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THE ACT OF CREATION: AN INTERPRETATION OF
SAMUEL BECKETT'S TRILOGY OF NOVELS

146

by

Kurt Alan Hanson

B.A. University of Montana, 1966

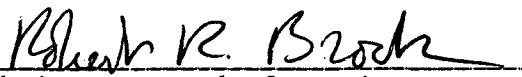
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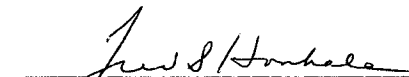
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INTRODUCTION

I ask the reader of this thesis to imagine himself in the audience of a jazz club on some Sunday afternoon during which an informal "jam session" is about to take place. The musicians take the stand and discuss among themselves the tune which they are about to interpret. They ready themselves and the session begins. The musical theme is stated by the piano perhaps, or by the entire group, and during the first few minutes the musicians remain faithful to this theme. As the tune progresses the audience realizes that the group has strayed from it somewhat and that they have started to develop perhaps one or two new sub-themes. Next come the solos. Each member of the ensemble improvises on the original theme and each might even develop a new one of his own. During this portion of the number virtually anything goes. A soloist might change the key or even the tempo. He is free to interpret the theme or themes in any way he wishes; he might add a phrase or two from another song if he feels that it will help his interpretation. Deviate as they might from that main theme of the song and far away from it as they may seem to be, the musicians still know where they are going with the number. And so at the moment the audience is convinced that the theme has escaped completely from the group the musicians come in together to restate it and finally to end.

Such, I feel, is a fair comparison to the trilogy of novels including Molloy,¹ Malone meurt,² and L'Innommable,³ written in that order

¹ Samuel Beckett, Malloy (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1951).

² _____, Malone meurt (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1951).

³ _____, L'Innommable (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1953).

by Samuel Beckett. Each one of Mr. Beckett's hero-authors--for each is a writer--can be compared to a member of the above jazz band. For just as the individual band member improvises musically on a given theme, each of Mr. Beckett's authors improvises verbally. And as stated above, just as the soloist might add various sub-themes at will to the piece, so does Mr. Beckett to his trilogy. But never in the case of the jazz combo nor in that of Mr. Beckett is the main theme lost in the frenzy of improvisation. Molloy might be speaking for Mr. Beckett when he says: "Et d'autant moins que quoi que je fasse, c'est-à-dire quoi que je dise, ce sera toujours en quelque sorte la même chose, oui, en quelque sorte."⁴ The theme in question of the trilogy that is always present--indeed, the raison d'être of the three novels might be the exploration of all the pitfalls, the contradictions, the anguish of that "amère folie," that "bitter folly" that is the act of writing.

This is not to say that there are no other themes in Mr. Beckett's trilogy. To the contrary there are many and for the most part they come from his vision of life; the failure of communication, the failure of love and the impossibility of human relationships, to name only a few. Each of these themes and any others are suitable topics for exploration and interpretation. Yet I feel that each is subordinate--I do not mean to lessen their importance--to the whole of the trilogy which may be, as Anthony Cronin puts it ". . . an anagogical illustration of the creative dilemma."⁵

⁴Molloy, p. 68.

⁵Anthony Cronin, "Molloy Becomes Unnamable," in A Question of Modernity (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966), p. 108.

It is this aspect of Mr. Beckett's trilogy that this thesis will explore. And if at times some of the statements that are made seem too definitive, it should be remembered that underlying each bold assertion about some aspect of the work is the word "perhaps." Mr. Beckett himself has said when speaking of his theater that "the key word in my plays is 'perhaps'."⁶ I have taken this into consideration in this study of his trilogy.

⁶Samuel Beckett, as quoted by Tom Driver in "Beckett by the Madeleine," Columbia University Forum, vol. iv (Summer, 1961), p. 23.

CHAPTER I

TECHNIQUES OF CREATION

Molloy is written in two sections, both of which are concerned with quests. In the first section, molloy writes about an undetermined period of time during which he searched for his mother. In the second, Moran writes a report about his quest for Molloy. That both Molloy and Moran are writers is established by each immediately in both sections. Molloy states quite succinctly and unpretentiously his idea of authorship when speaking about the man who comes once a week: "Il me donne un peu d'argent et enlève les feuilles. Tant de feuilles, tant d'argent."¹ Moran declares at almost the beginning of his section that "Mon rapport sera long. Je ne l'acheverai peut-être pas."² Having established that, both writers proceed with their narratives.

Molloy is in his mother's room writing about the events that preceded his present state and that brought him to her room although he knows not how this result came about: "Dans une ambulance peut-être, un véhicule quelconque certainement."³ All that he does know is that he writes, that someone takes away the pages and that he does not work for money.* He makes the statement that seems to typify the Beckett character: "Je ne sais pas grand'chose, franchement."⁴

¹Molloy, p. 7.

²Molloy, p. 142.

³Molloy, p. 7

⁴Molloy, p. 7.

*Most authors would make this statement. However, as it will be noted in the third chapter, Molloy has a more pressing reason to write.

Molloy's quest for his mother takes him to four geographical locations: a plain, a village, the seashore, and finally a forest. On the plain, Molloy watches two men, A and B, converge and then separate. In the village after some difficulty with the police he goes to live with a woman, Lousse, whose dog he had killed by hitting it with his bicycle; he replaces the dog. At the seashore he describes his attempt at solving the problem of the sucking stones. There are sixteen stones and only four pockets: to distribute them so that each stone is sucked in proper sequence is the problem. In the forest, having all but lost his mobility, he hears the reassuring words "Ne te bile pas, Molloy, on arrive"⁵ and his narrative ends.

At the outset of his section Moran is the antithesis of Molloy. If Molloy has trouble communicating with others, Moran has none. Unlike Molloy, Moran needs no crutches to aid him. He has a son and a housekeeper along with a house and a garden where he enjoys his Sundays. In brief, Moran is the epitome of the middle-class. He speaks in middle-class cliches and has taught his son early the "horreur du corps et de ses fonctions."⁶ Moran works for an obscure organization of which Gaber is the messenger and a Youdi the chief. With the arrival of Gaber who brings the order to find Molloy, Moran somehow realizes that his existence up to that time was to change: "C'est dans ce cadre que s'écoulèrent mes derniers moments de bonheur et de calme."⁷

The more Moran gets on after Molloy the more he begins to resemble him. First, one of his legs begins to stiffen. Then, he loses his mania

⁵Molloy, p. 140.

⁶Molloy, p. 182.

⁷Molloy, p. 144.

for exactitude and his hatred for vagueness. The ability to communicate with his son disintegrates as well as his desire for communication. At the end of his narrative Moran has not found Molloy, rather he has become like him, or become him.

The above is, very briefly, an outline of the two sections of Molloy. From the point of view of this thesis, what actually happens in each narrative is not as important as how each narrator deals with what happens. Both Molloy and Moran are writers and we are observing them in their act of creation.

Mr. Beckett has taken a theme that is not uncommon in literature: the quest. A novelist writes about someone who is looking for something. He describes events that befall his character, embellishing those that are important to the plot and to the outcome and treating lightly those that are important only in that they make the novel more "life-like." He introduces new characters and new situations with the hope that the reader will be able to "believe" in his novel. All that he adds, therefore, is somehow important to his theme of a quest. But Mr. Beckett has changed this. Both quests in Molloy are important to the novel only in that they serve as a general structure. As I will try to show, it makes no difference that Molloy does not find his mother, nor that Moran does not find Molloy. What does matter is that both Molloy and Moran are sitting in their respective rooms, each writing a novel, which is, as Hugh Kenner puts it, ". . . a piece of writing performed with considerable endurance by a solitary man who sits in a room, collecting what congruent memories he can of things he experienced before his siege in the room commenced."⁸

⁸Hugh Kenner, "Samuel Beckett vs. Fiction," National Review (October 11, 1958), p. 248.

Mr. Beckett has endowed his author-heroes with a new technique in writing fiction; a technique that is above all concerned with more truth in fiction. The statement is not as paradoxical as it seems, for what it basically means is that Mr. Beckett, in Molloy, has presented us with a more truthful piece of writing. Ruby Cohn has said of the trilogy that "Non sequitur is the norm; characters appear without cause or effect; place, time, and season are described at inappropriate and irrelevant intervals; . . ."9 The above does seem to be the case, but the point is that all of these things can and do happen in any one person's attempt to describe his existence. There is an incident in Molloy that can serve to suggest this point:

J'avais emporté de chez Lousse un peu d'argenterie, oh pas grand' chose, des cuillers à café massives pour la plupart, et puis d'autres menus objets dont je ne saisissais pas l'utilité mais qui semblaient devoir avoir de la valeur. Parmi ces derniers il y en avait un qui me hante encore, de tempts en tempts. Il consistait en deux X réunis, au niveau de l'intersection, par une barre, et ressemblait à une minuscule chevre de bucheron, avec cette différence pourtant, que les X de la vraie chèvre ne sont pas des X parfaits, mais tronqués par en haut, tandis que les X du petit objet dont je parle étaient parfaits, c'est-à-dire composés chacun de deux V identiques, l'un supérieur ouvert en haut, comme tous les V d'ailleurs, et l'autre inférieur ouvert en bas, ou plus précisément de quatre V rigoureusement pareils, les deux que je viens de nommer et puis d'autres, l'un à droite, l'autre à gauche, ayant l'ouverture à droite et à gauche respectivement. . . . Cet étrange instrument, je l'ai encore quelque part je crois, n'ayant jamais pu me résoudre à le monnayer, même dans l'extrémité de mon besoin, car je n'arrivais pas à comprendre à quoi il pouvait bien servir ni même à ébaucher une hypothèse à ce sujet.10

⁹Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett," Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essay, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 176.

¹⁰Molloy, p. 96.

The object that Molloy describes is nothing more than a silver knife-rest. A reader, however, would probably tend to give this object more importance than it is meant to have. He might see, instead of two X's joined by a bar, two crosses, thereby giving the object some sort of religious signification, reasoning that since Molloy has described it in his text it must therefore have some sort of symbolic value. The whole passage in context does seem to be an enormous non sequitur. The point is, however, that there is an enormous amount of non sequitur even in our day to day living. For example, if I am walking to the bank to borrow money for, say, a new car, I might notice many incidents along the way. I might pass by a church and notice a priest walking the grounds with a parishioner; or I might witness an automobile accident in which someone is injured or even killed; or I might note a man and a woman walking by, hand in hand. These and other incidents might be noted by me on my walk to the bank. None of them have anything to do with each other, nor are they connected in any way with my own preoccupations, but they might have happened. Now if I were to write about my walk to the bank and if I wished to be truthful, I must include all of the incidents--if any--that I witness. Since none of the incidents have anything to do with each other nor with my purpose they would all appear to be non sequitur. The reader of my piece of writing would no doubt seek some sort of significance to each incident in order for them to fit with the rest of my narrative. The fact that none of them actually have a significance and that they were included simply because they happened could never be accepted by the reader. For him, there must be a reason for everything that happens in a story. An incident, he might say, should be included only if it somehow helps the story. Thus, a reader of Molloy

might become stumped--as I did at first--for want of some meaning to the knife-rest incident. Judging by the various possibilities of interpretation--such as the aforementioned suggestion that some might see the knife-rest as two crosses thereby giving it a symbolic religious significance--the incident must be quite difficult to accept at face value; that is, that it is a knife-rest that somehow interests Molloy enough to write about it. However, I feel that a reader ought to take the rather obscure advice that Mr. Beckett himself appended to one of his early novels, Watt: "No symbols where none intended."¹¹

Similarly, Mr. Beckett's characters seem to have an obsession with objects that are dealt with to a much greater extent than even the knife-rest. Both Molloy and Moran wear hats and ride bicycles and both are objects of endearment to them. Each writer would gladly describe his bicycle. Moran seems so enthusiastic about his that he exclaims, "Je la décrirais volontiers, j'écirais volontiers quatre mille mots dessus."¹² Thus, with so much emphasis placed on bicycles, they would seem to have a less obvious function in the narrative. And indeed for many critics the bicycles alone have spawned essay upon essay. One such critic, Hugh Kenner, has developed a theory about the bicycles that--however ingenious--seems a bit too far-fetched:

The body, if we consider it without prejudice in the light of the seventeenth-century connoisseurship of the simple machines, is distinguished from any machine, however complex, by being clumsy,

¹¹Samuel Beckett, Watt (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959), p. 254.

¹²Molloy, p. 240.

sloppy, and unintelligible; the extreme of analytic ingenuity will resolve no one of its functions, except inexactly, into lever, wedge, wheel, pulley, screw, inclined plane, or some combination of these. If we would admire a body worthy of the human reason, we shall have to create it, as the Greeks did when they united the noblest functions of rational and animal being, man with horse, and created the breed to which they assigned Chiron, tutor of Asclepius, Jason and Achilles. For many years, however, we have had accessible to us a nobler image of bodily perfection than the horse. The cartesian Centaur is a man riding a bicycle, mens sana in corpore disposito.¹³

Thus, to Mr. Kenner, Molloy and Moran, each on their bicycle, represent the ideal marriage of body and mind. As such then, it would seem that without such emphasis on an object such as the bicycle--or if it were excluded altogether--that the narrative in some way would be lacking. But is this the case? Would the impact of the novel be in any way diminished without mention of a bicycle or a hat? I feel that it would not. The reason can be found with the acknowledgment that Mr. Beckett is more of a writer of poetry than one of prose. We will accept the out-of-context in a poem as well as the abrupt changes of thought that can occur from line to line. In fact, we will accept almost any type of aside in poetry. We usually will not suffer the same thing in prose. Thus according to Anthony Cronin:

The immanence of an object in a Beckett novel, a hat, say, is the immanence of an object in a poem. Its purpose is seldom utilitarian, or explicatory, or illustrative, as the purpose of an object in a novel frequently is. Though the heroes will not be parted from their hats, the narrative, such as it is, could get along without them. Objects play a part in what happens--a huge part. Molloy and Moran are largely dominated by their awful bicycles. But the presence of the bicycles is arbitrary; they have not been introduced to illustrate anything about their owner's history or

¹³Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 121.

status, or to explain anything whatever. Similarly, if a mysteriously crippled character loses his way and crawls through a wood it will be simply because woods exist, in the landscape and in Mr. Beckett's consciousness, not because this particular wood has any utilitarian function.¹⁴

Basically, what Mr. Beckett's technique of writing has done is to allow objects to exist for themselves in his novels just as they do outside of fiction. If Molloy and Moran are involved with bicycles and hats it is because such objects do have an interest all their own. There is no need to seek any symbolic significance from them, even though one is strongly tempted. That this is relatively new in fiction is obvious and it points out, again according to Mr. Cronin, that

One of the great affirmations of modern aesthetics was the fact that nothing is trivial. Onions on a cloth, a woman ironing, a dancer awkwardly adjusting her shoe, a bottle, a glass and a newspaper--anything at all could affect the sensibility as strongly or, more often, more strongly, than the battle of Marengo, or the 'Charge of the Light Brigade.' . . . The applications of the modern aesthetic can be seen not only in painting but in literature¹⁵

Therefore, I feel that any reader who insists on adding to the inherent value of any given object in Mr. Beckett's work by reading into it something of symbolic value ought to take Molloy's cleverly put advice: "Car ne rien savoir, ce n'est rien, vouloir savoir non plus, mais ne rien pouvoir savoir, savoir ne rien pouvoir savoir, voilà par où passe la paix, dans l'âme du chercheur incurieux."¹⁶

¹⁴Anthony Cronin, "Molloy Becomes Unnamable," p. 97.

¹⁵Anthony Cronin, "Is Your Novel Really Necessary?", A Question of Modernity, p. 55-56.

¹⁶Molloy, p. 96.

If objects are treated in the texts of Molloy and Moran in a manner quite different from what might be expected, so are events or incidents presented in a unique way. While searching for Molloy, Moran finds himself face to face with a man whom he does not know. Moran insists that the man leave, but in vain.

Il avança une main vers moi. Je crois bien lui avoir dit à nouveau de s'enlever de là. Je me rappelle encore la main qui venait vers moi, blanchâtre, s'ouvrant et se refermant. On aurait dit qu'elle se propulsait toute seule. Je ne sais pas ce qui se passa alors. Mais un peu plus tard, peut-être beaucoup plus tard, je le trouvai étendu par terre, la tête en bouillie. Je regrette de ne pas pouvoir indiquer plus clairement de quelle manière ce résultat fut obtenu.¹⁷

Thus, what might have been a long description of the killing of a man is instead a simple statement that a man is dead and that Moran does not know what happened. In any other narrative this might be a central incident worthy of much consideration. Here, the incident becomes simply a statement of a result. Moran admits that had he known exactly what happened "Ça aurait fait un beau morceau."¹⁸ But since he does not know he is not about to postulate because ". . . ce n'est pas arrivé à ce point de mon récit que je vais me lancer dans la littérature."¹⁹ We might substitute the word "fiction" for "littérature." He is writing a report and any embellishment of fact would be false and therefore fiction. Likewise, in the Molloy section the narrator dismisses a great portion of his previous existence by stating simple "Et quant à dire ce que je devins, et où j'allais, dans les mois sinon les années qui suivirent, je n'en ai pas l'inten-

¹⁷Molloy, pp. 234-235.

¹⁸Molloy, p. 235.

¹⁹Molloy, p. 235.

tion."²⁰ Molloy then goes into the pages and pages of his problem of the sucking stones. Major events, it seems, that would be very important in any other novel come to have little or no importance in each narrative. The reason for this becomes less obscure when we realize how concerned with truth are Mr. Beckett's characters. Molloy makes this declaration quite succinctly. "Car je dis toujours ou trop ou trop peu, ce qui me fait de la peine, tellement je suis épris de vérité."²¹ Molloy realizes (and Moran comes to realize) that not everything can be included in the narrative.

Et si je n'ai pas mentionné cette circonstance à sa place, c'est qu'on ne peut pas tout mentionner à sa place, mais il faut choisir, entre les chose qui ne valent pas la peine d'être mentionnées et celles qui le valent encore moins. Car si l'on voulait tout mentionner, on n'en finirait jamais²²

Then, if some aspects must be left out, the entire incident, if described, would be necessarily a falsification of what actually happened. And so rather than falsify his experience intentionally, he prefers to explore, in every possible way, the absurd problem of sucking sixteen stones in numerical order, just as Moran, instead of describing how he killed the man, describes the manner in which he succeeded in finding his keys which had scattered, presumably in the struggle with the man.

In Molloy Mr. Beckett carries the problem of writing one step further by admitting that all fiction is a lie. This does not seem to be too startling a revelation, but on the other hand, how many writers have actually admitted it? Most would rather that the reader believe in what they have written. Molloy and Moran point out constantly that they are

²⁰Molloy, p. 103.

²¹Molloy, p. 50.

²²Molloy, p. 61.

writing fiction, they will not have the reader believe otherwise. Molloy, when writing of his mother breaks in to say:

J'ajoute, avant d'en venir aux faits, car on dirait vraiment des faits, de ce distant après-midi d'été, qu'avec cette vieille femme sourde, aveugle, impotente et folle, qui m'appelait Dan et que j'appelais Mag, et avec elle seule, je--non, je ne peux pas le dire. C'est-à-dire que je pourrais le dire mais je ne dirai pas, oui, il me serait facile de le dire, car ce ne serait pas vrai.²³

Moran, early in his narrative had mentioned that he kept turkeys, but the more he begins to resemble Molloy, the more he becomes concerned with truth in his writing. "J'ai menti en disant que j'avais des dindes, etc. Je n'avais que quelques poules."²⁴ Finally Molloy comes to what must be an agonizing realization for a writer concerned with truth. To be able to admit it takes great courage:

Et chaque fois que je dis, Je me disais telle et telle chose, ou que je parle d'une voix interne me disant, Molloy, et puis une belle phrase plus ou moins claire et simple, ou que je me trouve dans l'obligation de prêter aux tiers des paroles intelligibles, ou qu'à l'intention d'autrui il sort de ma propre bouche des sons articulés à peu près convenablement, je ne fais que me plier aux exigences d'une convention qui veut qu'on mente ou qu'on se taise.²⁵

If you must "either lie or hold your peace," as Mr. Beckett translates the above, a question immediately presents itself: Why bother to write? The answer is, of course, that writing is the trade of Mr. Beckett's characters--and by extension, of Mr. Beckett himself. A mason lays bricks, an artist paints, and a writer can only write. Edith Kern has stated about Molloy--all of Mr. Beckett's authors can be included--that

²³Molloy, p. 26.

²⁴Molloy, p. 197.

²⁵Molloy, p. 135.

. . . Molloy is an author consciously engaged in literary creation. To him writing is more than a pasttime, more than a concern to record for posterity the memory of his strange journey. Writing is his only raison d'être. For that purpose he was rescued from a ditch, into which he had fallen more dead than alive, by those mysterious forces that, in times of need, come to the aid of heroes. His trials served but to lead him to his 'mother's room,' where writing is identical with existence and existence means writing.²⁶

Thus, Molloy and Moran, both writers, sit in their respective rooms and write as they must, Molloy because a man comes once a week to pick up the completed pages and Moran because he must write his report.*

Another aspect of the technique of the Beckett hero-author is the facility with which comment, insight, maxims, and puns are included. In the more traditional novel much of the same can be found, of course, but it is handled in an entirely different manner. In the latter, comment and insight must be worked somehow into the plot, whereas with Mr. Beckett it comes almost by-the-way, or it might be involved with an association. In most cases the effect of such asides is wildly comical. When talking of the small pomeranian that is following A or B (he does not know which) Molloy says: "Le petit chien suivait bien mal, à la façon des poméraniens, s'arrê[^]tait, faisait de longues girations, laissait tomber, je veux dire abondonnait, puis recommençait un peu plus loin. La constipation chez les poméraniens est signe de bonne santé."²⁷

Molloy's comment on criticism--for Molloy is an artist and the

²⁶Edith Kern, "Moran-Molloy: Hero as Author," Perspective, xi (Autumn, 1959), 183.

²⁷Molloy, p. 15.

*This obligation to create becomes an increasingly important theme as the trilogy develops. It will be dealt with further in the following chapters where its nature and contradictions become more clear.

latter traditionally have no use for criticism--is one that, whether criticism merits it or not, is certainly the funniest to have come along.

Et pendant l'hiver je m'enveloppais, sous mon manteau, bandelettes de papier journal, et je ne m'en dépouillais qu'au réveil de la terre, le vrai, en avril. Le Supplément Littéraire du Times était excellent à cet effet, d'une solidité et non-porosité à toute épreuve. Les pets ne le déchiraient pas.²⁸

In all cases Molloy's comments are well put and they do lend themselves to his vision. "Non, contre le geste charitable il n'existe pas de parade, à ma connaissance. On penche la tête, on tend ses mains toutes tremblantes et emmêlées et on dit merci, merci madame, merci ma bonne dame."²⁹ Then Molloy finishes this thought with a maxim worthy of Laroche-foucauld and which helps to explain the Beckett character's preoccupation with scatology. "A qui n'a rien il est interdit de ne pas aimer la merde."³⁰

Both Molloy and Moran are fond of punning. Both play with the French expression "ne pas être dans son assiette"--to be out of sorts--in a brilliant fashion. Molloy breaks in, when talking about how confusing directions are to him, to say: "Je n'étais pas dans mon assiette. Elle est profonde, mon assiette, une assiette à soupe, et il est rare que je n'y sois pas. C'est pourquoi je le signale."³¹ Moran cannot resist the same play: "J'en ai déjà mangé?" he asks Marthe, the housekeeper, "Elle m'assura qu'oui. C'est donc moi qui ne suis pas dans mon assiette, dis-je. Ce trait d'esprit me plut énormément, j'en ris tellement que je me mis à houqueter. Il fut perdu pour Marthe que me regardait avec hébètement."³²

²⁸Molloy, p. 43.

²⁹Molloy, p. 34.

³⁰Molloy, p. 34

³¹Molloy, p. 27.

³²Molloy, p. 179.

Much of their punning is scatological in nature and sometimes treats very irreverently of our most cherished institutions; here, birth and motherhood: "Malheureusement ce n'est pas de cela qu'il s'agit mais de celle qui me donna le jour, par le trou de son cul si j'ai bonne mémoire. Premier emmerdement."³³ Some of the punning is quite obscure, and the delight one feels after finally solving one can be matched only by the obvious delight Mr. Beckett takes in slipping one into the text. During the description of one of his attempts at solving the problem of the sucking stones Molloy triumphantly states "Il n'y avait qu'à (qu'à!) mettre par exemple . . ."³⁴ At first, the reader thinks that Molloy is stressing the word "only," which is literally what the contraction means. But if the phrase is said aloud the pun cannot be missed. "Qu'à qu'à" spoken rapidly is phonetically the same as the French baby-talk word for excrement, "caca." It should be remembered that Molloy called his mother "la Comtesse Caca."

The purpose of such asides and puns is twofold. Obviously, they allow the author to comment on various aspects of his vision and for this reason alone their existence in the text is justified. But they also serve to remind the reader that he is reading someone's fiction, which is exactly what Molloy and Moran (and Mr. Beckett) want.

There has been much critical speculation about the order of the two sections in Molloy. Many contend that Moran's narrative ought to be read first; and indeed, this would seem to give the book a more accessible structure. That is, the reader can begin with Moran, in all his middle-class surroundings, and follow him as he prepares himself for the ". . .

³³ Molloy, p. 22.

³⁴ Molloy, p. 109.

longues affres de la liberté et du vagabondage."³⁵ So many are the similarities between Molloy and Moran at the end of his narrative that one might suppose that Moran simply becomes Molloy. This inversion does seem to give the entire book a "nice" beginning and end. But if we take into account again that the novel is more poetry than prose, the inversion becomes very unimportant. On the poetic level--which is the way it should be read--there is no need for coherence nor for a beginning and end in order to experience the full impact of Molloy. As Bernard Pingaud has perceptively noted:

La fin du livre vers laquelle, dans une feinte ignorance, il [an author] prétend mener le lecteur, n'est donc pas une véritable fin, pas plus que le commencement n'était un commencement véritable. Tout roman (parce qu'il prétend commencer et finir) fixe à l'interminable des limites arbitraires. Mais si le narrateur se propose de restituer sous nos yeux le mouvement vrai de la décomposition, son 'émotion confuse,' il n'y a plus d'histoire possible, plus d'aventure, plus d'événement. Une existence qui se voit comme finissante ignore le changement, est devenue incapable de progrès. Tout ce qui s'y passe relève du hasard, ne l'engage pas, ne la modifie pas--ce qui signifie en définitive qu'il ne s'y passe rien, donc qu'on peut raconter à son sujet n'importe quoi.³⁶

Thus, neither narrative has an end. Rather, they both stop when they come to the point where they started writing. Moran's final attempt at truth in his narrative confesses that his opening lines were false. "Alors je rentrai dans la maison et j'écrivis, Il est minuit. La pluie fouette les vitres. Il n'était pas minuit. Il ne pleuvait pas."³⁷

³⁵Molloy, p. 204.

³⁶Bernard Pingaud, "Molloy, douze ans après," Les Temps Modernes, No. 200 (January, 1963), p. 1297.

³⁷Molloy, p. 272.

CHAPTER II

CREATION AND CRITICISM

If in Molloy the two hero-authors write about a time when they possessed at least a semblance of mobility, in Malone meurt there is no longer even a question of it. Malone lies in a bed located in a room that seems to be his. Like most of Mr. Beckett's characters, Malone is vague about questions of location and ownership. Thus, he supposes the room to be his, but he is not sure. Malone arrived in this room, as he says with Molloy's same words, "Dans une ambulance peut-être, un véhicule quelconque certainement."¹ He vaguely remembers being put in a forest at some time of his life but admits that all that is the past and that his concern now is with the present. At first, there was a woman who looked after Malone's very basic needs. Now it is simply a gnarled hand that puts a dish of soup on a table near the door. Malone has a stick with which to hook the table and to pull it near his bed. This same table is used to send away his chamberpot when it is full. The very basic fact of his existence in the room is summed up when Malone says, "L'essentiel est de s'alimenter et d'éliminer, si l'on veut tenir."² Thus Malone has achieved the state of stasis that is common to Mr. Beckett's characters in the trilogy. Their physical existence depends only upon the very minimum of necessities.

As are the other characters in the trilogy, Malone is a writer. And while waiting to die--he feels that his death is imminent--Malone tells us that:

¹ Malone meurt, p. 15. (See also Molloy, p. 7.)

² Malone meurt, p. 18.

. . . je vais me raconter des histoires, si je peux. Ce ne sera pas le même genre d'histoires qu'autrefois, c'est tout. Ce seront des histoires ni belles ni vilaines, calmes, il n'y aura plus en elles ni laideur ni beauté ni fièvre, elles seront presque sans vie, comme l'artiste.³

He goes on to say that he will tell four stories: one about a man, then another about a woman, a third about a thing and finally a fourth about an animal, probably a bird. Just as quickly he changes his mind and decides to put the man and the woman in the same story, because as he puts it, ". . . il y a si peu de différence entre un homme et une femme, je veux dire entre les miens."⁴ But before he can get into these stories he informs us that he must talk of his present situation; that accomplished, he will start with the stories and finally he will inventory his meager possessions. Thus are Malone's plans laid before he begins the creation of his fictions.

Malone's first story concerns a boy named Saposcat. The manner in which the opening paragraphs are treated shows the problem Malone will have throughout his section. The problem is one of an apathy--or perhaps even a hatred--for detail. Many times, as in Molloy, Malone will ask himself if something or someone ought to be described. More often than not the description is left out, but sometimes it cannot be avoided. Malone makes no secret of his disgust for detail.

L'homme s'appelle Saposcat. Comme son père. Petit nom? Je ne sais pas. Il n'en aura pas besoin. Ses familiers l'appellent Sapo. Lesquels? Je ne sais pas. Quelques mots sur sa jeunesse. Il le faut.*

³Malone meurt, p. 9.

⁴Malone meurt, p. 11.

*In his own English version, Mr. Beckett has strengthened the last sentence to "This cannot be avoided."

C'était un garçon précoce. Il était peu doué pour les études et ne voyait pas l'utilité de celle qu'on lui faisait faire.

Il assistait aux cours l'esprit ailleurs, ou vide.

Il assistait aux cours l'esprit ailleurs. Mais il aimait le calcul. Mais il n'aimait pas la façon dont on l'enseignait. C'était le maniement des nombres concrets qui lui plaisait. Tout calcul lui semblait oiseux où la nature de l'unité ne fût pas précisée. Il s'adonnait, en public et dans le privé, au calcul mental. Et les chiffres qui alors manoeuvraient dans sa tête la peuplaient de couleurs et de formes.

Quel ennui.⁵

Such interjections as the last along with others such as "Quelle misère" and "non, je ne peux pas" are found throughout his stories and they are usually interjected when Malone finds himself involved with some description or some excess of circumstance. In many ways this honesty about the tedium of description can be taken as a criticism of much of the literature that has come before Mr. Beckett. Perhaps an author such as Balzac--with his pages of description and detail--would never have admitted it, but the fact is that the writing as well as the reading of description is often boring. Some might say that, at least, it is helpful to a novel--and perhaps in their novels (such as they might be) it is. But with a novelist such as Mr. Beckett, such circumstance has little value: description is boring and, more important, it is false; and for a writer as concerned with truth as Mr. Beckett, as much as possible of the false must be suppressed.

Mr. Beckett's realization about description does not negate all literature before him, but it does pose some problems. Description can

⁵Malone meurt, pp. 21-22.

and does convey an experience, but will it always be the one intended by the author? Will the reader receive it as such and will the author himself be able to describe something accurately? Take a simple object such as a particular chair and let several people write a description of it. It is very doubtful that every result will be the same, nor will they all be complete descriptions. Then, since they are not the same and because they are incomplete, none of them can be an accurate description. The problem becomes multiplied if the description of a person, or a place is attempted. For if a true description of a simple chair is impossible to attain, how much more success can one expect to gain in a more involved attempt? Obviously, none. Thus, Malone, when he sees himself becoming involved with description, shows his unequivocal disgust with the whole idea.

In view of Malone's feelings about the shortcomings of detail and description one would expect a rather different view of one of man's favorite descriptive subjects: nature. And, indeed, this is the case, for there is a noticeable lack of any flowery prose about nature. For young Sapo, nature simply is; there is nothing special about it and there is none of the evocative. Malone tells us that Sapo loves nature, but for no particular reason.

Sapo aimait la nature, s'intéressait aux animaux et aux plantes et levait volontiers les yeux au ciel, de jour et de nuit. Mais il ne savait pas regarder ces choses, les regards qu'il leur prodiguait ne lui apprenaient rien sur elles. Il confondait les oiseaux entre eux, et les arbres, et n'arrivait pas à distinguer les unes des autres les céréales. Il n'associait pas les safrans avec le printemps ni les chrysanthèmes avec l'arrière-saison. Le soleil, la lune, les planètes et les étoiles, ne lui posaient pas de problème.⁶

⁶Malone meurt, pp. 29-30

The above might also be taken as criticism for our use of natural phenomena for literary symbols. The sun, moon, and stars have not always been symbols for emotions or thoughts. Rather, they have become symbols through their use as such in someone's long forgotten work of fiction. Since they were born from a fiction, they must remain fiction. So for Malone there is little place for any embellishment of nature. It is boring and since it would be merely descriptive, it is also more falsification. After one rather long--long for Malone's technique--descriptive passage in which Malone catches himself, he interjects,

Une rivière qu'enjambaient de loin en loin--mais il s'agit bien de la nature. D'ailleurs où aurait-elle pu prendre sa source, je me le demande. Sous terre peut-être. Bref un petit Eden pour qui apprécie le genre débraillé.*

In the whole of the trilogy there is a noticeable lack of similes. In Malone meurt there are perhaps four or five, none of which Malone lets slip by without some comment. In the case of some of them he scoffs. With others he completely destroys them, explaining why he cannot allow them into his writing. Malone had written that Sapo had eyes "clairs et fixes comme ceux d'une mouette,"⁸ but a few lines further he comments:

Ces yeux de mouette me font tiquer. Ils me rappellent un vieux naufrage, je ne me rappelle plus lequel. C'est un détail évidemment. Mais je suis devenu craintif. Je connais ces petites phrases qui n'ont l'air de rien et qui, une fois admises, peuvent pour empester toute une langue. Rien n'est plus réel que rien. Elles sortent de l'abîme et n'ont de cesse qu'elles n'y entraînent. Mais cette fois je saurai m'en défendre.⁹

⁷Malone meurt, p. 197.

⁸Malone meurt, p. 32.

⁹Malone meurt, p. 32.

*Again Becket has strengthened the English version "--but to hell with all this fucking scenery"

Similes, as well as other figures of speech, according to Malone, "pollute the whole of speech" as Mr. Beckett has translated the phrase. They lead one farther and farther from what the writer is trying to say. One becomes so involved with such figures that the result is one of confusion and ambiguity. By way of an example, Malone has italicized the sentence "Rien n'est plus réel que rien." One can muse for literally hours in trying to root out the actual meaning of the sentence. But all attempts lead nowhere because such a statement--a pseudo epigram--has no meaning. So finally, exhausted, one realizes that all his efforts have led him--not nearer to some signification--but rather away. The whole question becomes clouded and dark. So, Malone, a writer no less concerned with truth and clarity than Molloy and Moran, tries to avoid these pollutions of speech, because, as he puts it, ". . . je veux le moins possible d'ombre, dans son histoire. Une betite ombre, en elle-même, sur le moment, ce n'est rien. On n'y pense plus, on continue, dans la clarté. Mais je connais l'ombre, elle s'accumule, se fait plus dense, puis soudain éclate et noie tout."¹⁰

With such an obvious distaste for description, detail and figures of speech, one would think--and rightly so--that Malone's prose as well as that of the whole trilogy is quite barren. It is a prose quite unlike any other. In speaking of this, Anthony Cronin has noted that

The asceticism of this prose is one of its most notable features, an austerity in keeping with the macerations of false experience which are intended. It is a prose which denies itself all spurious ornament and adjectival embellishment, even, for the most part, the alluring joys of metaphor. And the boredom of description which,

¹⁰Malone meurt, p. 25.

at least nowadays, is almost always and almost necessarily a concoction and a falsification are rigorously avoided. . . . Mr. Beckett is intensely aware of the possibilities of corruption inherent in all attempts to embellish one's language, the harm that can be done by the harmless little words that continue to fester and corrupt the rest of the statement long after they have been indulged in.¹¹

In his own way Malone is not only criticising the style of many works of literature before him, but also the manner in which events--however minor--are treated. Malone is quite simply more honest about such aspects of creation. There is an incident concerning young Sapo that exemplifies admirably Malone's wish for honesty. Sapo, after being threatened with a cane by his master at school, grabs the cane and throws it through a closed window. This, according to Malone, was enough to merit expulsion from school. But Sapo was not expelled. Malone realizes that he must find out why. In any other novel, faced with a similar situation a reader would also demand an explanation. Such things cannot happen without reason. And so Malone seeks the answer. His efforts, however, are in vain, and he admits it.

Je n'ai pas pu savoir pourquoi il ne fut pas renvoyé. Je vais être obligé de laisser cette question en suspens. J'essaie de ne pas m'en réjouir. Vite je l'éloignerai, mon Sapo, de cette indulgence incompréhensible, je le ferai vivre comme s'il avait été puni selon ses mérites. . . . Voilà ce que j'ai décidé. Je ne vois pas d'autre solution. J'essaie de faire pour le mieux.¹²

A more conventional novelist would have omitted the whole statement, after failing to find a convincing solution. Not so Malone, the incident

¹¹Anthony Cronin, "Molloy Becomes Unnamable," A Question of Modernity, p. 105.

¹²Malone meurt, p. 28.

remains along with an apologetic explanation. The difference is, also, that Malone has no interest in showing a psychological development in Sapo, or for that matter, in any of his other creations. These characters have already developed. "Life has already settled their hash,"¹³ as Mr. Cronin puts it, contrary to most other prose works where the interest ". . . lies precisely in the unfolding of event; not in the result of action, but in the precise nuance of action itself: the motive, the accident, the coincidence, the success or failure of plan, the time taken, the effect of character not so much on fate as on action."¹⁴ Therefore, what we know or do not know of Sapo at school is unimportant, unimportant in that Sapo's fate in no way depends on it.

Malone does not tell the stories which he had promised. There is no further mention of a thing nor of a bird. In the middle of Sapo's story he introduces a family by name of "Louis." This story is no more successful than Sapo's because he sees himself becoming more involved with detail and circumstance. He interjects the same comments "Quel ennui." "Non, je ne peux pas." from time to time to show his boredom. Often he stops the narrative to make some observation or simply to make some statement about himself. As Hugh Kenner points out, he does this mainly to prevent tedium.

The narrator constantly shifts his focus of attention in order to keep himself interested. This is what the professional fictionist does too, although he would claim if pressed that he did it in order to keep the reader interested.¹⁵

¹³Anthony Cronin, p. 97.

¹⁴Anthony Cronin, p. 49.

¹⁵Hugh Kenner, National Review, p. 248.

Finally, Malone seems to lose all interest in Sapo, in spite of himself--and changes his name to Macmann. "Car Sapo--non, je ne peux plus l'appeler ainsi, et même je me demande comment j'ai pu supporter ce nom jusqu'à présent. Alors, car, voyons, car Macmann, ça ne vaut guère mieux mais il n'y a pas de temps à perdre, . . ."16* From this point on Malone's story centers around Macmann.

The view, then, of Malone Meurt is that of the artist in the process of writing fiction. Again, what he writes is not as important as the manner in which it is presented. What matters are his criticisms and comments of the act of writing fiction. Also included are Malone's own preoccupations that thrust themselves to his attention while he is trying to write. These will be discussed in the following chapter in light of the whole trilogy.

¹⁶Malone meurt, p. 101.

*Sapo becomes one more of Mr. Beckett's M's. There has been much speculation as to the signification of so many characters all with names that begin with an M. Some believe that there is some sort of mystical connection with the number thirteen, since the letter M is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet. I do not believe that there are any grounds for this. However, I cannot help commenting on the question. I have found three possible answers, none of which is conclusive. (1) All of the names are typical Irish names. That they all begin with M may be coincidence. (2) Robert Brock has suggested that perhaps there is an intended scatological reference. The French word for excrement, he suggests, also begins with the letter M. (3) Mr. Beckett may have done it on purpose, so that he could sit back and laugh at all the critical conjecture. A and B, the two men whom Molloy watches on the plain, become A and C in the translation. This change has caused an enormous amount of comment. Mr. Beckett must be laughing heartily at it all.

CHAPTER III

SELF THROUGH CREATION

The amazing fact of Mr. Beckett's trilogy is that a reader can experience the impact of each of the novels without reading the other two. Molloy, as an individual novel, readily stands alone. Molloy's techniques, comments, insights, and vision do not necessarily depend upon any knowledge of Malone, nor of the last novel in the series, L'Innommable. Similarly, one can read Malone meurt and enjoy Malone's criticisms of writing without prior knowledge of either of the other two. To a lesser degree, even the final novel of the trilogy can be experienced alone. It is, however, with L'Innommable that the reader begins to realize that the sum of each book of the trilogy--for all their sub-themes and variations--makes up the whole of a work in which can be seen a theme to which all others are subordinate. That theme is the artist in search for himself. The justification for this search for self is that there is a feeling that somehow its discovery will bring peace. This peace, in Molloy's words, is simply "to have done with it." And it is all-important: "Tout est là, finir, en finir."¹ But what is this "self" to which we owe the existence of the trilogy? According to Ross Chambers the answer can be found in the work of Marcel Proust.

There is a phrase in Proust that admirably summarizes the context of artistic thinking in which one must place Samuel Beckett's experience of time, which is the main subject of this essay. The words in question are in the last part of A la Recherche du Temps perdu: "une minute affranchie de l'ordre du temps a recréé en nous,

¹Molloy, p. 61.

pour la sentir, l'homme affranchi de l'ordre du temps"--words that suppose the existence within us of some timeless essential being, which for Proust is our true self, . . .²

If this "timeless essential being" is the "self" that is sought, how can its attainment be realized? More specifically, by what means can its discovery be brought about? For Beckett's ultimate hero-author, the Unnamable, it is a matter of words: "Tout se ramène à une affaire de paroles, il ne faut pas l'oublier, je ne l'ai pas oublié."³ It is the striving, toward this end, of self-definition through creation, that binds the three novels into the trilogy.

All of the authors in the trilogy tell themselves stories. Molloy noted early in his section his need for stories: "Ce dont j'ai besoin c'est des histoires, j'ai mis longtemps à le savoir."⁴ Malone says essentially the same thing when he announces that he will tell three stories while he is waiting to die. And finally the Unnamable states his intentions: "Je vais peut-être être obligé, afin de ne pas tarir, d'inventer encore une féerie, avec des têtes, des troncs, des bras, des jambes et tout ce qui s'ensuit, . . ."⁵ All are storytellers and each story plays a part in the ritual of the search for self.

When a writer creates a fiction, it is next to impossible to omit some aspect--however small--of his own experience, his personality, in brief, some aspect of himself from his creation. It cannot be avoided.

²Ross Chambers, "Beckett's Brinksmanship," in Samuel Beckett, ed. by Mar. Esslin, p. 152.

³L'Innommable, p. 98.

⁴Molloy, p. 16.

⁵L'Innommable, p. 41.

Thus, the finished product, the fiction, can be said to contain at least a glimpse of the author. In such a way a writer can learn about himself through his own fictions, for fiction is one way of talking about one's self. The various aspects of the actions of a character faced with a certain situation can reveal the actions that the author might--or might not--take in a similar situation. In Malone's case, however, this inability to separate himself from his fiction is a curse. It prevents him from "playing," his word for writing.

Cette fois je sais où je vais. Ce n'est plus la nuit de jadis, de naguère. C'est un jeu maintenant, je vais jouer. Je n'ai pas su jouer jusqu'à présent. J'en avais envie, mais je savais que c'était impossible. Je m'y suis quand même appliqué, souvent. J'allumais partout, je regardais bien autour de moi, je me mettais à jouer avec ce que je voyais.⁶

For Malone's stories are told ostensibly to pass the time while he awaits his death. But he discovers too soon that he is yet talking about himself. He finds it impossible to create a fiction without including some aspect of himself. After trying to get into his first story about Sapo, Malone breaks in

Quel ennui. Et j'appelle ça jouer. Je me demande si ce n'est pas encore de moi qu'il s'agit, malgré mes précautions. Vais-je être incapable, jusqu'à la fin, de mentir sur autre chose? Je sens s'amonceler ce noir, s'aménager cette solitude, auxquels je me reconnais, et m'appeler cette ignorance qui pourrait être belle et n'est que lacheté. Je ne sais plus très bien ce que j'ai dit. Ce n'est pas ainsi qu'on joue. Je ne saurai bientôt plus d'où il sort, mon petit Sapo, ni ce qu'il espère. Je ferais peut-être mieux de laisser cette histoire et de passer à la deuxième, ou même à la troisième, celle de la pierre. Non, ce serait la même chose. Je n'ai qu'à faire plus attention. Je vais bien réfléchir à ce que j'ai dit avant d'aller plus loin. A chaque menace de ruine je m'arrêterai pour m'inspecter tel quel.⁷

⁶Malone meurt, p. 9.

⁷Malone meurt, pp. 25-26.

In an identity search one would think that Malone and the others would welcome any aspect of themselves into their creations. But this is not the case. All of Mr. Beckett's hero-authors have an ambivalent attitude toward fiction. On the one hand they have a hatred for lies, and fiction certainly is a lie. And yet, there is the possibility that from the fiction, somehow a truth might spring. And so, because of this latter possibility and in spite of the hatred of fiction, the stories must continue. Furthermore, as a writer, how does one set out to arrive at a truth without the aid of a fiction? According to Anthony Cronin, fictions are necessary.

The artist who is concerned only with the truth can arrive at it only by means of a fiction It does seem that it is only by the adoption of a fictitious mechanism and the entry into a labyrinth that may never lead back to the self, that the self can be found. It does seem that it is only by the saying of words on other subject, 'even any old thing,' that the words will be found which will discover the self and release it from its torment. . . . For there is no doubt that the attempt to speak directly of the truth, without a fiction or mechanism or a construction of any kind, does lead to barrenness and silence. It is the liars who are creative; it is lies which are germinal, even of the truth. And yet should it not be otherwise? Hence the Unnamable's guilt and agony, which ever course he adopts.⁸

Proof of this need for fictions can be found throughout the entire trilogy. There is the possibility that each narrative is the fictional creation of the narrative that follows. In Molloy, there is a suggestion that Moran fabricated Molloy. Moran describes for us what may be the preliminary act of creating a fiction.

Car là où Molloy ne pouvait être, Moran non plus d'ailleurs, Moran pouvait se courber sur Molloy. Et si de cet examen il ne devait

⁸Anthony Cronin, p. 108.

rien sortir de particulièrement fécond ni d'utile pour l'exécution du mandat, j'aurais néanmoins établi une sorte de rapport, et de rapport pas forcément faux. Car la fausseté des termes n'entraîne pas fatalement celle de la relation, que je sache. Et non seulement cela, mais j'aurais prêté à mon bonhomme, [Molloy] dès le début, des allures d'être fabuleux, ce qui ne pourrait manquer de me servir, par la suite, j'en avais le pressentiment. J'ôtai donc ma veste et mes chaussures, je déboutonnai mon pantalon et me glissai sous les couvertures, la conscience tranquille, me sachant que trop bien ce que je faisais. Molloy, ou Moolose, n'était pas un inconnu pour moi. Si j'avais eu des collègues, j'aurais pu me soupçonner d'en avoir parlé avec eux, comme de quelqu'un appelé à nous occuper tôt ou tard. Mais je n'avais appris son existence. Peut-être l'avais-je inventée, je veux dire trouvée toute faite dans ma tête ... Car qui aurait pu me parler de Molloy sinon moi et à qui sinon à moi aurais-je pu en parler? Je cherchai en vain.⁹ (*Italics mine.*)

Thus, the command from Gaber to go after Molloy might be the personification of the "call" to create that any author might experience. It is the obscure command that comes from within himself to invent a fiction. In this case, Moran has received the call to create Molloy.

When we arrive at Malone meurt we find the suggestion that Malone has created both Molloy and Moran.

Mais laissons là ces questions morbides et revenons à celle de mon décès, d'ici deux ou trois jours si j'ai bonne mémoire. A ce moment-là c'en sera fait des Merphy, Mercier, Moly, Moran et autres Malone, à moins que ça ne continue dans l'outre-tombe. Mais pas de midi à vingt-trois heures, défungeous* d'abord, après nous aviserons. Combien de personnes ai-je tuées, en les frappant sur la tête ou en y foutant le feu.¹⁰

⁹ Molloy, pp. 172-173.

¹⁰ Malone meurt, p. 116.

*Here is shown Mr. Beckett's penchant for making up words. The verb "défunger" used above, does not exist in the French language. He translates it "defunge" in the English version. While the word sounds plausible in both languages it was non-existent, at least until the publishing of the trilogy.

Thus, at this point it seems that it is Malone who is the creator of all the fictions before his novel (including the novels that Mr. Beckett wrote before the trilogy). Again these fictions are necessary to him in order to arrive at his real preoccupation. But Malone admits that although they are necessary, they are painfully beside the point. Instead of getting closer to truth, it may be that he is losing it, because of his involvement with circumstance--however necessary--in his own story.

Mais tout cela est à côté de la question, comme tant de choses. Tout est prétexte, Sapo et les oiseaux, Moll, les paysans, ceux qui dans les villes se cherchent et se fuient, mes doutes qui ne m'intéressent pas, ma situation, mes possessions, prétexte pour ne pas en venir au fait, à l'abandon, en levant le pouce, en disant pouce et en s'en allant, sans autre forme de procès, quitte à se faire mal voir de ses petits camarades. Oui, on a beau dire, il est difficile de tout quitter.¹¹

Finally, in L'Innommable we arrive at the ultimate creator of all the novels. The Unnamable says that it was he who has invented them all along with ". . . l'amour je l'ai inventé, la musique, l'odeur de groseille sauvage, pour m'éviter."¹² He too, realizes the paradox that is familiar to writers concerned with truth: you must lie with a fiction or keep silent.

Ces Murphy, Molloy et autres Malone, je n'en suis pas dupe. Ils m'ont fait perdre mon temps, rater ma peine, en me permettant de parler d'eux, quand il fallait parler seulement de moi, afin de pouvoir me taire. Mais je viens de dire que j'ai parlé de moi que je suis en train de parler de moi. Je m'en fous de ce que je viens de dire. C'est maintenant que je vais parler de moi, pour la première fois. J'ai cru bien faire, en m'adjoignant ces souffre-douleurs. Je me suis trompé.¹³

¹¹ Malone meurt, p. 195.

¹² L'Innommable, p. 36.

¹³ L'Innommable, pp. 32-33.

Presumably, if the Unnamable is the creator of them all and if he says that he will talk only of himself from now on, there will be, then, no more fictions. But there must be--and there are--more fictions to come until the questions which opened the novel are finally answered. "Où maintenant? Quand maintenant? Qui maintenant? Sans me le demander. Dire je."¹⁴ The answer to the third question will give him the right to silence and peace which are so important to him.

One should not confuse "silence and peace" with death, for there is much doubt that death can grant it. Molloy explains in no uncertain terms his idea of death. "Mais pour vous faire entrevoir jusqu'où allait la confusion de mes idées sur la mort, je vous dirai franchement que je n'excluais pas la possibilité qu'elle fût encore pire que la vie, en tant que condition."¹⁵ Malone is not even sure that he is still alive, yet his narrative continues. "La possibilité ne m'échappe pas non plus bien sûr, quelque décevante qu'elle soit, que je sois d'ores et déjà mort et que tout continue à peu près comme par le passé."¹⁶ In L'Innommable, the question of whether or not the narrator is alive becomes ridiculously beside the point. For in the search for his true self, the "timeless essential being" of which Mr. Chambers spoke, there is no question of death. Death, by its nature, supposes some dependence on time; since the true self is timeless it is, therefore, immune to death. There is, of course, a question in L'Innommable as to whether the narrator is living, has lived: ". . . si je savais si j'ai vécu, si je vis, si je vivrai, ça simplifierait tout, impossible de savoir" ¹⁷ If he could know that he is

¹⁴L'Innommable, p. 7.

¹⁵Molloy, p. 103.

¹⁶Malone meurt, p. 83.

¹⁷L'Innommable, p. 258.

living or has lived, he would be at least a bit closer to his self.

The Unnamable, before he can win the right to silence, must continuously utter words. To explain this obligation to himself as well as to the reader, the narrator sets up conditions, each of which he contradicts a few lines later. The result is that the whole novel appears to be one contradiction after another. But no matter, for if all that counts is to say words, contradiction is not out of place. As he explains it ". . . on annonce, c'est ainsi, ça fait continuer, ça fait venir la fin, . . ."18

His first contradiction about his obligation of utterance has to do with saying a lesson.

Non, entre moi et le droit au silence, le repos vivant, s'étend la même leçon que toujours, celle que je savais bien mais n'ai pas voulu dire, je ne sais pourquoi, par crainte du silence peut-être, ou croyant qu'il suffisait de dire n'importe quoi, donc de préférence des mensonges, afin de rester caché. Peu importe. Mais maintenant je m'en vais la dire, ma leçon, si je peux me la rappeler.¹⁹

Soon, however, this lesson becomes a "pensum," which is a form of punishment that is given to school children who have failed at something in their school work, such as forgetting a lesson.

Ma bouche au repos se remplirait de salive, ma bouche qui n'en a jamais assez, je la laisserais couler avec délices, bavant de vie, mon pensum terminé, en silence. J'ai parlé, j'ai dû parler, de leçon, c'est pensum qu'il fallait dire, j'ai confondu pensum et leçon. Oui, j'ai un pensum à faire, avant d'être libre, libre de ma bave, libre de me taire, de ne plus écouter, et je ne sais plus lequel. Voilà enfin qui donne une idée de ma situation. On m'a donné un pensum, à ma naissance peut-être, pour me punir d'être né peut-être ou sans raison spéciale, parce qu'on ne m'aime pas, et j'ai oublié en quoi il consiste. Mais me l'a-t-on jamais spécifié? . . . j'ai un pensum à faire, c'est parce que je n'ai pas su dire ma leçon, et que lorsque j'aurai fini mon pensum il

¹⁸L'Innommable, p. 245.

¹⁹L'Innommable, p. 38.

me restera à dire ma leçon, et qu'à ce moment seulement j'aurai le droit de rester tranquillement²⁰

At this point his situation seems clear enough. He has told us that here is the explanation for his obligation to utter. He must say the pensum, then the lesson, and only after accomplishing that can he "have done." But this too, is ultimately contradicted. It seems that the idea of a pensum is merely another invention.

Toute cette histoire de tâche à accomplir, pour pouvoir m'arrêter, de mots à dire, de vérité à retrouver, pour pouvoir, la dire, pour pouvoir m'arrêter, de tâche imposée, sue, négligée, oubliée, à retrouver, à acquitter, pour ne plus avoir à parler, plus avoir à entendre, je l'ai inventée, dans l'espoir de me consoler, de m'aider à continuer, de me croire quelque part, mouvant, entre un commencement et une fin, tantôt avançant, tantôt reculant, tantôt déviant, mais en fin de compte grignotant toujours de terrain. A belayer. Je n'ai rien à faire, c'est-à-dire rien de particulier. J'ai à parler, c'est vague.²¹

Thus, his stories, talk of pensums and lessons are all conditions that he has set up in order to make the obligation easier for him. Up to this point, the idea of having to say words for some obscure reason had to be explained with more lies. But with such hatred for the false, he courageously forces himself to admit that they were all a ruse, invented for his own sake, as Mr. Beckett puts it in the English translation, to "allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road," It is at this point in the narrative that the Unnamable's agony is most profoundly felt, the

²⁰ L'Innommable, pp. 46-48.

²¹ L'Innommable, pp. 54-55.

*These words have a curious parallel in a collection entitled "Three Dialogues," published by Samuel Beckett and George Duithuit (found in Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Martin Esslin). The dialogues concern three painters, Tal Coat, Masson, and Bram Van Velde. B.--whom we suppose to be Mr. Beckett--is pleading for modernity in painting. He states that Van Velde, in his point of view, is the first to

agony that comes to one who is forced to say words until ". . . ils me trouvent, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me disent, étrange peine, étrange faute . . ."22

So the Unnamable searches to give himself an identity. He invents three new fictional characters, Basil who soon becomes Manhood, who in turn becomes Worm. This latter is, as Anthony Cronin has it, ". . . the reduction of them all whom no threat or torment can bring to life . . ."23 Worm is the last creation in the Unnamable's saga and finally he too, is forgotten as the narrative reaches a level close to his ultimate goal of merely saying words. And finally, after stripping away his fictions and contradictions his obligation to write becomes more coherently explained. It appears that his obligation to write in order for him to find this "quittance" has been set down by two sets of imperatives; on the one hand there is "they"--sometimes this stands for his creations, sometimes for society and at other times for some unknown power--and on the other there is "he," who is probably his true interior self. The problem is that he cannot deal with the latter until the former has set him free.

accept certain ideas about painting. Concerning some others he says, "What we have to consider in the case of Italian painters is not that they have surveyed the world with the eyes of building contractors, a mere means like any other, but that they never stirred from the field of the possible, however much they may have enlarged it. The only thing disturbed by the revolutionaries Matisse and Tal Coat is a certain order on the plane of the feasible.

D.--What other plane can there be for the maker?

B.--Logically none, yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road" (p. 17). One wonders if Mr. Beckett had this in mind when he later wrote L'Innommable.

²²L'Innommable, p. 261.

²³Anthony Cronin, p. 106.

Mais peu à peu je m'habituerai, eux aidant, à l'endroit, à moi, et peu à peu surgira le vieux problème, comment vivre, une seule seconde, jeune ou vieux, sans aide, sans guide, de leur vie à eux. Et cela me rappelant d'autres tentatives, dans d'autres conditions, je me poserai, eux aidant, eux soufflant, des questions, comme celles que je viens de me poser, sur moi sur eux, sur ces sautes de temps, ces changements d'âge, et les moyens à mettre en oeuvre pour réussir enfin qu'ils soient contents, et me laissent peut-être enfin tranquille, et libre de m'employer à ma manière, à essayer de contenter l'autre, si c'est bien là ma manière, afin qu'il soit content, et me laisse tranquille, et me donne quittance, et le droit au repos, et au silence, si cela dépend de lui.²⁴

Plainly, if we believe what the Unnamable says, that "tout se ramène à une affaire de paroles," the ultimate condition governing whether or not he will ever succeed in giving himself an identity and thus find peace, depends on language. All he has is words and these cannot be much help to him because he has learned these words from others; he can only borrow "their" language. "Mais ceci est ma peine, c'est sur ma peine qu'ils me jugent, je la purge mal, comme un cochon, muet, sans comprendre, muet, sans l'usage d'autre parole que la leur."²⁵ Furthermore, he has the task of using these same words to define something--his "timeless essential being"--which is by its very nature impossible to define.

To speak the language of the self, it [the voice of the Unnamable] will have to invent a new language, of timelessness and spacelessness. But meanwhile, knowing no words but the useless ones of the common tongue, it can only struggle on . . . condemned therefore to an endless 'wordy-gurdy' from which there is no escape. At this point, the task of life and the task of art (which I have so far been calling language) are seen to be one and the same, and each as absurd as the other: each is the unremitting search for an impossible language of the self, which would allow one at last to lapse into the silence of eternal self-possession. Proust's triumphant assertion of salvation through art has given place here to a notion of art as a desperate struggle with the impossible . . .²⁶

²⁴L'Innommable, p. 97.

²⁵L'Innommable, p. 167.

²⁶Ross Chambers, p. 156.

Thus, the Unnamable shows himself to be engaged in an art that must fail. And, indeed, there is a suggestion that Samuel Beckett himself has made this realization about art. In the previously mentioned dialogue with Georges Duithuit, B. speaks of an art that prefers this statement: that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express."²⁷ He goes on to say that Van Velde is

the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absense of relation, in the absence of terms or, if you like, in the presence of unavailable terms, the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living.²⁸

One cannot help recalling Malone's words about his art, words that echo Mr. Beckett's statement: "Je recommençais. Mais peu à peu dans une autre intention. Non plus celle de réussir, mais celle d'échouer."²⁹

Herein lies the final agony that is expressed by the Unnamable and that is most profoundly felt by the reader. He is condemned to utter words until he finds the right ones that will finally allow him the quit-tance. But at the same time he realizes that since true expression is impossible, he is engaged in an art of failure. Thus, his obligation is to fail, "as no other dare fail." His narrative ends with a statement that can only be termed courageous.

. . . il faut dire des mots, tant qu'il y en a, il faut les dire, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me trouvent, jusqu'à ce qu'ils me disent étrange

²⁷Beckett in "Three Dialogues," p. 17.

²⁸Ibid., p. 21.

²⁹Malone meurt, p. 37.

peine, étrange faute, il faut continuer, c'est peut-être déjà fait, ils m'ont peut-être déjà dit, ils m'ont peut-être porté jusqu'au seuil de mon histoire, devant la porte qui s'ouvre sur mon histoire, ça m'étonnerait, si elle s'ouvre, ça va être moi, ça va être le silence, là où je suis, je ne sais pas, je ne le saurai jamais, dans le silence on ne sait pas, il faut continuer, je vais continuer.³⁰

³⁰L'Innommable, p. 262.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I have tried to point out some aspects of the problems of the act of creation. Certainly it would be wrong to say that these aspects of Mr. Beckett's trilogy are the only ones that merit consideration in an interpretation of the work (I stress the fact that this is an interpretation and not the interpretation). I have resisted as much as possible the temptation to comment on the author's vision of the human condition by taking Molloy's excellent advice that warns that "on ne peut pas tout mentionner."

In Chapter I, some aspects of what is probably a new technique in writing fiction were discussed. It is a technique that allows for more truth in fiction. Objects, things, and incidents are allowed to appear in the narrative even if they have no apparent value to the text. The point is that these same things can and do appear in any one person's existence. With Mr. Beckett they have an importance for their own sake. In the case of most other novels, as Mr. Cronin points out,

Instead of existing in their own right, things are there as arranged accessories, as in an old fashioned subject-picture, and their functional importance in the narrative dominates, eats up and destroys their aesthetic virtue, their own nature and character.*

In Chapter II, the view of the artist at work on his fictions was discussed. Malone, a writer no less concerned with truth than the other hero-authors, strives to keep the spurious, the boring description, as well as the aspects of his own experiences, from his stories. In doing

*Anthony Cronin, p. 51.

so, he seems to be criticizing the literature that has come before, with all its embellishment and falsification.

And finally in Chapter III, the justification for the trilogy--that of the search for self through creation--was explored. For it is the reading of the final novel of the trilogy, L'Innommable, that reveals that the Unnamable has created Malloy, Moran and Malone "not only as an illustration of this tortuous irony in the artist's search for himself."* The Unnamable's most profound desire is to earn the right to "quittance." This will be granted only after he has found his true self. Since he is a writer, he only has words as the means for this search. The irony is that while the Unnamable, also, hates fiction, he realizes that for him it is only through fictional creations that he might stumble upon the right words that will allow him to "say me." Presumably, only then will he have earned the right to silence.

*Anthony Cronin, p. 108.

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