—to exist without purpose.

But as objects inspire the possibility of subjectivity and present, human relationships throughout Beckett fade into a disorienting sameness that denies distinction. Molloy often hints that he and his mother are similar to the point of becoming the same person. When Molloy later speaks of his mother he says, "We were so old, she and I, she and I, she had had me so young, that we like a couple of old cronies, sexless, unrelated, with the same memories, the same rancours, the same expectations. She never called me son, fortunately, I couldn't have borne it, but Dan, I don't know why, my name is not Dan. Dan was my father's name perhaps yes, she took me for my father."<sup>xxviii</sup> When interrogated in prison, he assumes that he and his mother most likely share the same name, Molloy, and when we meet the character later called Molloy he has essentially assumed the position of his mother.

This blurring of identity is again seen with Lousse, during this seeming break, or suspension of movement, Molloy is never able to conclude whether she is a man or a woman. This is also true of Molloy's first sexual encounter, with a woman, or what he believed to be a woman.

As the narrative progresses, as we are displayed these external differences, we are quickly given into the possibility of an all-encompassing sameness of identity. The ability to view individuals in relation to each other is shaken by this sameness and the irrelevance this sameness creates. Although we are presented with different material objects on which to hold and essentially build a narrative, such a task becomes elusive when we are left with these upending slips into the sameness and indecipherability of identity.

In the famous sucking stone scene, we see Molloy employ a complicated, tiresome, and disorienting redistribution of sucking stones to achieve, what he believes is the most efficient system of holding, carrying, and sucking these stones (this has been argued to display an exhaustion of logical thought into the absurd also as a representation as Beckett's attempt at narrative exhaustion<sup>xxix</sup>). Only to state, "but to suck the stones in the way I have described, not haphazard, but with method, was also I think a bodily need [. . .] And deep down it was all the same to me whether I sucked a different stone each time or always the same stone until the end of time."<sup>xxx</sup>

If we were to interpret this exercise as one of compulsion (to insert reading, thinking, writing within this context)<sup>xxxi</sup>, the compulsion that has defined Molloy's journey from the very beginning, are we left with the realization of the emptiness or inability in these words and actions?—That the individual is composed solely of compulsions while actual content is continually flawed, or useless. That we are simply fulfilling a bodily need to do in the face of the irrelevance of this doing—in the face of the sameness. That the beginning is the end, and the story we are told comes out of no greater meaning than a compulsion to tell.

As Critchley questions, "So if Beckett's advance over existential philosophy lies in its refusal to translate the meaninglessness of absurdity into a meaning for existence by keeping our focus on the immediate and the material—which is the refusal of the conceptual order of philosophy—then is one to conclude that the meaning of Beckett's work is that there is no meaning? Is this the meaning of the

phrase ‘meaning nothing becomes the only meaning’? If so, what is the task of interpretation? Is there a task of interpretation at all?”<sup>xxxii</sup>

To undermine the content of words in a work composed of words seems to bring us to a place of impasse or an anti-narrative where the reader is left in a perpetual and impossible cycle. The most poignant example of this anti-narrative in Molloy comes from the place of the beginning of the story, which is inevitably the place of the end—the place of confinement and waiting within Molloy’s Mother’s room. The story is then set-up as a circle, inevitably we will return to this place (which we have never left) where the story begins—what then has changed in the narrative?

By beginning this story from the place of the end, we are beginning from the time of death. Everything told from this position is of the past, or at least what we think of as the past, the story then, or the journey that Molloy takes, is in the context of futility. We are given no promise of change, Molloy states that he is simply saying his goodbyes and waiting to die. But within this format we are given to a certain eternity—when we return to the place of waiting, where the work begins, we are taken to a place of where the story begins again. We are within this futility of searching and sameness (how can anything be discerned if it’s all inescapably the same?). But such futility is made endless by the individual, who continues, in the face of dire nothingness—what Badiou deems tireless desire<sup>xxxiii</sup>.

## Chapter 2

### Duality of Context: The Temporal Landscape of Inside and Out in Beckett's Molloy

“And of my two eyes only one functioning more or less correctly, I misjudged the distance separating me from the other world, and I often stretched my hand for what was far beyond my reach, and often I knocked against obstacles scarcely visible on the horizon.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The dilemma of the existence and non-existence of the individual is further complicated by the external environment throughout. There are several layers of the approach to being in Beckett's works, but perhaps we see something in the spatiality of the text, the temporal landscape of shifting light and dark that seems to exist externally and internally throughout the work, a landscape that evokes vastness. After a subjective approach to self is made uncapturable, the reader is reoriented onto this vastness. Within this vastness Molloy experiences compulsions, external and internal, surrounded by chance and incident that continually re-direct the projection of the journey. But the conceptualization of this journey draws the character into a quagmire of thought and senselessness that only dissipates in moments of “void”—moments when the character experiences a unified silence and experiences something that is almost entirely whole. However, these moments are elusive and to stay within them is perhaps the impossible task of Beckett—because any building in Molloy is undermined by distinctionlessness

The filmic depiction of landscape that is portrayed in Molloy is alluded to in Alain Badiou's On Beckett. Badiou argues, “Both in spaces of wandering and in closed places, Beckett tends to suppress all descriptive ornamentation. This results in a filtered image of the earth and sky: a place of wandering, for sure, but a place that is itself akin to a motionless simplicity.”<sup>xxxv</sup> Over this simplicity we experience the physical projection of Molloy as well as a constant temporal figuring and description. The suspended context seems to hover on the edge of Molloy self-perception and compulsions. The external landscape is simple, undefined, and shifting while remaining the same. This internal landscape of “void” exists



constantly on the outside of the seemingly unceasing temporality of Molloy and becomes for Beckett, perhaps, the destination for which the story is written.

The world through which Molloy moves, or which moves, throughout Beckett, is without what Badiou calls *ornamentation*—or external descriptions and categorizations. The argument can be made that Beckett’s work initially creates a “nowhere place”—a place removed from a larger orientation, undefined by the particulars of names, dates, or any non-superficial categorization. We instead have the individual and all that exists in relation to him—the entirety of the being and setting that exists around, or within, this character. This individual reflects on his journey to find his mother within whose house he now waits. This landscape is one of rolling hills that change within the elemental shift of shade and light. As Molloy ponders in the earliest passages of *Molloy*, “If you think of the form and light of other days it is without regret, but you seldom think of them, With what would you think of them? I don’t know.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> As memory is largely committed to words, Beckett begins to bring us to a re-conceptualization of Molloy as set apart from a larger narrative and existing within a state of *current* in which the self continually dissipates away from words and the potential for solipsism alludes an anchor for being—in which there is the inter-experience of internal and external void (which might connote wholeness or death).

In the introduction to Alain Badiou’s lauded work *On Beckett* it is stated, “Badiou views this suspension of cultural and individual traits in Beckett as an absolutely positive procedure, because it allows one, he argues, to go ‘straight to the only questions that matter’. What’s more, ‘thus reduced to a few functions humanity is only more admirable, more energetic, more immortal’”<sup>xxxvii</sup>. It is true that suspension of context exists. But to argue that this suspension brings us to the essential questions ‘that matter’ seems to fall short of the meticulous and physical nature of Beckett’s text. Instead, it can be argued that such a suspension and undoing of a distinct approach to being brings us to the very questionless-ness for which Beckett may strive—moments where the reader is reduced to the minute

place of the individual and his supposed interface with the external (or internal) vastness and silence of existence which lapses into a larger silence or void.

This inter-existence of the mind and the environment begins to appear within the landscape created by Beckett. Beckett portrays a landscape in which we see creeping instances of mental mimicking. For instance, Molloy's tedious description of the traveler (A or C) on the hill strikes concordantly with the image of epiphany or heightened consciousness, "From here he must have seen it all, the plain, the sea, and then these self-same hills that some call mountains, indigo in places in the evening light, their serried ranges crowding to the skyline, cloven with hidden valleys that the eye divines from sudden shifts of color and then from other signs from which there are no words, nor even thoughts. But all are not divined, even from the height, and often when only when escarpment is discerned, and one crest, in reality there are two, two escarpments, two crests, riven by a valley."<sup>xxxviii</sup> The land over which Molloy exists is composed of shifting light and hidden valleys—folds that evoke the cerebral cortex and subconscious. The land is a work of deception. It is unable (even from epiphany) to be known. Most strikingly, the landscape defies distinct relation and description (words). Instead, we are presented with the silence, endlessness, and essential chaos of the landscape of void—A landscape that may exist externally but is undermined through the conceptualization of the internal and again brought into question, bringing us to the place of unknowing that separates completeness and partiality (being and non-being).

When Molloy describes the traveler we see a similar temporal imagery that establishes this external landscape as mind-like, Beckett writes, "But in spite of my leap out to him, at the end of its elastic, I saw him only darkly, because of the terrain, in the folds of which he disappeared from time to time only to return, to re-emerge further on, but most of all I think because of other things calling me and towards which too one after the other my soul was straining, wildly."<sup>xxxix</sup> Again, this image connotes the abysses of the mind, of memory, and the deception of consciousness that establishes the land over

which Molloy travels (evoking both temporality and physicality in Molloy's perception), a desire to see what eludes. Molloy contemplates his place (of consciousness?) in the larger setting of environment when he reflects, "I must have been on the top of, or on the slopes, of some considerable eminence, for otherwise how could I have seen, so far away, so near at hand, so far beneath, so many things fixed and moving."<sup>xl</sup> These images remind us that Molloy is as much a story of memory and perception as of a physical (or even deliberate) journey. The external world can only exist through this inner-world of Molloy—and the perception of this perception exists as the consciousness of Molloy. This remains framed entirely within the memory of Molloy—through this perception of perceptions Beckett calls to mind the continuity, fluidity, and mystery of what we perceive as internal and external, what can be undermined, confusing the distinction of the undefined depths of internality and its place in the current external (which is in-turn internal). A Beckett search is a confused mix of the internal past and the external present and the haphazard compulsions that exist at the moment these two regions meet and the land over which we search exists within a fiction of the unknowing of this dilemma.

To clarify, in Beckett we are given to the possibility of the "conceptual self"—an understanding of self through a larger narrative (words) which is elusive. When we are torn away from this context we are left with the external vastness of Beckett's landscape—the rolling hills, the forest, the ocean—and the vastness of the current moment. Here we approach something like silence or an interface of the being and the vastness of being—which is creeping, dramatic, and inspires inertia. But this external vastness falls into conceptualization, or the possibility that this vastness exists strictly within the individual (solipsism). And such a possibility can never be mediated—so the external landscape becomes the mirror of the internal mind of Molloy and we are left with the creeping question of true externality which may only exist in these creeping occurrences of an all-encompassing void that relates to a greater vastness. Beckett creates a relationship between external vastness and the chance of internal vastness and nothingness—which drives the character to search for ever-elusive distinction.

This conceptualization of self (and compulsion) can be seen in the psycho-analytical imagery used by Beckett throughout Molloy. Phil Baker's Beckett and the Mythology of Psychoanalysis points to the compulsions towards Molloy's mother as one of several instances of a (ridiculed) attention to psycho-analysis within Beckett. In this compulsion, Molloy lavishes in sexual ambiguity, sameness, and in undefined gender depictions, blurring the differences between himself and his father (oedipal complex) as well as instances of oral and anal fixations (and a compulsion which is later seen in what Baker argues is Moran's Paternal compulsion). Baker argues that Beckett plays upon these pseudo-psychological images to create the world of the individual as mired by these larger defining compulsion (which are made into concepts)—a somewhat horrible and entrapping image of a past that perverts and in some ways predestines not necessarily the actions, but the compulsion that will define the individual's existence. As Baker highlights in regards to Beckett, "He (Beckett) called self-perception the most frightening of all human observations', a 'looking into the abyss."<sup>xli</sup> But psycho-analysis is also the categorization of past to educate the present—and these archetypes may be the means used by Beckett to portray the meeting of internal compulsion and external environment—to categorize and understand internal compulsion that fits into a larger narrative of self (and man).

There is a certain futile comedy underlying this internal reflection. The images are played upon as an indication of the individual past (which is perhaps learned), which is then a product of language, language which Molloy asserts is the product of a learned lesson (for it is impossible to invent with language) so everything 'said' in Molloy is suspect—these tireless self perceptions and reflections of psych-analytical categorizations, are essentially flawed through language. This psycho-analysis, which would allow for a subjective approach to self, fades into the environment of the present and we are left with the acknowledgment of unquantifiable or controllable compulsion within Molloy that laterally pulls Molloy over or through this landscape of the mind.

Molloy is pulled through his “regions”, vast areas of being—a vastness alluded to when Molloy finds himself at the edge of the great expanse of the ocean, “But don’t imagine my region ended at the coast, for that would be a grave mistake, for it was this sea too, its reefs and hidden islands and its hidden depths.”<sup>xlii</sup> Or later, “...and even the limits of my region were unknown to me[. . .]for if my region had ended no further than my feet could carry me, surely I would have felt it changing slowly. For regions do not gradually end, as far as I know, but merge gradually into one another.”<sup>xliii</sup>

But the searching we see throughout Beckett’s work is not an endeavor of active assertion. This lack of agency or this passive movement is important to consider throughout Molloy’s travel. A journey, traditionally and logically, calls for a destination. Molloy has a destination, but it is not a physical or necessarily attainable destination within the disorientation that exists around Molloy. Instead Molloy has compulsion in the face of the illogical—compulsion without a sound means of attainment—the physical world through which Molloy travels both begs for and defies a set course and instead we are left in openness where Molloy is subject to external pulls—this existence of a *greater* other and the haphazard of the external.

Beckett further suspends a persistent distinction of self in the possible realm of the mind when Molloy states, “For I did not know if it was the right road. All roads were right for me; a wrong road was an event, for me. But when I was on my way to my mother only one road was right, the one that led to her. Or one of those that lead to her, for all did not lead to her.”<sup>xliv</sup> Beckett opens Molloy to the endless immensity of possibility, which proves contradictory. Only one choice is correct, but because of his state of perpetual unknowing every path is as equally correct to Molloy (or incorrect). Molloy thus opens himself to entirety, compulsion and the incidents of landscape—“Well I guess you have to try everything once, succor included, to get a complete picture of the resources of their planet.”<sup>xlv</sup> We lose distinction in the hope to experience the entirety of unknowing.

This openness of being is seen in the incidents that occur around Molloy. Despite his constant temporal action and tireless involvement in the surrounding, the character's external movements are often without unifying assertions. Molloy is subject to what Badiou calls the *event*, he argues, "little by little—and not without hesitations and regrets—the work of Beckett will open itself up to chance, to accidents, to sudden modifications of the given, and thereby to the idea of happiness"<sup>xlvi</sup> Although this paper does not necessarily argue the outcome of "happiness" within the event, It can be acknowledged that every interaction that occurs throughout Molloy, even those that drastically change the course of the narrative, occur as an incident or "event" into which Molloy is often dragged (as is seen in Molloy's arrest or in the accidental acquaintance Molloy experience with Lousse). Molloy is both temporally and physically pulled throughout the larger environment of the mind and his perception exists a step behind these larger pulls of the external 'other' and we this consciousness is never given time to mire in it's futile questions.

But what does one make of these larger external pulls of the "event"? The event described by Badiou exists largely as a state of chance within the vastness of the hap-hazard of existence created by Beckett. Can it be argued then that such an event continually draws Molloy from temporality and into the vastness of the external (the other)? In the incident with Lousse, for example, Molloy is physically thrown from his bicycle and then taken (pulled) into the confinement of Lousse's estate. Again, when Molloy is arrested he is lead by the police officer to the confinement of the holding cell and then into the questioning of the social worker. Surely these incidents cannot be self created and instead draws one toward the chance and endlessness of the 'other', the external, and the current, which allows a particular subjective approach to being, which will only later fit into a categorization of self that will be essentially flawed, which may draw us into the same essential problems of orienting being. These events offer a *promise* of the other that may sustain (even if unwillingly) the search of the individual—while at

the same time, the larger interactions create a sense of purpose or the urgency towards purpose for Molloy.

Through the event Beckett creates an existence that is defined by “what happens”<sup>xlvii</sup> to the individual—both in external incidents (the pull of the event) and internal compulsion (as portrayed through psycho-analytical reflection). Any semblance of consciousness, in Beckett, is then a passive process that exists after the larger hap-hazard pulls of existence. One can see that the character of Molloy is at the will of these larger (internal and external) occurrences. We then see that any semblance of the “free-will” (that would imply an understanding of “I”) of the individual does not exist in the action, or within the moment, or in Badiou’s event, or even in the movement of the individual but solely in the metaphysics of the actual—in the attempts at self perception of the being, which is again made suspect by language. Consciousness in Beckett is not a unifying proprietor of action, but is the after-phenomena of the pulls of the present. The larger context of the story becomes the combined landscape of internal and external vastness, affected by the haphazards of compulsion and the incident—existing in both the possibility of external spatiality and the dissipation of space into void and nothingness.

What can be described as the kinetic vigor of Molloy’s story lies in the character’s fall through the various events and the unrelenting pull into the chasm of chance and compulsion—words that prove similar and are perhaps one in the same—both an external and internal chance that pulls the character into (at times literally) an actual landscape and the landscape of the mind. But these pulls of the internal and external event (and this modified lifetime through which Molloy travels) catch itself at the point of the meticulous and current in which the character is transfixed on the interplay of the future (the relentless unknowing face of the current) and the past (the memory, subconscious, abysses of the mind).

The difficulty of Beckett’s Molloy lies not necessarily in the meticulous intellectual vigor in which Molloy is employed, but the manner in which this vigor throws the individual into oblivion. The vigor of these self-imposed questions drives the metaphysics of the narrative beyond any controlled framework.

The relentless perception and contemplation of self and environment, the exactitude of every movement, and unceasing description drives the individual to a place of interface with the void—a perceptive wall which is impossible to fully breach (or is it?) to attain a state of wholeness.

Stylistically, throughout the exhaustive first section, there is an absence of physical pause. Instead, the reader is submitted to the continuity of Molloy's thought—only given glimpses at times of the interface between this thought and the subjective world, and at times, this creeping realization of externality, endlessness, and actual silence. In these places, the text exists at the very point of the character's interaction of the various subjects he encounters while simultaneously experiencing the "everything" of the current moment. It is within these moments of fixation and decomposition that we experience the living continuity of the external void and we are washed momentarily of the dilemmas of being.

In these instances we are brought to the face of some sort of disconnectedness, or to a direct and untainted interface with the external void, the current. Such an interface comes about in the return to the direct and peculiar—the details that Molloy is fascinated by—the purposeless tool, his hat, the stones on the beach, the cup given to him by the social worker—meticulous observations of things and numbers that heightens the vastness of the void. These objects serve to remove us from the mind and bring us to the external (or the internal which achieves a similar vastness and irrelevance), which is massive and without order (knowledge, sense), and also silent: "To the return to silence is the role of objects."<sup>xlviii</sup> And in these moments, we see not necessarily beauty but a heightened sense of being in relation to the vastness of the other. In the miniscule, we are given concentrated points of entrance into this interface.

The external void is constant and unchanging; it is not necessarily a place of mystery but a place of complete and unified silence, what Beckett calls "the indestructible chaos of timeless things"<sup>xlix</sup>. This void exists solely in momentary glimpses, or in a shifting of both mental and feeling place, Molloy



ponders the entrance into this place, “But it is not the kind of place where you go, but where you find yourself, sometimes, not knowing how, and which you cannot leave at will, and where you find yourself without any pleasure, but with more perhaps than places you can escape from, by making an effort, places full of mystery, full of the familiar mysteries.”<sup>i</sup>

This pleasure becomes the flesh of environmental feeling that is akin to a particular un-thought sensuality of ‘being’ in a particular moment in a particular place—to feel the inklings of an impossible wholeness, “but now I shall have to get myself out of this ditch. How joyfully I would vanish there, sinking deeper and deeper under the rains”<sup>ii</sup>. An attempt, as seen several times throughout Beckett, to recede into the landscape—this mental landscape that Beckett has created, that is both internal but possibly (and thus elusively) distinctly external and separate—to exist in the entirety of the mind, proves impossible—but there are certain instances of this entirety (silence) where the partial being can glimpse wholeness.

The constancy of this chaotic, endless, and silent void is seen in the sky, “I listen and the voice is of a world collapsing endlessly, a frozen world, under a faint untroubled sky, enough to see by yes, and frozen too.”<sup>iii</sup> In the ocean, “for much of my life has ebbed away at the shivering expanse, to the sound of the waves in storm and calm, and claws of the surf”<sup>iiii</sup> and on the earth, “for the garden seemed hardly to change, from day to day, apart from the tiny changes due to the customary cycle of birth, life, and death.”<sup>iv</sup> Which opens us into the vastness of entirety as well as a distinct partiality that can only exist in a realization of the “other” or that which exists outside of Molloy’s realm—to be and search within this larger place that must be separate.

At this time, Molloy experiences a state of beauty, a creeping realization or feeling of void that is both horrifying and calming. The idea opens into the static possibility and endlessness of the external void which is beautiful at times and times terrible, “For if I see myself putting to sea, and the long hours without landfall, I do not see the return, the tossing on the breakers, and I do not hear the frail keel

grating on the shore.”<sup>iv</sup> Beautiful in the endlessness and complete dissipation into the external void and terrible in the impossibility this void represents—to be unknown—a life in constant decomposition.

Badiou asserts that in this we see a positive relationship with ‘other’, “This is why I (Badiou) am entirely opposed to the widely held view according to which Beckett moved towards a nihilistic destitution, towards a radical opacity of significations.” To face this other, this void, is to achieve a state of silence. Not necessarily to see the nothingness of existence, but to see an unending chaos, a continuity that makes the existence of the human, the human condition that much more hap-hazard and futile—and which would abolish the existence of the searching self. Within these interfaces of void we lapse, momentarily, from the tireless figuring of Molloy and are directly faced with the peculiar and beautiful, the futile and the unending—entirety. But to self-define, to speak, and to think is to remove ourselves from this state of void.

Another aspect of this inter-contextual landscape becomes indicative of the place of Molloy. As contradiction is the way of Molloy, the sand on the beach, which empties and fills holes (positive and negative assumptions) only to return to a similar mass of oblivion, evokes this place of being, “In the sand I was in my element, letting it trickle between my fingers, scooping holes that I filled in a moment later or that filled themselves in, flinging it in the air by handfuls, rolling in it.”<sup>vi</sup>To undercut, to abolish any semblance or basis of belief—is the constant and unceasing practice within the mind of Molloy.

When the reader begins to attack the metaphysical negations of Beckett we are eventually brought into a place of suspension, an undeniable futility within the understanding of a philosophical work within the text--Molloy’s world of contradiction—a desire for and the futility of wholeness. Molloy, when searching for his mother (wholeness) is unable to “find” her (eventually ending up in her bed when she is gone). At the same time, Molloy is never able to achieve a state of complete disorientation—during his attempt at being completely lost (wholeness) he is discovered and brought to his vacant mother’s room. His mind allows him neither to be lost nor found. To question is an

impossible task but to not question is perhaps equally impossible. To abandon knowledge is perhaps the most seductive and impossible of possibilities—"I can't go on, I must go on, I will go on."

If we approach the mental scratching of the character Molloy on a literal level, if we take these impossible questions at face value, we find ourselves sinking into a quicksand of philosophical contradiction—thoughts are propagated, negated, and left in a place of impasse—philosophy is played upon or ridiculed, or approached like a thorn in the side. Particular instances—the inversion of Cartesian logic discussed by Badiou and Critchley<sup>lvii</sup>, the extension of logic into the absurd, and attention to the miniscule and meticulous (counting bodily functions) draw us into a quagmire within the sinking and endlessness of possibility without fruition. Critchley argues in his work Very Little Almost Nothing, "The peculiar resistance of Beckett's work to philosophy lies, I think, in the fact that his texts continually seem to pull the rug from under the feet of the philosopher by showing themselves to be conscious of the possibility of such interpretations."<sup>lviii</sup> Molloy chews his philosophical food and spits it out without consuming, instead becoming consumed in the practice of thinking, thinking, and rethinking, only to further confuse without progress. Here we must consider Badiou's statement that the reader of Beckett must consider "what is thought in Beckett's work" and "what place does this thought have in Beckett's work"<sup>lix</sup>. The reader is left with two options—to attempt a reading of this meticulous philosophical negation or to consider the effect of this mental searching in the face of the larger setting—the setting of void. A similar question is brought up in Critchley when he asks, "Who speaks in the work of Samuel Beckett? Who is this indefatigable I who always seems to say the same thing?"<sup>lx</sup>. Such an inquiry asks us to read within and around the perceptive blanket of the "I" and to attempt an understanding of the interface of the constant and inconstant world surrounding this "I", (Critchley will go on to argue that in Beckett, instead of an "I" we are given a "not I", which makes sense when we consider that the name Molloy is only assumed partially into the story—before which and after which the "I" stands as more of

a place holder for what one could call “*the openness of this instance of being*” which had no name, no particular category or clear meaning).<sup>lxvi</sup>

The void is a place removed from knowing or knowledge. It is only when Molloy is arrested that he becomes known again (he remembers his name). In the confines of the prison and the face of a single law he is subject to knowledge (the policeman’s, the social workers, society in general) he is far from the void (“there are not two laws”)<sup>lxvii</sup> he is instead in a place of concrete knowledge (“right” and “wrong”). Can Jacques Moran’s story be called one of structural and personal unknowing while Molloy initially exists in this unknowing only to attempt to be known only to abandon this knowing? Is not Molloy’s story that of incontinence (openness) while Moran’s journey begins with an enema?

But to be unknown, or to un-know in Beckett, proves a far more complicated process. Although Molloy is faced with these creeping instances of void, this silence for which Beckett seems to strive—the possibilities created within the very act of being—complicated by compulsion and incident—continue to pull Molloy into this discourse of self and place. Beckett’s character exists in a place of contradiction that seems to fade into these moments of void—which is something different from the unknowing of fiction. But we can we never stay at this place of void because greater than the desire for silence in Molloy seems to be the desire to speak—a speech which allows to breach this place of fiction—a place between being and non-being.

### Chapter 3

#### The Complication of Language and the Place of Fiction in Molloy

“In other words, or perhaps another thing, whatever I said it was never enough and always too much. Yes, I was never silent, whatever I said I was never silent. Divine analysis that conduces thus to knowledge of yourself, and your fellow-men, if you happen to have any.”<sup>lxiii</sup>

In the reduction or degradation towards void it is dangerous to assume that Beckett espouses the destruction of speech in place of a constant interface of void—no such idealized argument exists in any explicit way. Instead, this argument becomes another possibility for Molloy inside of the larger temporal context that Beckett has created. A context which works as both a mirror and a mechanism: a reflection of the constant futility of purpose in “doing” and a mechanism that moves us towards a vast external silence.

Beckett’s Molloy denies a larger order or structure. The external void of existence is not one of divine harmony but of silent and vast chaos. Beckett’s writing assumes a hyper-sensitivity to a peculiarity of being and then explores the implications of this peculiarity. In this peculiarity, what becomes of perception? What becomes of action and purpose? And most pressingly, what becomes of speech, thought, and language? Beckett establishes through Molloy that speech is a product of learning. To speak then, is to “mutter out” one’s lesson. It is not to create but to rifle through annals of categorization and simplification. Beckett’s speech exists in a place between the inner and the external void of being, which is to say it separates the conceptual being from a state of un-deliberate being—ever complicating the decomposition towards void that the work craves.

Throughout Molloy, Beckett takes pains to remove us from a concrete narrative, leaving only the haphazard of the unconstrained being walking along a mental landscape faced with the endlessness of the external chaos of void. Speech and thought may become toil, a useless (?) and futile practice that leaves the individual in a state of heightened, but fundamentally flawed awareness of self and place—

consciousness and fiction exists at the point between the possibilities of partiality of being and the possibility of an all encompassing wholeness.

Molloy tediously thumbs through Beckett's myth of self-knowledge in which the words and titles all relate to a past knowledge—something learned and something untrustworthy. At times reaching a place that allows void. To face wholly this authentic, beautiful, and futile void and the temptation to live by what could be described as the feeling of the flesh and the senses—the pleasure in the meticulous and current that the character repeats over and over, which is seen in the pleasure described in the description of his bike, or later of blowing the bike's horn, "It is a pleasure to meet it again. To describe it at length would be a pleasure [ . . .]To blow this horn was for me a real pleasure, almost a vice."<sup>lxiv</sup> A sensuality of being that is later portrayed when Molloy lies in the ditch, embedding his face in the grass and the earth, "the smell of earth was in the grass that my hands rove around my face until I was blinded."<sup>lxv</sup> In these moments of the meticulous and sensuous current, the character's existence is consumed in this pleasure of being. A being at the point of Void that affords no larger concept of being—silence.

To exist in this place of the pleasure of the current is to acknowledge that in the haphazard peculiarity of chance in Beckett's landscape, speech is rendered purposeless—a compulsion without a point or place. This is a dire conclusion for the compulsive searcher and proves an equally impossible conclusion in Beckett's text. In this text, Instead of creating what would surely be an idealized manifesto of silence Beckett portrays a more complex relationship between this desire for un-conceptualized silence and the unceasing continuity of speech. Instead of denying speech, Beckett will return to its presence within the compulsion to search as an essential truth and question (or the question of the question). But this compulsion seems only to create a dilemma between the desire and impossibility of understanding—speech and silence—that serves to carry, or perpetuate, the searcher. This dilemma is perhaps alluded to when Molloy states, "for in me there has always been two fools, among others, one

asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on.”<sup>lxvi</sup>The individual exists in a dual desire. One is to remain in silence, to stay where they are (within this pleasure of the current of being), and the other is to push forward (this conceptualization of self that begs purpose) in the search of a greater understanding.

The search for this understanding begs purpose while being evaded by truth, “It is true that in the end, by the dial of patience, we made ourselves understood, but understood with regard to what, I ask you, and to what purpose”<sup>lxvii</sup> Beckett’s *Journeer* acknowledges the futility of the journey, accepting the contradiction of being in the pursuit of the impossible (an impossibility which in turn may be impossible to accept).

For to not speak, or to not feel a need to speak, for Beckett, becomes impossible or akin to non-existence. Even in the moments where Beckett has achieved complete silence, when we have been so lost or disoriented from context that we achieve a state of void, we see the murmurs begin again: “And then the murmurs began again.”<sup>lxviii</sup> These sounds of external knowledge, the knowledge of the “other”, seem to arise around the peripherals of Molloy’s being—and create urgency within Molloy. But is this urgency in the face of the impossible? And the cycle, the “searching” of the living, begins again. Openness begs systemization. Perhaps the individual is able to escape, but the urgency towards knowledge will never cease within these questions—these desires to categorize, conceptualize, and ‘understand’ continue to perpetuate the journey. But then does such a continuation relate to a higher order?

We are brought to the discussion of the *purpose* (or lack of) in doing (the actions of Molloy) that becomes essential, “So many days and nights unthinkingly given to that rumor rising since birth, What shall I do? What Shall I do?”<sup>lxix</sup> In a system of belief—in a larger system of categorization that affords the weight and significance of words and meaning of words, meaning and purpose become easily definable. The individual has a *place* in a larger context or narrative. They are known and know themselves and will

further this narrative. They thus have purpose. In Beckett's world, purpose is a taunting unanswerable question. Molloy contemplates after leaving Lousse, "I knew I was bound to be stopped by the first policeman and asked what I was doing, an answer for which I had never been able to find a correct reply."<sup>lx</sup> The question of doing for Molloy becomes a slippery series of contradiction. Every moment exists in "doing", but the concept of a discernable, quantifiable, or explicit purpose is a question that spirals into oblivion. Doing in what context? Based on what principles? Doing for what greater order? Concerning the state of purpose, further paradoxes arise—can the purpose of the individual ever be self-realized, or is it a conceptual phenomenon based on the perception of others (which could all be undermined by solipsism)? For Molloy, the only answer is compulsion and the journey as the manifestation of this compulsion in the face of the potentially futile—the compulsion toward sense as the ultimate act of senselessness, being as a contradiction of purpose and purposelessness. These two terms are again separated by this place of unknowing that begs for the continuation of search even in impossibility.

The dilemma of doing resonates within the very realm of writing, demanding the purpose of such a work—can a purpose be purposelessness? (as can perhaps be seen in the object that Molloy carries, the object for which he could never find a distinct purpose which instead offers an endless puzzle of thought). It seems that in this continuation, Beckett slips us from an answer. There may be no unified purpose but we might still "rap on the right door" in the end. For Beckett, the temptation of something vague in the distance seems to trump the possibility of purposelessness and the state of Molloy proves to be possibility in the face of the impossible—a dire place which is impossible to conclusively accept.

At times, Beckett's work attempts to deny a larger conceptual categorization by existing in a state of immediate perception. But this attempt is subject to inevitable failure. Molloy and the reader are dragged within the spirals of the question of purpose, the relevance of thought, and a being that



continues to take us to the point of stoppage—the ‘impasse’ or the ‘void’—only to bring us into tireless continuation. There is no chance of purpose but I must go on for no other reason than a need to search for this purpose—the urge forward in utter incomprehensibility, or impossibility. Beckett’s Molloy builds within the realization that this structure is being undone. What then does building accomplish?—an extension of existence and non-existence that is separated by a fundamental place of unknowing that allows for constant continuation?

To further return to this state of current, we have references to numbers. Numbers (the tools in speech used to quantify) are used by Molloy to quantify an immediate perception of self—the meticulousness of self movement, “Extraordinary how mathematics helps you know yourself.”<sup>lxxi</sup> Molloy observes bodily functions in a way that draws upon meticulousness and exactitude of his being that momentarily slows these futile contradictions of thought. To know one-self is to know the details of being. This takes us to a slower place of unrelenting future (or current), a future that speech draws us from (toward the past). Speech becomes an exercise of the past while moments of the meticulous—detail, bring us towards future and inevitably toward a feeling of place and void—a different context of being. Which will beg the same futile practices of categorization in hope of understanding—but again, an understanding in regards to what?

These numerations of self display the logical analysis into the senseless (as seen with the sucking stones)— an analysis that is logical in the immediate, but when this immediate is stepped out of, or pushed past, in the search for greater understanding we are quickly cast back into nothingness and chaos—which could just as easily relate to a greater order. But Being in Beckett is momentary order that is always in decay and Molloy seems to build with an attention to the irrelevance of building—or the off-ness of building. In the numeration of the inane we search for a purpose or a context in which to connect the data with a plausible conclusion. But we are denied such a conclusion. We are denied the

'so-what' of these observations and 'knowing ourselves' as an outcome becomes a quip that ridicules the perception of self as an understanding—to quantify to no greater end.

Molloy is moved outside of perceived understanding through a lack of subjectivity. Instead of a subjective world of assuming knowledge, he exists in the state of perpetual decomposition that occurs in the movement towards the void. As Molloy states, "To decompose is to live too"<sup>lxxii</sup> but to decompose is also to deny purpose, to deny place, to deny any sort of categorization or understanding in the place between existence and non-existence to attempt to become part of the environment and to find oneself in a constant state of partialness ("All the morticians are dead"<sup>lxxiii</sup>). So the reader is brought to a cycle of doing and undoing, "existing" in a conceptual sense and waiting, existing still, but unrecognized, without context (in the current)—to either be employed in this futile comedy or to accept non-existence and await death.

In his approach to the compulsion to speak, Beckett establishes a three part truth of humanity: void as inevitable truth, compulsion as inevitable truth, and speech (or the desire to speak, synonymous with think, categorize, understand) as inevitable truth. We see Molloy attempt to escape from language in isolation, in suicide, and in exhaustion—the gnarly attempt to blacken the pages to become completely mired in speech and thought in the desire for some sort of unity. Blackening the pages, for Molloy, is synonymous to erasing the words, completely being lost becomes synonymous with finding, or being found (Molloy is only discovered when he is the most disoriented in the forest).

"But it's the word I mean to use, free to do what, to do nothing, to know, but what, the laws of the mind perhaps, of my mind, that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and that you would be better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, misery."<sup>lxxiv</sup> This practice of the deprecation of speech calls into question the irrelevance of speech—or the issueless void from which it comes. Beckett espouses not beauty, but the ugliness of words in their

muck-like inability. To delve full on into these essential questions, and the question of question (intellectual inquiry), Beckett truly finds himself drudging through dense muck that leaves Molloy more complicated without epiphany, understanding, or escape.

This muck-like drudgery appears on the peripherals of the story. Within the story we are given to creeping but distinct instances of the being directly facing the void—an unspoken realization of some sort. But throughout the story we are also given to instances of *learned* context of speech that appear in the peripherals of the individual. This can be seen in the illusions to “right” and “wrong” when the individual faces the law or observes the decisions of others, in the references to education and the study of man, and in general to the contemplation of principle and purpose—all relating to a past categorization, which makes actual knowledge and creation suspect, “All I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome sum with a beginning middle and an end as in the well built phrases and the long sonata of the dead.”<sup>lxxv</sup> Beckett establishes knowledge based on a history based on words, which removes the individual from the void, or authentic, un-deliberate being (not that that would necessarily be any better). Education is tied up in words. How much of the supposed understanding of human life is clustered and lost in these words and larger narratives? In Beckett, to know becomes impossible; it becomes only to think to know. And to evoke suspect within the “knowledge” of words creates a problematic quandary.

How can speech, and reflection and the medium of words approach the indefinable man without falling victim to false knowledge “What I liked most about anthropology was its inexhaustible faculty of negations; it’s relentless definition of man, as though he were no better than God, in terms of what he is not.”<sup>lxxvi</sup>

In this, the text seeks to escape these instances of learned context and re-assert a place of external silence—a place beyond knowing where words can exist in a state of reflection that does not necessarily relate to a concrete understanding, but something approaching a reflection of truth in the

immediate. But to create within these words and the myth of knowledge, is an increasingly difficult task for Molloy, “you think you are inventing , you think you are escaping , and all you do is stammer out your lesson. The remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten, life without tears, while wept.”<sup>lxxvii</sup> To risk becoming the passive mime then is the plight of the thinker. A reflection perhaps played on by Lousse’s parrot. To think will separate us from the meticulous truths of void and instead draws us into peril and the futility of understanding—all that can exist for any extended amount of time is the current. But we are unable to stay at this current.

Thinking in Beckett becomes a parade of falsehood. Beckett’s analysis striates the multi-levels of thought—the types which rest in words and are thus always incapable and suspect and those that are creeping and silent (and are unable to be captured?). The words within thought are always struck incapable of a larger narrative. The story then exists in the almost physical depictions of futility throughout Beckett—the reflection of the problems of an orientation of being. This will call into question any point that can be drawn from his literature, which would seem more fittingly to not have an explicit point but these implicit expressions of being within a feeling self—a self at the current place and nothing being known past this dissolving point.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

In thought, the constant contradiction affords a single benefit—to bring us past these words to the very compulsion that calls for them—not to understand but to want to understand. In these examples, words and the compulsion towards these words seems to complicate the plight of man. To exist in purposelessness is one thing, but to exist within the puzzle of a possibility of purpose, or the search for purpose, is the plight of Molloy from which he cannot escape.

But what can we know beyond words? Not much, just the shifting and endless sky and void, the silent chaos of environment, and unspoken compulsion and movement. But here again, we assume a seriousness of the speaker in Molloy—a speaker whom we must always remain suspect. Because even in the most dire impossibilities of language within the character—he for some reason continues what

seems to be an oppressively futile journey. For the need to attempt an understanding, to be ever in a state of questions will feed the restless tone of Beckett's work. Beckett has created a 'circle of sense' within the story: the logical categorization to the point of the senseless, which elicits a greater senselessness, which is impossible to really achieve—to draw into suspect self and self-analysis. But in this, Beckett also begins to craft a mechanism of escape.

The self of the individual in Beckett is futile and inevitable in the sense that it will always be begged for, or searched for in some context. And although we can see exasperation in this we are more likely to witness a kind comedy of the individual that draws us into a desire for the actual "truth" and the impossible conclusion of this truth. What in the individual calls for this utterly tireless search for self that will remain even in the creeping sense of impossibility which is just as impossible to understand or accept?—the comedy of this self becomes the tireless cycles of order and chaos which blusters throughout existence (No paragraphs in the first section)—ending only momentarily in lapses into void, where we cannot stay. As Beckett himself asserted "all writing is a sin against silence" but in being throughout Beckett's story Molloy exist within the realization of this "original sin". And this sin will inevitably call for mediation because outside of this comical perception of the ever-present futility of being, somewhere throughout Beckett we achieve a change that re-asserts the importance of stories to the character and will call for a reposition of language throughout the text. Somehow, Beckett is able to shed these contradictions and allow a place of open being, but perhaps only momentarily.

In the sucking stones scene consumption attains a new meaning—the compulsion toward an inevitably empty consumption of knowledge. When telling of his time with Lousse, Molloy states, "Or I did not search at all, preferring hunger and thirst to the trouble of having to search without being sure of finding"<sup>lxxix</sup>, or later when he Or later, in when he recounts his "first love", he mentions that when the woman approached him, "I was bent double over a heap of muck, in hope to find something to disgust

me forever with eating,"<sup>lxxx</sup>. In these instances, Molloy searches for a state of not-searching—which he can never find.

But we see a change to this aversion to search, or an embrace of this, at the beginning of the story (which is actually the end restarting) when Molloy recounts, "I want to see the dog, see the man, at close quarters, know what smokes, inspect the shoes, find out other things [ . . . ] I believe him, I know it's my only chance to—my only chance, I believe all I'm told, I've disbelieved only too much in my long life, now I swallow everything greedily, what I need now is stories."<sup>lxxxi</sup> In this need to believe, Beckett's asserts a vastly different approach to search and re-positions the being as this consuming force—a force that attempts to attain without necessarily ascribing to—or that can shed what is perceived for what it actually is, issueless misery, and achieve a reverence for a new distinct place of being.

In searching for a place and time in the vast external, Molloy finds himself, over and over, in ditches or dead ends—momentary and unendurable lapses of peace. And if this impasse comes to represent the limits of a particular journey—coming to a point of not going on, of complete impossibility—why then (or how then) do we continue the pursuit, almost casually, almost as if it took a simple glance in a new direction to continue, "In the end I left the impasse, where half-standing half lying I may have had a little sleep, my little morning sleep, and I set off, believe it or not, towards the sun, why not, the wind having fallen. Or rather towards the least gloomy quarter of the heavens which a vast cloud was shrouding from the zenith to the skyline."<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Even in the face of peace or the possibility of wholeness (suicide) Molloy goes on. Molloy finds himself in the alleys of the town he is unsure is his because he is unable to discern this town from any other because he has never been to another town and has no point of comparison. He finds himself in the deepest midst of this futility, for even peace in life (the silence which Molloy speaks of) is as impossible as silence (not saying/thinking)—there is still the need to move, to search, to say. Molloy then attempts suicide (death would make him whole) only to give up and continue his journey—and

once we reach the very end we begin again—in a new direction that faces the same futility and disorientation.

This new direction brings us to the same problems we faced earlier, the inability to go in a meaningful direction—the circular issues of disorientation—to continually be lost in this place, “I continued my spirals”. It is from here that Molloy is deterred from his pursuit of mother— or “of knowledge”, to wander or embrace the depths of confusion— which we can perhaps see in his fixation on the one peculiar object that he continues to carry, “for I could never understand what possible purpose it could serve, nor even contrive the faintest hypothesis on the subject [. . .] I could therefore puzzle over it endlessly without the least risk. For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, to know you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace wanders in, to the soul of the incurious seeker”<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

As Molloy goes to the forest, an obvious attempt at disorientation, he states, “But from time to time I came on a kind of crossroads, you know, a star, or circus, of the kind to be found in even the most unexplored of forests. And turning them methodically to face the radiating paths in turn, hoping for I know not what, I described a complete circle, or less than a circle, or more than a circle, so great was the semblance between them.” Instead of choosing a path, Molloy chooses not to choose, or to choose them all in their essential sameness—which is equally as futile.

But this pursuit is further complicated by the assertion, while lost in the depth of the forest, “And when I appeared to give up and to busy myself with something else, or with nothing at all any more, in reality I was hatching my plans and seeking the way to her house.”<sup>lxxxiv</sup> —Is the way to Molloy’s mother’s room then complete confusion? in the final passage we see Molloy exit the forest and collapse into a clearing only to be removed from the narrative—“I longed to go back into the forest, oh not a real longing, Molloy could stay where he was”—we are then given to inevitability, Molloy reaches his mother’s home only through being removed from this lateral movement of search—but the story (from

where this narrative arises) reasserts this place of possibility, the lateral search. It is in this lateral search of a positive approach to entirety (and this internalization of external) that allows the promise of wholeness—or to be beyond knowing in a concrete contextual framework.

Perhaps we can read the disorientation as a reorientation onto the everything of the current—what can exist is only what does exist in the “everything” of this current moment—the abandonment of a particular point for every point, the acceptance of openness, an acceptance which eventually brings us back to closure—the place of waiting beyond knowledge. Is to embrace the inanity of thought or impossibility of knowledge to bring us to place of heightened clarity? To view the process without knowing why? “It was the beginning do you understand? Whereas now it’s nearly the end. Is what I do now any better? I don’t know. That’s beside the point.”<sup>lxxxv</sup> We are presented with the possibility of change in the face of its impossibility, but we go back to it, endlessly. To have a purpose is impossible, but to not have a purpose is impossible. So Beckett leaves us someplace in the middle, in this place of waiting where fiction can be achieved.

But in denouncing the medium in which Beckett’s craft exists—words—we see a blaring, undeniable contradiction. Beckett brings into suspect, or lightens, the purpose and weight of the materials he uses to build his structure.

In this denouncement, current criticism of Beckett often highlights Beckett’s attention to the German philosopher Fritz Mauthner, in her essay “Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the limits of language” Linda Ben-Zvi argues, “By placing language at the heart of the critique, subsuming under it all knowledge, and then systematically denying its basic efficacy, Mauthner illustrates the possibility of using language to indict itself...”<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Surely we can see a similar indictment in Beckett when he laments of his English education, “The fault lies not with me but with my supervisors, who corrected me only on point of detail and instead of showing me the essence of the system.”<sup>lxxxvii</sup>



In the apparent need for words that Beckett displays in the character Molloy we also are given to the possibility of the essential meaningless of words. Perhaps they are, like the sucking stone described on page 22, empty filler for an unrealized compulsion, “A little pebble in your mouth. Round and smooth, makes you forget your hunger, forget your thirst.”<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

The contemplation of the essential incapability of words may be effective for a philosopher but it creates an unavoidable paradox for the writer of literature. In this indictment how do we make sense of the use of self-deflating, or essentially impotent words? Does this not limit Beckett’s own literary endeavor? Does not Beckett draw his entire work into question?

The essential contradictions of Beckett’s work: a compulsion to order in the face of chaos, which only relates to a greater chaos towards which the world and mind are in constant decay. As well as the desire for silence in the face of the impossibility based on the need speech (search), an impossibility of which is impossible to understand or know (because they are all constrained in words)—exist even in the practice of the writer. To write anything for Beckett becomes a practice in futility and contradiction—the terms written are self dissolving eventually striking the entirety of the text irrelevant or useless. But to have this text self dissolve we are brought again to the seminal characteristic in Beckett’s work—the reduction to the place of the writer and the compulsion to write. The character Molloy (the tireless searcher) figures into the reduction of what is done to the basic need for this thing to be done. Beckett and Molloy, through the paradox of speech, can thus exist as a parallel.

To question the efficacy of words is only, in Beckett, Bringing us to a place that is neither all-encompassing nor completely exclusive (playing again on the imagery of the blacking out or erasing the pages). Words might be useless but we are compelled to create in futility—and this place of creation does not pretend actuality but it also does not assume non-existence. In this place, the only existence is that of the immediate; all prior norms of understanding are cast off. But in this place of waiting we are opened to the area of fiction—the lateral searching that exists in the unknowing that separates a

sureness of existence or non-existence—a searching that relates directly to the searching of an understanding of self. In Beckett, to think that we were ever going anywhere was a mistake, we are always coming back. But in these moments of “going” we are offered momentary escape from the futility of being that allows for continuation.

So in Beckett’s Molloy we have words that are deemed meaningless at least in their relationship to knowledge, but these words are essential in some way—In our hero’s journey and his search for containment—an encompassing feeling or understanding in which we are taken past the point of the pursuit of knowledge. When Molloy exits the forest to enter the clearing he collapses only to be taken to his Mother’s room. And “Molloy” is left behind and we presumably have the individual being brought (forcibly) to a place beyond (contextlessness)—the place from where the story began. It is most important to note that this place is his destination in some ways, but he has done little to achieve destination—destination has occurred. This is a state of destination that seems empty. When it is achieved we instead dive back through the process (the long confused emotion) of the story—the place of lateral searching—or fiction, the place of suspended possibility in the impossible.

The individual is brought here to the place of writing by the ‘unknowns’ who now bring him paper to write on, “Is what I do now any better?” <sup>lxxxix</sup>the individual demands. The story we are told is of the beginnings, the lateral searching for understanding and place in the face of vast disorientation. Now the individual is confined to a bed in a place of the static suspension of possibilities that is surrounded by ‘unknowns’ whose identity the character does not attempt to discern. But, the individual is faced with long desired silence to which he cannot submit. He must ‘say’ his goodbyes to finish this decomposition (after the body has been exhausted and struck useless), to open us to the place of fiction where both possibility and impossibility exist together. He must speak within this vast silence. The act of writing becomes the release of the confusion of being that opens the world into the being and non-being of fiction—that breeches (or sins against silence) and drags us (sometimes violently) through

possibility that brings us to no greater purpose but to drudge through muck. Words are likened to muck—earthly, material, moldable, and not necessarily divine or relating to anything higher, “For if you set out to mention everything you would never be done, and that’s what counts, to be done, to have done. Oh I know, even when you mention only a few of the things there are, you do not get done either, I know, I know. But it’s a change of muck. And if all muck is the same muck that doesn’t matter, to move from one heap to another a little further on.”<sup>xc</sup>

Where writing occurs for Beckett is at this place of dissipation into nothing where subjectivity can fade into open possibility. Like the landscape this fiction is always shifting, and subject to change and is without place but always trying to be placed—an immediate and passing (dissipating) phenomena that exists dually in possibility and impossibility but continues to deny conceptualization and instead exists elementally, like dirt or dead things—that fades into silence only to move forward in intellectual and physical calisthenics of being—even past the point of exhaustion and into decomposition. Fiction in Beckett is the continuation to exist in non-existence—to establish a place in the placeless silence, if only momentarily, then to return to this greater silence.

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<sup>i</sup> Further Reading on postmodernism and Beckett can be found in Brian McHale’s “Telling Postmodernist Stories” This work identifies postmodernists as a period or writing stories about theories (“where we once had theories about narrative). In this thinking, McHale designates Beckett as a late-modernist writer, who uses the approach of a closed narrative to systematically exhaust all possibilities of narrative—which he argues is exemplified in the sucking stone scene in *Molloy*.

McHale, Brian. “Telling Postmodernist Stories.” *Poetics Today: Aspects of Literary Theory*. 9.3 (1988). Web. 15 November 2010.

Philip Howard Solomon’s “Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy*: A Dog’s Life” is an extremely interesting work explores the importance of dogs specifically in *Molloy*. Outside of this examination, the essay offers a very clear, if almost casual examination of Beckett’s *Molloy* that is refreshing in comparison to the density in which *Molloy* is often attempted. A very thoughtful approach and examination.

Solomon, Howard Philip. “Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy*: A Dog’s Life.” *The French Review* 41.9 (1967):84-91. Web. 15 November 2010.

Finally, the direction of Beckett’s literature after Proust and Joyce is discussed in Melvin J. Friedman’s “Samuel Beckett and the “Nouveau Roman”

Friedman, Melvin J. “Samuel Beckett and the ‘Nouveau Roman’” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 1.2 (1960):22-36. Web. 15 November 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Further reading on existentialism can be found in Critchley’s “Very Little Almost Nothing”, as well as “The flight from self in Samuel Beckett” by Ethel F. Cornwell who offers a lucid reading of several of Beckett’s works that approaches *Molloy* from the existential concepts of Ortega “Only animals and objects are *given* a being, said

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Ortega in 'Man the Technician.' 'the stone is given its existence,' what it is, but man is given 'the abstract possibility of existence,' what he may or might be;" from here she argues that Beckett's characters are crushed under their own consciousness.

Cornwell, Ethel F. "Samuel Beckett Flight from Self" *PMLA* 88.1(1973). Web. December 6 2010.

"The Beckett hero is crushed by the burden of consciousness, out of which nothing, out of which comes that self-responsibility he would like to escape but cannot. He has neither a god (footnote) to assume it for him, nor the courage for self-destruction—which he yearns for perpetually." pp 41.

iii Alighiere, Dante. *Inferno*. (Allen Mendelbaum, Trans.). New York: Random House. 1980. pp. 33.

iv Atik, Anne. *How It Was: A Memoir of Samuel Beckett*. London. Cromwell Press, 2001. pp 71

v *Ibid* pp 95

vi Beckett, Samuel. *Molloy*. New York, NY: Grove, 1955. pp. 15

vii In Critchley's insightful philosophical work *Very Little Almost Nothing* he devotes his entire third section to Beckett, specifically the refusal of Beckett's work to fit into a clear philosophical tradition. In part "F" of this lecture, he argues that Storytime in Beckett is also the time of death that in the area of waiting the need for collect stories arises in Beckett's work.

viii Badiou, Alain. *On Beckett*. (Nina Powers and Alberto Toscano, Trans.). Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP. 2003. pp. XIX which is paraphrased in the introduction by Alberto Toscano and Nina Powers

ix *Molloy* pp. 7

x *Ibid* pp 67

xi *Ibid* pp 22

xii Critchley, Simon. *Very Little Almost Nothing*. New York, NY:Routledge, 1997. Pp 164

xiii *Molloy* pp 11

xiv *Ibid* pp 15

xv For further reading on both the "syntax of weakness" and "Aporia" in Beckett, see *Very Little Almost Nothing* by Critchley, Lecture 3 Section G, Critchley discusses "undoing" statements throughout the trilogy.

xvi Alain Badiou: "What is the gray black? It is a black such that no light can be inferred to contrast with it. An 'uncontrasted black'. This black is sufficiently grey for no light to be opposed to it as its Other [ . . . ] the gray black is a black that must be grasped on its own arrangement and which does not form a pair with anything else." *On Beckett* pp 66

xvii *Molloy* pp 43

xviii *On Beckett* pp 39

xix *Ibid* pp 49

xx Ricks, Christopher. *Beckett's Dying Words*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

xxi *Molloy* pp 10

xxii *Ibid* pp 24

xxiii *Ibid* pp 10

xxiv *Very Little...Almost Nothing* pp 149

xxv *Molloy* pp 9

xxvi Woodward, Kathleen. "Transitional Objects and the Isolate: Samuel Beckett's "Malone Dies"". *Contemporary Literature* 26.2 (1985). Web. December 14 2010. pp 143

xxvii *Molloy* pp 10

xxviii *Ibid* pp 13

xxix In Critchley's *Very Little ...Almost Nothing* this logical exhaustion is discussed as relating to the sucking stone scene.

xxx *Molloy* pp 67

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xxxii Linda Ben-Zvi's "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language" examines Beckett's approach to language through his readings and the supposed philosophical influence of Fritz Mauthner. The work first establishes Beckett and Mauthner's connection (through interviews, etc.) and then explores Mauthner's philosophy (thinking and speaking are one activity) and explores ways in which this philosophy can be found in Beckett's works. An understanding of this connection is important to any reading of Beckett, and especially to this paper, as the plight of the speaker and thinker often over-lap or become a single entity.

Ben-Zvi, Linda. "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language." *PMLA* 95.2 (1980): 183-200. Web. December 6 2010.

xxxiii *Very Little. . .Almost Nothing* pp 149

xxxiiii *On Beckett* pp 37

xxxv *Molloy* pp 45

xxxvi *On Beckett* pp 6

xxxvii *Molloy* pp 4

xxxviii *On Beckett* pp XXII

xxxix *Molly* pp 5

xl *Ibid* pp 7

xli *Ibid* pp 10

xlii Baker, Phil. *Beckett and the Mythology of Psycho-analysis*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. pp 9.

xliii *Molloy* pp 63

xliiii *Ibid* pp 60

xliiii *Ibid* pp 26

xliiii *Ibid* pp 85

xliiii *On Beckett* pp 35

xliiii What can one make of Badiou's assertion "there is nothing inevitable about the event, only that 'something happens to us', and partly because what follows from the event is absolutely singular, though (crucially) universalisable."<sup>xliiii</sup>

xliiii *Molloy* pp 9

xliiii *Ibid* pp 35

l *Ibid* pp 35

li *Ibid* 23

lii *Ibid* 35

liii *Ibid* 63

liiii *Ibid* 47

liiii *Ibid* 63

liiii *Ibid* 63

liiii Both in *On Beckett* and *Very Little Almost Nothing* there are arguments of the inversion of Cartesian logic "I think therefore I am". Instead we have in Beckett something more akin to "I think, there for I am separate from something"—the assertion of I removes the being from existence into something else, the theoretical (?) perhaps.

liiii *Very Little...Almost Nothing* pp 141

lix *On Beckett* pp XVIII

lx *Very Little Almost Nothing* pp 172

lxi *Ibid* 149—for discussion of 'not I' in Critchley

lxii *Molloy* pp 16

lxiii *Molloy* pp 30

lxiii *Molloy* pp 12

lxiii *Molloy* pp 22

lxiii *Ibid* pp 45

lxiii *Ibid* 45

lxiii *Ibid* pp 9

lxiii *Ibid* 6

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lxx Ibid pp 55

lxxi Ibid 26

lxxii Ibid 21

lxxiii Ibid 23

lxxiv Ibid 9

lxxv Ibid 27

lxxvi Ibid pp 45

lxxvii Ibid pp 27

lxxviii Badiou identifies: "In *Molloy* we find this preemptory ant-Cartesian utterance:  
I think so, yes, I think that all that is false may more readily be reduced,  
to notions clear and distinct, distinct from all other notions." *On Beckett*  
pp 7

Instead of thinking asserting being, it instead in Beckett seems to assert only what we are not. Any concept of self will constantly be constrained by words.

lxxix *Molloy* pp 50

lxxx Ibid pp 52

lxxxi Ibid pp 9

lxxxii Ibid pp 57

lxxxiii Ibid pp 59

lxxxiv Ibid pp 81

lxxxv Ibid pp 2

lxxxvi Ben-Zvi, Linda. "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language." *PMLA* 95.2 (1980): 183-200. Web. December 6 2010.

lxxxvii *Molloy* pp 20

lxxxviii Ibid 22

lxxxix Ibid 4

xc Ibid 37