

## **Habit and spontaneity in Samuel Beckett's English fictions.**

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HABIT AND SPONTANEITY

IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S ENGLISH FICTIONS

LINDA J. LEITH

1976



TO

A.B.G.

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Ne parlons pas de la critique proprement dite. La meilleure, celle d'un Fromentin, d'un Grohmann, d'un McGreevy, d'un Sauerlandt, c'est de l'Amiel. Des hystérectomies à la truelle. Et comment en serait-il autrement? Peuvent-ils seulement citer? Quant Grohmann démontre chez Kandinsky des réminiscences du graphique mongol, quand McGreevy rapproche si justement Yeats de Watteau, ou vont les rayons? Quand Sauerlandt se prononce, avec finesse et - soyons justes - parcimonie, sur le cas du grand peintre inconnu qu'est Bällmer, où cela retombe-t-il? Das geht mich nicht an, disait Ballmer, que les écrits de Herr Heidegger faisaient cruellement souffrir. Il le disait fort modestement.

Ou alors on fait de l'esthétique générale, comme Lessing. C'est un jeu charmant.

Ou alors on fait de l'anecdote, comme Vasari et Harper's Magazine.

Ou alors on fait des catalogues raisonnés, comme Smith.

Ou alors on se livre franchement à un bavardage désagréable et confus. C'est le cas ici.

Samuel Beckett

"La Peinture des van Velde, ou le monde et le pantalon", p. 349

## CONTENTS

	page
Abbreviations of Frequently Cited Works by Beckett	6
INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER I	
HABIT AND SPONTANEITY IN BECKETT'S AESTHETICS	28
The Shape of Ideas	28
Habit and Spontaneity in <u>Proust</u>	33
The Relevance of <u>Proust</u> to Beckett's Creative Work	39
The Two Needs in Time	45
The Possibility of Extratemporal Salvation	51
Contradictions	57
Resistance Against the Currently Dominant Contrary	70
CHAPTER II	
"DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLEING WOMEN"	80
CHAPTER III	
<u>MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS</u>	106
The Mind/Body Relationship	110
Death	120
"Dante and the Lobster"	130

## CHAPTER IV

MURPHY

148

The Needs for Murphy from Outside Himself	149
Murphy's Two Needs	161
Murphy's Need for the Little World	163
Murphy's Need for the Big World	167
Habit and Spontaneity and Murphy's Two Needs	171
The Development of Murphy's Needs	172

## CHAPTER V

WATT

202

Mr. Hackett and his World	204
Watt and Mr. Hackett	208
Spontaneity and the New Day	214
Watt on the Ground Floor of Mr. Knott's House	220
Watt on the First Floor of Mr. Knott's House	241
On the Road and in the Station	261
The Mansions and the Gardens	265

## CONCLUSION

275

## APPENDIX

286

## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CITED

288

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ABBREVIATIONS OF FREQUENTLY CITED WORKS BY BECKETT

- DBV "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce"
- D "Dream of Fair to Middling Women"
- P Proust
- MP More Pricks Than Kicks
- DD "Denis Devlin"
- M Murphy
- DB "Les Deux Besoins"
- PvV "La Peinture des van Velde, ou le monde et le pantalon"
- W Watt
- PE "Peintres de l'Empêchement"
- DGD "Dialogues with Georges Duthuit"
- BvV Bram van Velde (Samuel Beckett with Jacques Putnam and Georges Duthuit)
- G Waiting for Godot
- E Endgame

Editions and locations are those listed in the bibliography on pp. 288f below.

## INTRODUCTION

In this study I will be analysing the way in which the contraries that Beckett calls habit and spontaneity are used in the fictions he wrote in English.

In his discursive writings Beckett comments on human experience generally and on the experience of artists particularly in terms of these contraries. I will show that they can be seen as applicable to the people who populate Beckett's early fictions, and thus as illuminating the meaning of those fictions.

While it is, in the most obvious sense, true that, as Germaine Brée has said, "few contemporary novelists are as reticent on the subject of their art as Samuel Beckett",<sup>1</sup> I will try to show that Beckett has indirectly commented on his work in his articles and in his reviews as well as in the admittedly few interviews that he has given in which he explicitly discusses certain aspects of his art.

Habit is the generic name given in Beckett's ~~introduction~~ <sup>essay</sup> ~~introduction~~, Proust,<sup>2</sup> to the mechanism that shelters us from an awareness of anything that might disturb us. This mechanism is seen as common to all human beings. As creatures of habit we see only what we are conditioned to see; the only thoughts we have are those which conform to our preconceptions. Habit screens us off from everything that we cannot cope with, and it is essential to human existence. Life, however, is not one habit but is rather composed of a succession of habits, each one of which is cut off from the next by an experience that is the opposite of habitual experience. Under certain circumstances habit may fail to shield us adequately, and when this happens our current habit of living

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1. Germaine Brée, "The Strange World of Beckett's Grands Articulés", in Melvin J. Friedman (ed.), Samuel Beckett Now, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1970, p. 73.
  2. Proust, Chatto and Windus (Dolphin Books), London, 1931. All references to Proust in this study are to this edition.



may "die". If it does die we will, in the interval before a new habit can form, be exposed to "the cruelties and enchantments of reality" (P. 11).<sup>3</sup> It is through this experience of reality, which Beckett describes as spontaneous (P. 28, 59),<sup>4</sup> that "the maximum value of our being is restored" (P. 9). The experience of spontaneity is, however, necessarily brief. Habit will re-form its "evil and necessary structure" (P. 29) as quickly as possible to defend us from the cruelties and from the enchantments of reality, and we will acquire a new habit of living which will last until it too fails to screen us.

In this study I will be examining the three English novels - the unpublished "Dream of Fair to Middling Women",<sup>5</sup> Murphy,<sup>6</sup> and Watt<sup>7</sup> - and the collection of short stories, More Pricks Than Kicks,<sup>8</sup> to determine the extent to which the experiences of the principal characters in these fictions are habitual and the extent to which those characters' experiences are spontaneous. I will thus be judging the extent to which Beckett is depicting the first of his "people" as either shunning or, on the contrary, facing up to reality, i.e. as either denying or affirming the maximum value of their being.

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3. This is a reference to page 11 of Proust, ibid. "P" is used as an abbreviation for this work. For a list of the abbreviations used throughout this study for works by Beckett that are cited frequently, see p. 6 above.
  4. Beckett also uses the word "involuntary" to describe this kind of experience in Proust (P. 19 etc.). Since this term is closely linked with the concept of "involuntary memory", and since I will be discussing the extent to which this concept is relevant to Beckett's work (rather than only to Proust's), I have preferred to use "spontaneous" rather than "involuntary" to describe non-habitual experiences in general.
  5. "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" was unknown until Beckett showed the typescript to John Fletcher in the late fifties. It was written, according to Fletcher, in 1932 (see John Fletcher, "In Search of Beckett", in Beckett at Sixty: A Festschrift, Calder & Boyars, London, 1967, p. 31). I am grateful to Dr. James Knowlson of Reading University for helping me trace a copy of this work. References to it in the present study are to the unfinished typescript, 214 pages in length.
  6. Murphy was first published in 1938 by Geo. Routledge & Co., London. References to it in this study are to the edition published by Calder & Boyars, London, 1963.
  7. Watt was written during the war but was not published until 1953 (The Olympia Press, Paris). References here are to the edition published by Calder & Boyars, London, 1970.
  8. More Pricks Than Kicks was first published by Chatto and Windus,

There is of course no easy transition possible from what Beckett writes discursively and analytically about habit and spontaneity in Proust to what he writes imaginatively in his fictions. In Proust he is outlining what he sees as Proust's interpretation of the way in which human beings function. I will have to show that Beckett can be justifiably seen as applying this interpretation to the characters in his own fictions. Before this will be possible, however, it will be necessary to determine whether or not, and if so the extent to which, Proust can be considered as expressing Beckett's own concerns. Beckett clearly found habit and spontaneity central to an understanding of Proust's novel. It cannot, however, be assumed that they are of any wider interest to Beckett: this must be demonstrated. I will do so by analysing what Beckett has said on the subject of habit and spontaneity, and about their correlatives, habitual and spontaneous need, in discursive writings other than Proust.

The works that are to be considered were all written during the same twenty-year period between 1929 and 1949. "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" was written in 1932, More Pricks Than Kicks in 1932-33, Murphy in the mid-thirties, and Watt during the war. Their composition was framed by and interspersed with the writing of the main critical articles and reviews, the first of which was "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce"<sup>9</sup> in 1929 and the last the three "Dialogues with Georges Duthuit"<sup>10</sup> in 1949.

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8. (cont.) London, 1934. References to it in this study are to the edition published by Calder & Boyars, London, 1970.

9. "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" was Beckett's contribution to the volume Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, a collection of articles on Joyce's Work in Progress. Our Exag. was published in 1929 by Shakespeare & Company, Paris, and reprinted by Faber & Faber, London, in 1961. Beckett's article is on pp. 1-22 of this latter edition, which is that referred to in this study. The dots between the names in the title signify the number of centuries between each of the writers: Dante Alighieri, 1265-1321; Giordano Bruno, 1548-1600; Giambattista Vico, 1668-1774; and James Joyce, 1882-1941.

10. The three "Dialogues with Georges Duthuit" were originally published in Transition '49, No. 5 (ed. Georges Duthuit). They were reprinted, along with Proust, by Calder & Boyars, London 1970, on pp. 95-126. References to them here are to this latter edition. This is the last known extended piece of discursive writing ever published by Beckett. He has published a few very short pieces since that time (see below p. 44, n. 30) but nothing that adds anything significant or new to his aesthetics.

During the same period Beckett also published a poem, "Whoroscope",<sup>11</sup> which won a £10 prize for the best poem on Time in a competition organized by Nancy Cunard,<sup>12</sup> two short prose pieces,<sup>13</sup> and a small collection of poems entitled Echo's Bones,<sup>14</sup> as well as some translations.<sup>15</sup>

Of all of these, the only works to receive any attention at all were More Pricks Than Kicks and Murphy, and these were generally kindly received by such reviewers as mentioned them.<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that the attention that has recently been focused on these and on the other works

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11. Whoroscope was first published by Nancy Cunard, The Hours Press, Paris, 1930. It is reprinted in Beckett's Poems in English, Calder and Boyars, London, 1971, pp. 9-14. References to it in this study are to this later edition.
  12. See A.J. Leventhal, "The Thirties", in Beckett at Sixty: A Festschrift, op. cit., p. 10.
  13. "Assumption" was published in Transition 16-17, June 1929, and reprinted in E. Jolas (ed.), Transition Workshop, Paris, 1949, pp. 41-44; and "A Case in a Thousand" in The Bookman, August 1934, pp. 241-242.
  14. Echo's Bones, a collection of thirteen poems, was first published by The Europa Press, Paris, in 1935. It is reprinted in Beckett's Poems in English, op. cit., pp. 15-38. References to these poems in this study are to this later edition.
  15. Beckett translated several articles for Nancy Cunard's anthology Negro, Wishart and Co., London, 1934, and several poems by French surrealist poets, notably Eluard. (See A.J. Leventhal, op. cit., p. 12 and, for details of publication of these translations, see Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics, An Essay in Bibliography, University of California Press, Berkeley and London, 1970.) These and later translations (eg. those of the Mexican poets commissioned by UNESCO in the forties and published in 1958) were all done for financial reasons: Beckett cannot remember ever having translated for his pleasure (see typescript questions put to Beckett by James Knowlson and Beckett's manuscript replies, January 10, 1971, Reading University Library Archives). An exception to this is, no doubt, Beckett's wife, Suzanne Dumesnil's "F...", translated by Beckett into English and published in Transition Forty-Eight, 4, January 1949, pp. 19-21.
  16. The Times Literary Supplement of July 26, 1934, p. 526, considered More Pricks Than Kicks "uneven" and called Beckett "a definite fresh talent though it is a talent not quite sure of itself". Peter Quennel in the New Statesman, May 26, 1934, p. 802, described the collection as a pastiche of Joyce, and Edwin Muir in The Listener, XLI, July 4, 1934, p. 42, wrote that Beckett's art sometimes degenerates into excellent blarney but that "at its best it has an ingenuity and freedom of movement which is purely delightful". Dilys Powell reviewed Murphy in The Sunday Times (London, March 13, 1938, p. 8), considering the novel somewhat "sterile" though not negligible; the T.L.S. of March 12, 1938 was generally approving, describing the novel as "a very unusual and spirited performance" in spite of certain tedious moments and a less than profound theme; and Dylan Thomas, writing in the New English Weekly of March 17, 1938, thought the novel basically "serious".

written before the great creative years 1946-50<sup>17</sup> - and, to a considerably lesser extent, on the critical works - is due in very large measure to the interest generated by his later writings. At the same time, however, the later work does rely, in some cases quite heavily, on its precursors, and Beckett's preoccupations (which, as Hugh Kenner says, are remarkably stable<sup>18</sup>) receive their clearest and fullest expression in the works in which he first explores ways of using them. The dream cherished by Belacqua of being cut off from the confusion of existence in a "limbo purged of desire" (D. 38) is referred to either directly or obliquely in nearly all the later work; those seeking to fathom what Beckett is writing about in Godot (and elsewhere) are directed by the author himself to read Murphy<sup>19</sup>; and Messrs. Endon (in Murphy) and Knott (in Watt) can be seen as the same types of personages as the mysterious Godot himself.<sup>20</sup> The recurrent themes of journeying, of waiting, of shunning the "big world", of searching for peace, of solipsism, and the use of such ideas as the relationship (or lack of relationship) between mind and body and between the individual and the world around him, all have a central place in the early fictions. For those who are interested in such themes and ideas when

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17. Beckett has said "I wrote all my work very fast - between 1946 and 1950. Since then I haven't written anything. Or at least nothing that has seemed to me valid". Quoted in John Fletcher and John Spurling, Beckett: A Study of His Plays, Eyre Methuen, London, 1972, p. 25.
18. Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1961. Reprinted in 1968 with an additional chapter. References to this publication in the present study are to the 1968 edition (p. 32).
19. "If you want to find the origins of Waiting for Godot", Beckett has said, "look at Murphy" (see John Fletcher and John Spurling, op. cit., p. 25), and in a letter (dated June 14, 1967) to Sighle Kennedy he wrote: "If I were in the unenviable position of having to study my work my points of departure would be the "Naught is more real..." and the "Ubi nihil vales..." both already in Murphy and neither very rational". (See Sighle Kennedy, Murphy's Bed: A Study of Real Sources and Sur-real Associations in Samuel Beckett's First Novel, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, 1971, Appendix A, p. 300.)
20. See, for example, "The Residual Beckett", unsigned, in T.L.S., October 12, 1973, p. 1218.

they appear in the later novels and plays and in the "residua",<sup>21</sup> a study of the English fictions is of some importance.

It has become customary for commentators to caution readers of Beckett against looking for a "key" to his work, and this is not only sound advice - as anyone who has tried to find such a key will testify - but has the blessing of the author.<sup>22</sup> While we can thus never unlock the mysteries of his work, we might still be forgiven for attempting to catch a glimpse of where the door might be that must remain locked, and of what sort of door it is.

All Beckett's works, even the bleakest of the "residua", are extremely complex and rich in implication. In the early fictions, however, the relative immaturity of the author's powers and the concomitant relative crudity of expression allow us to understand a little more of his concerns than is possible if we begin with a reading of, say, Comment C'Est or even Godot. The critical writings, though by no means without complexities of their own, afford further access to such understanding. Here Beckett is at his least ambiguous, and to such an extent is he clear in what he is saying here that the occasions when ambiguity appears are by contrast most easily discernible. These two early forms of expression used by Beckett may thus provide us with our glimpse at the locked door, allowing us to discern where the mysteries lie.

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21. "Residua" is the name Beckett applies to his writings since Comment C'Est. See Brian H. Finney, Since How It Is, Covent Garden Press, London, 1973.

22. In an interview with Beckett, Gabriel d'Aubarède asked if a pre-occupation with the problem of being as posed by the existentialists might not be the key to Beckett's work; Beckett replied, "Il n'y a pas de clé, il n'y a pas de problème...". See "En Attendant... Beckett", Les Nouvelles Littéraires, February 16, 1961, p. 7. (Beckett did, however, on one occasion say that "the key word in my plays is 'perhaps'". See Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia University Forum, IV, Summer 1961; rpt. in Samuel A. Weiss, Drama and the Modern World: Plays and Essays, University of Illinois, Chicago, 1964, p. 506.)

The creature of habit experiences what Beckett calls the "boredom of living", and when habit fails to screen us adequately this boredom is replaced by the "suffering of being" (P. 8). This spontaneous experience of suffering not only "opens a window on the real" but is also "the main condition of the artistic experience" (P. 16; italics added).

The full meaning and the implications of the concepts of habit and spontaneity as used by Beckett cannot be understood except in the context of Beckett's aesthetics. This, his view of what art is and of what it can do, is never explained fully in any of Beckett's writings, but it underlies all of them. I will be discussing the main characteristics of Beckett's aesthetics as they relate to habit and spontaneity not only through the critical articles and reviews but also through the few interviews that Beckett has given and - an important link between the discursive and the creative work - through the several extended authorial interjections in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women".

As an examination of habit and spontaneity in Beckett's English fictions, this study takes its place among those which have concerned themselves with Beckett's aesthetics. Many commentators have mentioned and used ideas from Proust, the "Dialogues with Georges Duthuit", etc., in their analyses of the novels, poems, and plays,<sup>23</sup> and a few have taken some steps in the direction of understanding the importance of his aesthetics, but none has attempted to use the latter consistently as an approach to the creative work.

The first article to appear on Beckett's aesthetics was written by J. Mitchell Morse and published in 1964.<sup>24</sup> In this paper Morse

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23. Examples are Hugh Kenner's Samuel Beckett? A Critical Study, A. Alvarez (Beckett, Fontana/Collins, London, 1973), David H. Hesla (The Shape of Chaos: An Interpretation of the Art of Samuel Beckett, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1971), and Francis Doherty (Samuel Beckett, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1971).
24. J. Mitchell Morse, "The Ideal Core of the Onion: Samuel Beckett's Criticism", French Review, XXXVIII, October, 1964, pp. 23-29.

discusses Beckett's criticism briefly, particularly "Denis Devlin" and the three "Dialogues", and he attempts to connect the criticism with the creative work when he writes:

The way in which Tal Coat and Bram van Velde paint is exactly the way in which the Unnamable goes on telling his stories, in which Malone, Molloy and Moran write... 25

In a six page article it is impossible for Morse to substantiate this, so it remains suggestive, perhaps justifiable, but unsupported. Since, however, Beckett criticises Tal Coat in the first of the "Dialogues" for not having "stirred from the field of the possible" (DGD I, 102), unlike Bram van Velde, Morse seems to be on very shaky ground even with his principal topic, and it may not be unreasonable to distrust his suggestions about the novels when he clearly doesn't understand the criticism on which these suggestions are based.

John Fletcher gave a talk on Beckett as critic that was broadcast on the BBC Third Programme in 1965 and printed in The Listener.<sup>26</sup> Here again it was impossible to do anything more, after quoting a few statements from Beckett's reviews, than just suggest a connection with the creative work. Fletcher concludes from Beckett's admiration for the way in which Jack B. Yeats brings light, in his paintings, to the "issueless predicament of existence", that "Beckett's works, despite their scorn of happy optimism, are profoundly humanistic".<sup>27</sup>

The most extended discussions of Beckett's aesthetics are those written by Lawrence E. Harvey in a paper entitled "Samuel Beckett on Life, Art, and Criticism"<sup>28</sup> and in his study of Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic.<sup>29</sup> This latter is the only work that has discussed in detail both the criticism and some of the creative work (specifically all the poetry that Beckett wants known and some of the early fictions). Harvey's examination of the aesthetics is interesting in many ways and

25. Ibid, p. 29.

26. John Fletcher, "Samuel Beckett as Critic", The Listener, LXXIV, November 25, 1965, pp. 862-863.

27. Ibid, p. 863.

28. Lawrence E. Harvey, "Samuel Beckett on Life, Art, and Criticism", Modern Language Notes, LXXX, December 1965, pp. 545-562.

29. Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1970.

is particularly valuable in its discussion of unpublished and previously unknown articles and letters, but ~~is~~<sup>it</sup> is more of a detailed outline of the ideas Beckett expresses in his discursive writings than a focused analysis of the implications of these ideas. In his critical writings the subjects Beckett discusses range from the fidgets<sup>30</sup> to courtly love<sup>31</sup>, from Walt Disney<sup>32</sup> to the Moscow Show Trials<sup>33</sup>, and it is essential to focus on a particular aspect of importance if a commentary on these writings is to be of analytical value. Harvey does not use the criticism as an approach to the poems and prose writings under consideration in his study: rather, his book is divided into two main sections, the second of which concerns itself with Beckett's criticism, and no attempt is made at a thorough-going analysis of the creative work through the criticism.

This kind of analysis seems potentially valuable for several reasons. It will, first of all, provide us with an understanding of the implications of Beckett's use of habit and spontaneity, and of his aesthetics generally, in the concrete framework of his English fictions. This will enable us to re-interpret these fictions in a new light.

It should, furthermore, furnish us with a means of judging the validity of statements made about the relevance of Beckett's critical writings to his creative work. Commentators often refer to the ideas Beckett expresses, particularly in Proust and "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", in order to explain, support, or add colour to their own arguments.

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30. In Beckett's review of Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke, The Criterion, July 1934, p. 706.

31. In "Ex Cathedra" (a review of Make It New by Ezra Pound), The Bookman, Christmas 1934, p. 10.

32. In "The Essential and the Incidental" (a review of Windfalls by Sean O'Casey), The Bookman, Christmas 1934, p. 111.

33. In "Denis Devlin" (a review of Intercessions by Denis Devlin), Transition: Tenth Anniversary, 27, April-May 1938, p. 289. (The reference is to Karl Radek, executed in the Soviet Union in 1937 after a much publicised trial.)



Quite apart from the different uses to which quotations from such works are put and the different interpretations that result - which are more or less to be expected - commentators generally differ widely on what in fact such quotations say and often seem unaware of the difficulties implicit in the ideas Beckett is using. Considering the weight that these quotations frequently have to bear in carrying through certain interpretations, this is not an insignificant problem. We will never all agree in our interpretations of Beckett's novels, poems, plays; we may possibly never even agree fully in our interpretations (for sometimes it requires interpretation) of what he says in his discursive writings; but those of us who take his critical writings into consideration in our commentaries might at least have a more fruitful basis for discussion if such difficulties as do exist in these writings are brought out into the open. The recent proliferation of books, scholarly papers, and collections of articles on Beckett, many of which disagree on fundamentals, are bewildering and daunting for any newcomer to the field of Beckett criticism. With so many, often arbitrary-seeming, different interpretations in existence, we might well conclude, as we might conclude from reading pages of permutations and combinations of possibilities in Watt, that the whole issue is merely silly. The discussion of the beginnings of Beckett's writing career, through his early articles and fictions, should help us focus on the problems around which disagreement centers and to reveal that some of the differences in interpretations are based on misunderstandings of what Beckett is saying.

Another reason why this approach seems potentially valuable is that it will allow us to examine the relationship between Beckett's ideas and his creative work. Beckett has always insisted that he is not an intellectual, but rather a sensibility, and that he doesn't understand philosophy,<sup>34</sup> but he does nonetheless make considerable use of many

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34. He told d'Aubarède that he never reads philosophers because "je ne comprends rien à ce qu'ils écrivent" and, asked why he did write his novels (if not to express philosophical ideas), he answered: "Je n'en sais rien. Je ne suis pas intellectuel. Je ne suis que sensibilité". Gabriel d'Aubarède, "En Attendant...Beckett", op. cit., p. 7.

ideas related to his own aesthetics and to various philosophers in his creative work.<sup>35</sup> I will be examining the role played by these ideas in his early fictions.

It should also be possible to gain certain insights into Beckett's use of irony. In his critical articles and reviews, and in interviews, Beckett frequently makes it clear what he thinks of certain kinds of behaviour. If -- and this remains to be seen -- his ideas of habit and spontaneity can be usefully applied to his early fictions, then the extent to which Beckett sympathises with and/or is critical of his people's behaviour should become clear.

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Habit and spontaneity are contraries, and the relationship between them is of the same kind as that between any and all of the other contraries that are expressed throughout Beckett's work. As an attempt to understand that relationship, this study is concerned not only with Beckett's aesthetics, but also with his far-reaching fascination with contraries in general. This is a subject that has interested large numbers of commentators on Beckett's work.

Ever since Beckett first became well known after the success of

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35. The starting points that Beckett says he would use if he had to comment on his own work - the "Naught is more real..." and the "Ubi nihil vales..." - are not only in Murphy, but are also direct quotations from the philosophers Democritus and Arnold Geulincx respectively.

En Attendant Godot in 1953, reviewers and critics of his work have interested themselves in the manner in which he juxtaposes mutually contradictory concepts. The early commentary concentrated on the play, the very sub-title of which, "A Tragi-Comedy", seemed to invite the compilation of a list of similarly linked opposites. Life and death, salvation and damnation, hope and despair, and many more such pairs have been found relevant to the play. The author himself appears not to object to the kind of commentary that concerns itself with this aspect of his work: in the only statement that, so far as I have been able to trace, Beckett has ever made on the content of commentaries on his work, he congratulated <sup>36</sup> Jerry Tallmers of the Village Voice on a review of Godot in which Tallmers wrote that the play seemed to him to be "about suicide and salvation, about man's duality, body and mind, and about dignity and ignominy and the nature of society and of Nature, and of Life, Time, Damnation, many other things". <sup>37</sup>

Beckett's early novels and stories, his first attempts at writing in French, and ultimately even his critical articles and his poetry, all became subjects of scrutiny, but a large number of commentators still focused on the contraries in his work, and for good reason: it is not only habit and spontaneity that can be found in these works.

In the first of his articles, "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", Beckett discusses philosophy and philology, complete identification between philosophical abstraction and empirical illustration, the coincidence of contraries, the maxima and minima of particular contraries, the materialistic and the transcendental, individuality and universality,

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36. See Daniel Wolf and Edwin Fancher (eds.), The Village Voice Reader, Grove Press, New York, 1963, p. 74.

37. "Godot on Broadway", ibid., p. 61.

the unborn infant and the lifeless octogenarian, progression and retrogression, movement and rest, in the first few pages, and continues throughout to elaborate on the ways in which the four writers he is discussing use contraries.

Proust begins thus:

The Proustian equation is never simple. The unknown, choosing its weapons from a hoard of values, is also the unknowable. And the quality of its action falls under two signatures (P. 1)

and Beckett proceeds to examine in the first place that "double-headed monster of damnation and salvation - Time" (P.1). A review of Sean O'Casey's Windfalls distinguishes between the "essential" and the "incidental";<sup>38</sup> in a later review, this one of Denis Devlin's Intercessions,<sup>39</sup> and in an article entitled "Les Deux Besoins",<sup>40</sup> Beckett distinguishes between two conflicting kinds of need; the first of his two articles on the two van Velde brothers<sup>41</sup> is sub-titled "Le Monde et Le Pantalon", which is a reference to a joke contrasting the imperfect world with a perfectly tailored pair of trousers, and it and the second of these articles, "Peintres de l'Empêchement",<sup>42</sup> is built around the contrast between the two brothers' approaches to painting.

"Dream of Fair to Middling Women" is an often aggressively playful exploration of the conflicting claims, firstly of the outer world of society and the inner world of individuality, and secondly of either of these worlds and the "limbo" that is neither centrifugal nor centripetal. Murphy is concerned with the lure of what Murphy calls his big world and that of his little world, the body and the mind, and with his attempts to cut himself off from the big world altogether. Some of the contraries that figure largely in Watt are rationality and irrationality, journeying and waiting, and progression and retrogression.

Much of the confusion experienced by readers of the articles and

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38. "The Essential and the Incidental", loc. cit.

39. "Denis Devlin", loc. cit.

40. "Les Deux Besoins" was, Beckett thinks, written about 1938. It has never been published, and we owe awareness of its existence to Lawrence E. Harvey, who mentions it in his discussions of Beckett's criticism, op. cit.

41. "La Peinture des van Velde, ou le monde et le pantalon", Cahiers d'Art, Vol. 20-21, 1945-46, pp. 349-356.

42. In Derrière le Miroir, Galerie Maeght, Paris (Editions Pierre à Feu), 11-12, June 1948, pp. 3,4, and 7.

books that have been written on Beckett stems from the different interpretations of the nature of the relationship, or lack of relationship, between various pairs of these contraries. When the large body of criticism that has been produced in the last fifteen or twenty years is examined, it is possible, out of all the individual differences in opinion, to discern three main currents of thought on this issue. All three can be found in the special edition of Perspective<sup>43</sup> published in the autumn of 1959, when Beckett criticism was just getting into its stride.

Among the papers included was one by Hugh Kenner that was subsequently incorporated into his book, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study,<sup>44</sup> the first full-length study published about Beckett's work. Here Kenner suggested that Beckett's concern with contraries stems from his fascination with Cartesian and post-Cartesian dualism.<sup>45</sup> A similar approach was taken, in the same edition of Perspective, by Samuel I. Mintz who, in a paper entitled "Beckett's Murphy: A Cartesian Novel",<sup>46</sup> traced the direct and indirect allusions to Descartes and Geulincx in Murphy back to their sources and - unlike Kenner - went so far as to claim that Beckett is a Cartesian. A third commentator, Jacqueline Hofer,<sup>47</sup> took an entirely different approach, discussing the logical positivism that she felt relevant to Watt and the contrast (and the ultimate similarity) between sound and silence, and between rationality and irrationality.

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43. Perspective, IX, Autumn 1959, edited by Ruby Cohn, pp. 119-196.

44. Op. cit.

45. Ibid. See particularly the chapters on "The Rational Domain" (pp. 79-116) and on "The Cartesian Centaur" (pp. 117-133).

46. In Perspective, IX, Autumn 1959, pp. 156-165.

47. "Watt", in Perspective, IX, Autumn 1959, pp. 166-182; reprinted in Martin Esslin (Ed.), Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays, Prentice-Hall Inc., Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1965, pp. 62-76. References to this paper in the present study will be to the reprinted version.

In the first group - both chronologically and, perhaps, as regards their eminence in Beckett criticism - are those who largely restrain themselves to noting the recurrences of elements that can be seen as indicating a concern with contraries and with Cartesianism. Kenner, for example, prefaces his study with a caution against assuming that Beckett knows any more than his books reveal, and with a plea for restraint in extrapolating from the given:

We are not, in short, like dogs excited by the scent of invisible meat, to snap after some item of information which the author grasps very well and is holding just behind the curtain. So to proceed is to misapprehend the quality of the Beckett universe, which is permeated by mystery and bounded by a darkness; to assail those qualities because they embarrass the critic's professional knowingness, is cheap, reductive, and perverse. Like primitive astronomers, we are free to note recurrences, cherish symmetries, and seek if we can means of placating the hidden powers: more for our comfort than for theirs. 48

Also in the first group is Ruby Cohn who, while more explicit than Kenner in her discussion of the links between Beckett and Cartesianism, still keeps the question of the nature of these links open. All Beckett's work, she writes, paradoxically insists upon and rebels against the Cartesian definition of man as "a thing that thinks" and "the Cartesian cleavage between the world in re and the world in intellectu".<sup>49</sup> Her differences with Kenner notwithstanding,

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48. Hugh Kenner, op. cit. p. 10. It is a measure of the extent to which Kenner keeps to these restrictions throughout his book, that so many critics who differ in their views both among themselves and, very often, with Kenner, still almost invariably hark back to what Kenner said and use that as point of departure for their own arguments. Kenner seems to have been able to open up a great number of lines of suggestion without committing himself to the - sometimes justified but often dubious - extrapolations of others. His commentary on Beckett's work is - and this is partly an advantage and certainly also partly a disadvantage in what is supposed to be a "critical study" - almost as much in need of interpretation as are many works of art.

49. Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett", in Martin Esslin (ed.), op. cit., p. 170.

she does share with him a refusal to discuss what Beckett himself may actually think of Cartesianism.

One problem with this type of commentary is that, while it re-states in a new form the question about Beckett's concern with mutually contradictory opposites, it does not really take us any further: it is at least as difficult to understand why he should be fascinated with Cartesian, or post-Cartesian, dualism - the "Cartesian centaur" or the cleavage between the two worlds - as it is to understand why he should be fascinated simply with opposites. While Kenner does make some comments that are suggestive, his method again leads him to leave the question open, and here the result is, in my opinion, unsatisfactory. At one point he writes that Beckett's work is "a compendious abstract of all the novels that have ever been written, reduced to their most general terms",<sup>50</sup> and at another that "the Cartesian Centaur was a seventeenth century dream, the fatal dream of being, knowing, and moving like a god".<sup>51</sup> Even when we agree with these statements, we feel that Kenner should have justified making them, elaborated on them, and connected them with the central question and, perhaps, with each other, and that it would have been neither cheap, reductive, nor perverse of him to have explained what he means. As it is we must draw our own conclusions about why Beckett, writing novels in the mid-twentieth century, should have concerned himself with all the novels that have ever been written and with a seventeenth century dream.

The second group of critics constitutes what may well be seen as the mainstream of the criticism concerned with contraries in Beckett's work. Like Kenner and Cohn, these critics place a fair amount of emphasis on the Cartesian aspects, but they go further in considering that Beckett himself is a Cartesian of some sort. Their forerunner is Mintz who, after outlining what he sees as Murphy's Occasionalism,<sup>52</sup>

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50. Op. cit., p. 64.

51. Ibid., p. 132.

52. Occasionalism is the name given to the post-Cartesian doctrine of Arnold Geulincx, the Belgian philosopher whose "Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis" is quoted by Beckett in Murphy (M. 124).

goes on to suggest that "Beckett himself is committed to Murphy's doctrine - the whole tendency of his work from Murphy to The Unnamable supports this view".<sup>53</sup> Not all of the critics in this group take so unequivocal a standpoint: John Fletcher who, however, attributes Beckett with Geulincxian fatalism,<sup>54</sup> and John Federman who writes that "Beckett chooses to obliterate the body and all its demands",<sup>55</sup> seem rather less certain about what Beckett himself thinks than Mintz, but the main points of their arguments do run on similar lines. Jean-Jacques Mayoux sums up - and contributes to - the influence that this type of interpretation has had when, in 1971, he writes that:

It is by now familiarly admitted that Beckett is a Cartesian, even if for greater personal intimacy Descartes turns into Geulincx, or if Leibniz provides, very usefully, the windowless monad... He would bully their philosophy a little, if needs be, to make it stress the separateness of man, the fact that since his ancestors have turned to a mental life even his body has become a stranger. 56.

For Mayoux Beckett is, in other words, even more Cartesian than the Cartesians themselves. The usual explanation of why this should be so is that Beckett is - like his people - searching for an ultra-Cartesian peace of mind that is possible only through a total severance of the connection with the material world as symbolised by the body. There are, however, undoubtedly considerably difficulties in maintaining that Beckett is, for whatever reason, any kind of Cartesian, and when these are too glaring to be ignored, this group of critics generally deals with them by suggesting that Beckett uses a very rigorous Cartesianism in order to mock Cartesianism.<sup>57</sup> Some of these

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53. Op. cit., p. 164.

54. John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett, Chatto and Windus, London, 1964, p. 53. Fletcher also writes that Beckett's urge to retreat into the "wider freedom of the mind springs from an underlying dualistic conviction... In all his writing, in fact, Beckett advances a version of Cartesianism, the belief that the mind and the body are quite distinct, the one thought, the other extension, their interaction a mystery which it is not worth trying to fathom" (ibid, p. 36; italics added).

55. Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965, p. 76. While Federman recognises the difficulties in attributing Beckett with Cartesian beliefs, he does nonetheless consider that "the ultimate goal of Beckett's entire literary production is to create a fictional being that can exist completely detached from the physical reality of the body" (p. 76.).

56. "Samuel Beckett and the Mass Media", English Association Essays and Studies 1971, John Murray, London, 1971, p. 83.

57. See, for example, Federman, op. cit., p. 79. Comments of this kind



commentators explicitly connect the idea that Beckett is searching for an ultra-Cartesian peace with the idea that he is mocking Cartesianism, and others merely suggest both in their discussions. The two ideas are not irreconcilable, but in conjunction they have very definite implications that are seldom examined: such critics are in fact implying that Beckett is a mystic.<sup>58</sup> This may or may not be the case. Without, at this stage, getting involved in a fairly complex issue, it is still possible to suggest that what is seen as Beckett's Cartesian dualism is only poorly explained by claims that he goes further than the Cartesians and, at the same time, belittles them: if this is the case, why should he have concerned himself with Cartesian dualism at all? This explanation seems much better designed to explain a concern with, say, Plato, Meister Eckhardt, St. John of the Cross, or Schopenhauer (to name a few), than with Descartes, or even Geulincx.

The third group also draws certain conclusions about Beckett's views from the presence of Cartesian elements in his work, but their conclusions differ from those of the others in that they see Beckett as opposed to Cartesianism in any form, as, in other words, taking a Cartesian framework to its logical - and absurd - conclusion in order to topple the whole edifice. This view can be open to the same criticism that I have levelled against the second group - namely that it does not explain why Beckett should have concerned himself with Descartes to begin with - unless it can show a connection between Cartesianism and the world we live in today. One writer who does do this and who thus avoids the pitfall is Darko Suvin who, in his article "Beckett's Purgatory of the Individual",<sup>59</sup> convincingly identifies Descartes as figure-head and theoretician of an "individualist" worldview characterised by faith in the unlimited potential of individual

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57. (cont.) are frequently made in connection with the title - Whoroscope - that Beckett used for his poem on Descartes. See, for example, Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, op. cit., Chapter 1.

58. Federman, who describes Geulincxianism (a philosophy for which he considers that Beckett has considerable affection) as a kind of "mystic Cartesianism" (op. cit., p. 79), and Lawrence E. Harvey (in Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, op. cit., passim) are among the few who have made this conclusion explicit.

59. In Tulane Drama Review, Vol. II, No. 4, Summer 1967, pp. 23-36.

human reason that can be seen to have shaped the modern Western world, and interprets Beckett as using the figure-head in order to protest against the world we live in.

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This last group generally puts far less stress on Cartesianism in Beckett's work than do either of the others. Hofer concentrates on logical positivism and, in particular, on Wittgenstein; Hesla discusses dozens of philosophers in relation to Beckett's work; Schulz is more interested in Hegelianism than in Cartesianism; and Suvin is concerned with a world-view often seen as represented by Descartes rather than with specific Cartesian doctrine. As a group - and it cannot be over-emphasised that they differ radically from one another in many ways - they have done much to re-vitalise and diversify Beckett criticism which was rapidly approaching a dead end. The reasons for this are not only that there is a limit to how much can be said on the subject of Beckett and Cartesianism, but also that on its own, i.e. without the kind of analysis that Suvin makes, for instance, this kind of interpretation is ultimately of dubious value. We have seen how Kenner and Cohn turn our initial question about Beckett's concern with opposites into a question about Beckett's concern with Cartesian dualism. They themselves do not answer this question, but the "mainstream" critics do: Beckett, they say, is concerned with Cartesian dualism because it allows him to posit that the mind is both separate from and superior to the body, and to search for peace of mind within a self that is cut off from material

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60. See, in particular, David H. Hesla, op. cit.; H.-J. Schulz, This Hell of Stories: A Hegelian Approach to the Novels of Samuel Beckett, Mouton, Paris and The Hague, 1973; and Sighle Kennedy, op. cit.; as well as Jacqueline Hofer, "Watt", op. cit.

reality. Here, however, it becomes clear how the re-stated question has distorted the whole issue. There is a significant difference between mutually contradictory forces and the Cartesian - or Occasionalist - cleavage between mind and body (the world in intellectu and the world in re) for the latter has a built-in mechanism for resolving the paradoxical nature of the former. This built-in mechanism is the superiority of mind posited by the Cartesians. When two forces that are irreconcilably opposite, and of equal stature, are confronted with each other, there can be no hope of a resolution. This is the case with Beckett's opposites, and is at the heart of the paradoxical nature of his work. When, on the other hand, the one force is seen as superior to the other, as is the case with the Cartesian mind/body schism, then the one can outweigh the other, and resolution is at least theoretically possible. The type of interpretation that stresses Cartesian elements thus reduces the problematical nature of Beckett's work to Cartesian common sense and, in the process, falsifies what it purports to illuminate.

It is thus a healthy sign that some of the more recent commentaries have refrained from over-emphasising Cartesianism. There has always been a widespread recognition that Beckett uses philosophical notions other than those of Descartes and his followers: reference has often been made to the way in which Beckett uses the ideas of Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Bruno, Pascal, Vico, etc. For no very good reason, however, Cartesian elements have all too often been assumed to be the most important, and others are mentioned only when they can be seen (as Mayoux sees Leibniz, for example) as reinforcing the interpretation offered. This is one of the reasons why the way Beckett uses the ideas of Heraclitus, Bruno, and Pascal, in particular, has been so badly neglected: the ideas of these men are directly at odds with Cartesian ideas,<sup>61</sup> especially with regard to the emphasis placed by them on a total opposition between forces of equal stature. The growth of interest in such hitherto

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61. Pascal even wrote his Pensées partly - if not mainly - to counteract what he saw as the pernicious influence of Cartesianism on the world of his day. See Lucien Goldmann, The Hidden God, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964 (translated from the French by Philip Thody), especially Chapter 1, "The Whole and the Parts", pp. 5-40.

neglected elements in Beckett's work are helping us to see what the earlier type of interpretation concealed.

There can, of course, be no doubt about the very well documented fact that Beckett is interested in certain aspects of Cartesian and post-Cartesian thought, and it is a weakness among some of the recent commentators that they neglect this almost as much as the 'mainstream' critics neglect the importance of ideas inconsistent with Cartesianism. Both are present, and the very nature of the contradiction between them cancels out any possibility of reconciling them and discerning any "happy medium" type of compromise that could be passed off as Beckett's credo. It is, nonetheless, clearly necessary to take both Cartesian and anti-Cartesian ideas into consideration if we are to get any closer to an understanding of Beckett's concerns. A possible way of doing this is suggested by what Beckett has himself said, in an interview with Harold Hobson in 1956, on the kind of interest he takes in ideas. What matters, he says, is the shape of ideas.<sup>62</sup> This notion, which may help us understand how Beckett uses opposites throughout his work, will provide a convenient introduction to the aesthetics underlying Beckett's own critical writings.

This discussion of his aesthetics will not only situate habit and spontaneity within the general framework of Beckett's views on contraries, but will also show that habit and spontaneity concerned Beckett over the whole of the period during which he was writing his English fictions, and illuminate the implications of these ideas for art and -- since habit and spontaneity are first and foremost the names of what Beckett sees as the two basic kinds of human experience -- for human existence.

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62. Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett: Dramatist of the Year", International Theatre Annual, Vol. 1, London, 1956, p. 153.

## CHAPTER I

HABIT AND SPONTANEITY IN BECKETT'S AESTHETICS

"Nous ne vivons pas, mais nous espérons de vivre"

Pascal

The Shape of Ideas

I am interested in the shape of ideas even if I do not believe in them. There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. I wish I could remember the Latin. It is even finer in Latin than in English. 'Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume; one of the thieves was damned.' That sentence has a wonderful shape. It is the shape that matters. 1

The kind of meaning that this notion of the shape of ideas has for Beckett can best be seen in "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", where he contrasts Dante's Purgatory with Joyce's:

Dante's is conical and consequently implies culmination. Mr. Joyce's is spherical and excludes culmination. In the one there is an ascent from real vegetation - Ante-Purgatory, to ideal vegetation - Terrestrial Paradise: in the other there is no ascent and no ideal vegetation. In the one, absolute progression and a guaranteed consummation: in the other, flux - progression or retrogression, and an apparent consummation. In the one movement is unidirectional, and a step forward represents a net advance: in the other movement is non-directional - or multi-directional, and a step forward is, by definition, a step back... (DBV. 21-22)

In this passage Beckett is describing two different shapes of the idea of purgatory, and is using the contrasting shapes to point out the way in which the implications of Dante's work differ from those of Joyce's. Neither a cone nor a sphere can describe the shape of ideas in Beckett's own work, the implications of which differ from both Dante's and Joyce's, but this example of how the concept of shape can be related to ideas, and of how it can help us understand the implications of a work of literature, may help us understand the shape of the ideas in Beckett's work and their implications.

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1. Interview with Harold Hobson, ibid., p. 153.

In another interview, this one with Tom F. Driver, the shape of Augustine's doctrine of salvation and damnation is explicitly connected with Beckett's interest in contraries:

If life and death did not both present themselves to us, there would be no inscrutability. If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable. Take Augustine's doctrine of grace given and grace withheld: have you pondered the dramatic qualities in this theology? Two thieves are crucified with Christ, one saved and the other damned. How can we make sense of this division? In classical drama, such problems do not arise. The destiny of Racine's *Phèdre* is sealed from the beginning: she will proceed into the dark. As she goes, she herself will be illuminated. At the beginning of the play she has partial illumination and at the end she has complete illumination, but there has been no question but that she moves toward the dark. That is the play. Within this notion clarity is possible, but for us who are neither Greek nor Jansenist there is no such clarity. The question would also be removed if we believed in the contrary - total salvation. But when we have both light and dark we have also the inexplicable. The key word in my plays is 'perhaps'... <sup>2</sup>

This suggests that Beckett's interest in contraries stems from an awareness of contraries in his experience. The fascination with philosophical dualism, like his fascination with dozens of other ideas, thus appears important only as a way of expressing his awareness of contraries. The question whether or not Beckett believes in such ideas is secondary: it is their shape that matters. I will, in this study, be mentioning several of the disparate and often contradictory fragments of philosophical ideas that are used in Beckett's early novels, but no attempt will be made to systematise his ideas, or to construct a philosophical grid that could pretend to include them all, since this cannot be done without falsifying the meaning these ideas have within the fictions. Beckett himself has said, "si le sujet de mes romans pouvait s'exprimer en termes philosophiques, je n'aurais pas eu de raison de les écrire"<sup>3</sup> and, asked if his system was the absence of system, he replied: "I'm not interested in any system. I can't see any trace of any system anywhere".<sup>4</sup>

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2. "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia University Forum, IV (Summer 1961), reprinted in Samuel A. Weiss (ed.), Drama and the Modern World: Plays and Essays, University of Illinois, Chicago, 1964, p. 506.

References to this article in this study will be to the reprint.

3. Gabriel d'Aubarede, "En Attendant...Beckett", loc. cit.

4. Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters", New York Times, May 6, 1956, Section 2, p. 3.

Life and death; light and dark; salvation and damnation: when both such opposites are admitted simultaneously, as Beckett feels they are in his plays, what results is an art that can under no circumstances be reduced to the "clear and distinct" ideas so dear to Descartes or, for that matter, to any philosophical notion, since philosophy necessarily involves at least an attempt at clarity. For Beckett, aware of mutually contradictory elements in his experience, clarity is possible only if he ignores the half of that experience (and with it the entirety of its inexplicability). These views, expressed in 1961 to Tom Driver, are the echo of statements Beckett made on the subject of clarity over twenty years earlier, which strongly suggests that Beckett's ideas on this matter did not change over that period.

In a 1938 review of a volume of poems by Denis Devlin, Beckett took issue with the opinion of the poems expressed in an earlier review that had appeared in the Times Literary Supplement:

To cavil at Mr. Devlin's form [as the T.L.S. reviewer had done] as overimaged (the obvious polite cavil) is to cavil at the probity with which the creative act has carried itself out, a probity in this case depending on a minimum of rational interference, and indeed to suggest that the creative act should burke its own conditions for the sake of clarity. (DD. 293)

The work of any artist who has retained his integrity as an artist - i.e. who has not shied away from the inexplicability of his experience - will, Beckett suggests, necessarily be unclear. "Denis Devlin" continues:

The time is perhaps not altogether too green for the vile suggestion that art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear and does not make clear, any more than the light of day (or night) makes the subsolar, -lunar and -stellar excrement. Art is the sun, moon and stars of the mind, the whole mind. (DD. 293)

A work of art, in other words, is no more able to clarify its concerns than the sun, moon and stars are able to clarify what they illuminate: illumination is the most that is possible. It is high praise from Beckett to be described as an artist "who sheds light, as only the great dare shed light, on the issueless predicament of existence"<sup>5</sup> or as a "mind aware of its luminaries" (DD. 294).

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5. "Hommage à Jack B. Yeats", Lettres Nouvelles, II (April, 1954), p. 620.

The shape of Augustine's doctrine, the inexplicability (which is also referred to as "the mess", "the mystery", "this buzzing confusion", "chaos")<sup>6</sup> that results from an awareness of contradictions, and the impossibility of clarity in art, are thus seen by Beckett as interrelated. Together they provide us with a basis of Beckett's aesthetics.

The difficulties involved in expressing the shape of Augustine's doctrine in a work of art are formidable, as Beckett is well aware. In his interview with Driver he discusses these difficulties and the necessity of overcoming them:

Then he began to speak about the tension in art between the mess and form. Until recently, art has withstood the presence of chaotic things. It has held them at bay. It realised that to admit them was to jeopardise form. 'How could the mess be admitted, because it appears to be the very opposite of form and therefore destructive of the very thing that art holds itself to be?' But now we can keep it out no longer, because we have come to a time when 'it invades our experience at every moment. It is there and it must be allowed in'. 7

Driver, while not disagreeing with this, points out that the result seems to have been an increased preoccupation with form, and he cites Beckett's own work, particularly his plays, as exemplifying this. "What I am saying", Beckett replies, "does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art":

It only means that there will be new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. 8

This by no means implies that form should be an arbitrary construction independent of content. On the contrary, form exists as a separate problem for the artist precisely because of the need to find a form that admits the chaotic material. In Proust Beckett writes approvingly that:

Proust does not share the superstition that form is nothing and content everything... Indeed he makes no attempt to dissociate form

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6. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.



from content. The one is a concretion of the other, the revelation of a world. (P. 67)

And in "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" he castigates readers who dislike the way in which Joyce's "form is content, content is form":

Here is direct expression - pages and pages of it. And if you don't like it, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other... The form that is an arbitrary and independent phenomenon can fulfil no higher function than that of stimulus for a tertiary or quartary conditioned reflex of dribbling comprehension. (DBV 13-14)

Joyce's direct expression consists, for example, in making his words go to sleep when he wishes to express a sense of sleep, in making his words dance when the sense is dancing (DBV.14). This is not Beckett's way of coping with the problem that he feels is so much in need of a solution: "To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now".<sup>9</sup> An indication of how he has attempted to do this is to be found in his comparison between his own work and Kafka's:

The Kafka hero has a coherence of purpose. He's lost, but he's not spiritually precarious, he's not falling to bits. My people seem to be falling to bits. Another difference. You notice how Kafka's form is classic, it goes on like a steamroller - almost serene. It seems to be threatened the whole time - but the consternation is in the form. In my work there is consternation behind the form, not in the form. 10 (Beckett's italics)

Here Beckett is describing Kafka's form as one which in effect says that the consternation is not consternation at all, as one which turns consternation into something very like serenity; as a result, Kafka's form only seems to be threatened the whole time. As against this, Beckett's work expresses consternation (for which we can read the terms "mess", "chaos", etc. used earlier) by refusing to incorporate it into the form, and this is why the form in his work is not at all serene. Beckett's material, his content, is chaos, consternation, inexplicability:

One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess. 11

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9. Ibid.

10. Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters", op. cit., p. 1.

11. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.

and:

I think that anyone nowadays, who pays the slightest attention to his own experience finds it the experience of a non-knower, a non-can-er. The other type of artist - the Apollonian - is absolutely foreign to me. 12

Form and chaos are mutually exclusive opposites. Beckett's chaos, unlike Kafka's, remains chaos because it is not emasculated by being incorporated into his form. His form, therefore (again unlike Kafka's), is threatened the whole time by the undiminished power of the chaos that stands in opposition to it. Thus it is, in Beckett's view, possible to express chaos in art only by keeping it behind the scenes, since as soon as it comes to the fore it will necessarily be forced into the straitjacket of form.

The relationship between form and content in Beckett's work can serve as an example of why and how Beckett juxtaposes contraries. These pairs of opposites are all as intimately connected and at the same time as mutually exclusive as are the form and the chaotic material which is accommodated by being excluded.

The word "threat", as used in the idea that form should be threatened the whole time by the chaos it necessarily excludes, fairly adequately sums up the relationship between, and the contradictory nature of, any pair of the opposites that concern Beckett.

An analysis of the pair that I will be focusing on in this discussion, namely habit and spontaneity, will not only help explain why the notion of "threat" is significant, but will also establish a basis for understanding how Beckett himself has tried to accommodate chaos in his work by excluding it.

#### Habit and Spontaneity in Proust

In Proust the word habit has the usual meaning of a settled disposition to act in a certain way. Where Beckett's use of the word

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12. Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters", loc. cit.

differs from the norm is in his application of it to a general condition rather than merely to certain aspects of behaviour.

Habit, in Proust, is the usual condition of human existence: it shields human beings from an awareness of reality and thus not only from the cruelties of reality but also from its enchantments. Spontaneity, which has as comparatively restricted an application as habit has an extended application, is the fleeting experience of reality which is possible only when habit, our current habit, has wholly or partially lost its control of our perceptions.

Habit, Beckett writes, "is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment, or between the individual and his own organic eccentricities" (P. 7-8). Thus the determinant of any human being's relations with the world outside himself - his physical environment, his fellow human beings, the society of which he is a part, etc. - and with his own self, is given the generic name of habit. Habit is what enables an individual to cope with his outer and his inner worlds, it is "the guarantee of a dull inviolability" (P. 8):

Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals. (P. 8)

The changes in the individual and in his world that inevitably take place as time passes necessitate corresponding changes in habit. "The pact", Beckett writes, "must be continually renewed; the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date" (P. 8).

The threat from which the letters of safe-conduct of habit shelter us is the threat of being exposed to the reality of our worlds.

Reality is a word much used by Beckett in Proust. The unstated and unexplained view of art that I have referred to as underlying his discursive writings is dependent on what Beckett means by reality. It is a term never defined - probably because Beckett cannot define it - and thus I too will forego definition. However, the contexts in which Beckett uses the term do allow us to offer certain suggestions about how we might conceive of reality along the same kind of lines as Beckett does. Habit creates illusions about our past, about our

present, and about our possibilities for the future, and it is only when habit is in abeyance, i.e. when we are spontaneous, that we are confronted with the "real".<sup>13</sup> Whatever reality is, in Beckett's conception, it can thus be preliminarily understood as that of which we are aware when we are not creatures of habit. The "suffering of being" that we experience at such moments of freedom from habit "opens", Beckett writes, "a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience" (P. 16). This does not mean that habit is itself unreal. As creatures of habit we are the victims of illusions, but the fact that we have such illusions is not itself illusory.

The action of habit consists in screening us off from reality, from the absolutely unbearable cruelties and enchantments of reality that can cause us to suffer. Habit is thus a defence mechanism preserving us from the suffering that is the necessary correlative of spontaneity.

... The fundamental duty of habit, about which it describes the futile and stupefying arabesques of its supererogations consists in a perpetual adjustment and readjustment of our organic sensibility to the conditions of its worlds. Suffering represents the omission of that duty, whether through negligence or inefficiency, and boredom its adequate performance. (P. 16)

Habit shields us from reality and from suffering by falsifying, by allowing us the illusion of security. This falsification is not carried out consciously, as in a simple lie (although lying may be a part of our habit); rather the process begins, as René Girard has written, in advance of any conscious experience:

The 'organic falsehood' functions every time someone wishes to see only that which serves his 'interest' or some other disposition of his instinctive attention, whose object is thus modified even in memory. The man who deludes himself in this way no longer needs to lie.

Combray shies away from dangerous truths as a healthy organism refuses to digest something which would harm it. Combray is an eye

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13. Beckett describes one incident from Proust's novel thus: "...in consequence of his [Marcel's] journey and his anxiety, his habit is in abeyance, the habit of his tenderness for his grandmother... The notion of what he should see has not had time to interfere its prism between the eye and its object. His eye functions with the cruel precision of a camera; it photographs the reality of his grandmother". (P. 15 )

which blinks out the particles of dust which might irritate. Everyone at Combray is therefore his own censor; but this self-censorship, far from being painful, blends with the peace of Combray, with the happiness of being a part of Combray. 14

It is when the pact is being brought up to date, in the period when we are spontaneous as one habit is being replaced by another, that we are exposed to reality and liable to suffering:

The periods of transition that separate consecutive adaptations (since by no expedient of macabre transubstantiation can the grave sheets serve as swaddling clothes) represent the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being. (P. 8)

When changed conditions have necessitated the creation of a new habit, the old habit (Beckett also calls it the old "ego") may die. If it does, we are freed from our habitual illusions and, in the interim before the new habit can form, the "maximum value of our being is restored" (P. 9):

The old ego dies hard. Such as it was, a minister of dullness, it was also an agent of security. When it ceases to perform that second function, when it is opposed by a phenomenon that it cannot reduce to the condition of a comfortable and familiar concept, when, in a word, it betrays its trust as a screen to spare its victim the spectacle of reality, it disappears, and the victim, now an ex-victim, for a moment free, is exposed to that reality. (P. 10)

Beckett gives an example of this from Proust's novel. The narrator is used to a low ceiling and is unable to sleep in a room with a high ceiling, is tortured by the strange room. What is taking place, Beckett says, is that the old pact of friendship for a room with a low ceiling has been made ineffectual by the changed conditions, under which Marcel finds himself in a room with a high ceiling. The old habit must therefore die in order that a habit of friendship for the high ceiling may be born:

Between this death and that birth, reality, intolerable, absorbed feverishly by his consciousness at the extreme limit of its intensity, by his total consciousness organised to avert the disaster, to create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat - and also of its beauty. (P. 10-11)

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14. René Girard, Deceit, Desire, and The Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure, (translated from the French by Yvonne Freccero), The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1965, p. 197. Combray is, in Proust's novel, Marcel's childhood home. Girard goes on to say that the Verdurin salon also possesses an "eliminative function" similar to that of Combray (p. 198).

After Beckett's discussion, in "Beckett by the Madeleine", of a form that accommodates chaos in art, Tom Driver suggests that this could apply to all art:

'Isn't all art ambiguous?'

'Not this,' he said, and gestured towards the Madeleine. The classical lines of the church... dominated all the scene where we sat. The Boulevard de la Madeleine, the Boulevard Malesherbes, and the Rue Royale ran into it with graceful flattery, bearing tidings of the Age of Reason. 'Not this. This is clear. This does not allow the mystery to invade us. With classical art, all is settled.' 15

While form cannot be equated with habit, nor chaotic material with spontaneity, it is nonetheless possible to see how the same kind of relationship exists between form and chaos as between habit and spontaneity. We have seen how Beckett considers that the new form in art will be of such a kind that it will accommodate chaos by excluding it. He wants art to allow chaos, the mystery, to invade us, and he sees the best way of doing this as having a form that is threatened the whole time. In Proust he feels that the maximum value of our being is restored only when we are threatened by the mystery, and that this is possible only when habit is in abeyance. In both cases the emphasis is on the need to let chaos in: as far as form/content is concerned, the reason given is that the chaos is all around us and must be accommodated; as far as habit/spontaneity is concerned, the reason given is that only thus is value restored. And in both cases the idea of a threat is what governs the relationship. The threat is important both because it is responsible for the existence of habit (we would not need a guarantee of inviolability <sup>if</sup> ~~if~~ there were no threat) and because it can, under certain circumstances, overthrow habit; both because it is responsible for form in art (to the extent to which form in art is a response to our need to make order out of the chaos of experience) and because it can, under certain circumstances, overcome the limitations of form in art. The importance of the idea of a threat is, moreover, not limited to these two pairs of opposites: it relates to all such pairs in Beckett's work, all of

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15. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.

Beckett continues: "But it is different at Chartres. There is the inexplicable, and there art raises questions that it does not attempt to answer".

which are both irreconcilably opposite and at the same time totally dependent on each other.

In some ways the spontaneity discussed by Beckett is similar to what Joyce called an 'epiphany', which in Stephen Hero is described in the following terms:

By an epiphany he [Stephen] meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or gesture or in a memorable phrase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments. He told Cranly that the clock of the Ballast Office was capable of an epiphany. Cranly questioned the inscrutable dial of the Ballast Office with his no less inscrutable countenance.

'Yes', said Stephen, 'I will pass it time after time, allude to it, refer to it, catch a glimpse of it. It is only an item in the catalogue of Dublin's street furniture. Then all at once I see it and I know at once what it is: epiphany.'

'What?'

'Imagine my glimpses at that clock as the gropings of a spiritual eye which seeks to adjust its vision to an exact focus. The moment the focus is reached the object is epiphanised. It is just in this epiphany I find the third, the supreme quality of beauty'. 16

The major differences between this and the spontaneity Beckett discusses in Proust is that Joyce, unlike Beckett, envisages no such mechanism as habit that opposes the exact focusing of the 'spiritual eye', and that he does not associate these evanescent moments with even the possibility of change: the epiphanies discussed by Joyce, unlike the spontaneity that comes with the death of habit, are unconnected with any period of transition to a new ego.

This brief preliminary outline of what Beckett says about the workings of habit and spontaneity in Proust would be incomplete without a mention of the workings of two of their correlatives, voluntary and involuntary memory.

Voluntary memory is conditioned by and is a function of habit (P. 17): it is what enables us to recall what we wish to recall. It is, Beckett writes:

...the uniform memory of intelligence; and it can be relied on to reproduce for our gratified inspection those impressions of the past that were consciously and intelligently formed... It presents

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16. James Joyce, Stephen Hero, Jonathan Cape Ltd., London, 1944, p. 188.

the past in monochrome. The images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by imagination, and are equally remote from reality. (P. 19)

As against this, involuntary memory is "explosive, an immediate, total and delicious deflagration" (P. 20):

...it abstracts the useful, the opportune, the accidental... in its flame it has consumed Habit and all its works, and in its brightness revealed what the mock reality of experience never can and never will reveal - the real. (P. 20)

The "miracle" (P. 21) of involuntary memory restores "the total past sensation, not its echo nor its copy, but the sensation itself" (P. 54):

Thanks to this reduplication, the experience is at once imaginative and empirical, at once an evocation and a direct perception, real without being merely actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal. (P. 56)

This spontaneous or involuntary memory is the reduplication of an earlier spontaneous sensation that habit has rejected and which has literally been forgotten by (habitual) voluntary memory. As Beckett writes, the "integral purity" of the original spontaneous sensation is "retained because it/[is] forgotten" (P. 54):

The most trivial experience - he [Proust] says in effect - is encrusted with elements that logically are not related to it and have consequently been rejected by our intelligence: it is imprisoned in a vase filled with a certain perfume and a certain colour and raised to a certain temperature. These vases are suspended along the height of our years, and, not being accessible to our intelligent memory, are in a sense immune, the purity of their climatic content is guaranteed by forgetfulness, each one is kept at its distance, at its date. So that when the imprisoned microcosm is besieged in the manner described, we are flooded by a new air and a new perfume (new precisely because already experienced) and we breathe the true air of Paradise, of the only Paradise that is not the dream of a madman, the Paradise that has been lost. (P. 55)

### The Relevance of Proust to Beckett's Creative Work

While it may be, and it certainly has been assumed often enough, that the ideas expressed in Proust are of relevance to Beckett's own creative writings, it is important not to forget that Proust is first and, presumably, foremost about Proust's novel. Before taking this discussion of these ideas any further, therefore, it is essential to examine whether or not, and if so the extent to which, Proust can be justifiably



considered as reflecting Beckett's own concerns. The only way, in the final analysis, we can do this, for Proust or for any of the other critical articles, is by examining what Beckett says in these articles together with his creative work, and this we will be doing in subsequent chapters of this study. A large number of commentators on Beckett's work have already taken some steps in this direction, particularly as regards Proust, and they seem to agree in general terms that this work is useful as an aid to understanding its author's creative writings. Raymond Federman writes that "though describing the Proustian creative process in this essay [Proust]... Beckett largely predicts his own creative course to come";<sup>17</sup> Francis Doherty sees Proust as "a necessary adjunct for the reader interested in Beckett's theories of fiction" since it can be seen to be "predicative of Beckett's own concerns";<sup>18</sup> and John Fletcher and John Spurling claim that the essay is "a table of law for any student of either Proust or Beckett".<sup>19</sup>

When, however, the ideas expressed in the essay are applied in any detail to the creative work Beckett wrote later, the resulting muddle is often enough to cast doubt on the supposed usefulness of any such application, as well as on the relevance of Proust to anything other than (and sometimes including) Proust. This can be illustrated by an example taken from A. Alvarez' recent study of Beckett.<sup>20</sup>

Alvarez considers that for Beckett, as for Proust, the infrequent illuminations of involuntary memory - coupled with the fact that suffering inspires art - is the best that can be hoped for.<sup>21</sup> Quoting Beckett's discussion of the periods of transition that separate any two habits - "because by no expedient of macabre transubstantiation can the grave-sheets serve as swaddling clothes" (P. 8)<sup>22</sup> - and considering Pozzo's

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17. Journey to Chaos, op. cit., p. 155.

18. Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 14.

19. Beckett: A Study of His Plays, op. cit., p. 28.

20. A. Alvarez, Beckett, op. cit.

21. Ibid, p. 22. Alvarez is guilty of a misreading of Beckett- and also, I would suggest in passing, of Skinner - when he writes that in Proust Beckett's "message is undifferentiated gloom; he makes it sound as though the noblest human aspiration were to achieve the condition of one of B.F. Skinner's robots, conditioned out of human feeling by boredom" (ibid, p. 22). As I have shown, Beckett explicitly identifies "the maximum value" of human existence, in Proust, with those moments when "the suffering of being" replaces the "boredom of living" (P. 8).

22. Quoted ibid., p. 87.

view in Godot that "they give birth astride a grave" (G. 57)<sup>23</sup> and Vladimir's echo, "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth" (G. 58),<sup>24</sup> Alvarez concludes:

Apparently the only real change in Beckett's thinking over all those years is in understanding that the 'macabre transubstantiation' of swaddling clothes into grave-sheets [sic] does, in fact take place. Otherwise, it is the same image and the same predicament: Pozzo and Vladimir have both entered "the perilous zone...when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being." 25

This analysis is typical of the way in which much Beckett criticism handles the concepts expounded in Proust - or, for that matter, in any of Beckett's discursive writings and statements about his work.

There is no clear reason why Alvarez should conclude that the excerpts from Godot signify any "real change" in Beckett's thinking. Without embarking on a detailed discussion of the play - which alone could properly indicate what, if any, difference there is between Beckett's "views" in it and those expounded in Proust - I would still mention three factors which undermine Alvarez' claim.

One is that even a cursory examination of Pozzo's and Vladimir's speeches show that some kind of time elapses between the death and the birth: "they give birth astride of a grave", says Pozzo, "the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (G. 57; italics added);<sup>26</sup> and Vladimir continues his brooding with, "Down in the hole, lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. [He listens.] But habit is a great deadener" (G. 58; italics added).<sup>27</sup> When, as in both these cases, allowance is made for an interval between the death of one habit and the birth of the next, then there is no justification for Alvarez' assertion that, instead of a transitional period of suffering, there will be a transubstantiation of one habit into the next.

The second is that Alvarez is begging the question of whether or not Beckett is using his people, here Pozzo and Vladimir, as mouth-pieces for his own views, and ignoring the possibility that these

23. Quoted ibid., p. 87. References to Waiting for Godot (G) are to the 1954 edition published by the Grove Press, New York.

24. Quoted in Alvarez, Beckett, op. cit., p. 87.

25. Quoted ibid. 26. Quoted ibid. 27. Quoted ibid.

people may be being treated ironically. This may or may not be the case, but it is certainly important if we are to get any further in our understanding of Beckett, and the continued use of out-of-context quotations from Beckett's people that are merely assumed to reflect the author's own views succeeds only in perpetuating what could be a fundamental misunderstanding.

Thirdly and lastly, this excerpt from Alvarez' book reveals the kind of muddle-headedness that plagues so many attempts to determine the relevance of statements such as those made in Proust to Beckett's art. A relatively minor example of this is the fact that Alvarez is here claiming that Pozzo and Vladimir have entered the perilous zone of suffering, while earlier in the book he describes Waiting for Godot as an example of "the art of boredom, not suffering".<sup>28</sup> More serious is the basic misunderstanding that he reveals of what Beckett means by a "period of transition" and by the "suffering of being". If, as Alvarez claims, Beckett had changed his mind about the possibility of a "macabre transubstantiation of grave-sheets into swaddling clothes", then Beckett must also have changed his mind about the perilous zones of suffering: the suffering of being replaces the boredom of living only during the periods of transition, and if grave-sheets are transubstantiated into swaddling clothes then there is no possibility of suffering at all. The fact that there is at least a momentary lapse after one habit dies before the next has time to form represents the single hope in Proust - as, I would suggest, in Beckett's art. To cancel it out, to claim that Beckett changed his mind, may conceivably be justified, but the question deserves consideration rather than an off-hand comment, and the attention of a critic who at least understands the meaning and the implications of his own and Beckett's arguments.

These three faults that I have found with Alvarez - his inadequate reading of the text, his unjustified assumption that Beckett's people are necessarily voicing the writer's own views, and his muddle-headedness about the meaning and the implications of concepts Beckett uses in Proust - are by no means peculiar to Alvarez. It is, however, impossible to give such detailed attention here to all those who have made similar

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28. Ibid, p. 22.

errors in their use of Proust and of others of Beckett's discursive writings,<sup>29</sup> and I will let this discussion of Alvarez serve as a warning of possible pitfalls that can annul whatever value there may be in an application of the ideas expressed in Beckett's critical works to his art.

Since the disservice that Alvarez has done to the procedure of applying these ideas to Beckett's creative work is, in the example discussed, clearly the result of that commentator's own failings, the question of how potentially useful and relevant the procedure may be remains open.

Most discussions of the relevance of what is said in Proust are prefaced by a remark to the effect that we must keep in mind that the essay is mainly about Proust, not about Beckett. Instead, however, of attempting to ascertain what, in Proust, is expressive of Beckett's own concerns, most commentators simply use those quotations from the essay that "fit in" with the interpretation they are offering. They tautologically presume to show that a certain amount, in Proust, is relevant to Beckett's art by pointing to evidence in the texts of the novels, plays, etc., which, however, has been selected in order to prove the relevance of what is said in Proust.

It is, in my opinion, impossible to avoid tautologies altogether in a discussion such as this one, which shifts its focus back and forth between the creative and the discursive writings: there is nothing to guarantee any connection between the two. It is, however, possible to establish the likeliest connections and to justify using some of the ideas expressed in the discursive writings rather than others.

My interest here in Proust is centered around what is said in that essay about habit and spontaneity. This is an interest shared by other commentators, as has been seen in the case of Alvarez. Since

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29. Some of the other commentators who have done so will be discussed in subsequent chapters in connection with particular questions raised by the English fictions. See also the discussion of Morse's comments on Tal Coat and Bram van Velde, p. 14 above.

Beckett nowhere else in his discursive writings or in interviews mentions these particular contraries explicitly, the difficulties in ascertaining how much of what is said in this connection about Proust can be seen as expressive of Beckett's own concerns are by no means inconsiderable.

In terms of the past, habit manifests itself, as we have seen, as voluntary memory, the spontaneous counterpart of which is involuntary memory. These again are mentioned explicitly only in Proust. In terms of the future, however, habit manifests itself through the workings of habitual need, whose counterpart is spontaneous need.

These two kinds of need are relevant not only to Proust, written about 1930, but are also explicitly mentioned in the 1938 review of Denis Devlin's poems and in the unpublished article "Les Deux Besoins" (also probably written about 1938). They are also referred to by clear implication in others of Beckett's critical writings, particularly in the two articles on the van Velde brothers written after the war and in the 1949 Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, Beckett's last extended piece of critical writing.<sup>30</sup> If we compare what is common to these various discussions, spanning the nearly twenty year period during which Beckett was writing critical articles and prose fiction in English, with what is said only in Proust, we should be able to determine the extent to which Beckett is, in Proust,

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30. The only reviews, so far as I have been able to trace, that Beckett has published since 1949 are "Hommage à Jack B. Yeats", op. cit. (1954); "Henri Hayden, homme-peintre" (a short critical text dated January 1952 and printed in Les Cahiers d'Art - Documents, 22, November 1955, Ecole de Paris, No. 4); a preface written to the exhibition of Bram van Velde's paintings at the Galerie Michel Warren in 1957 (Bulletin de la Galerie Michel Warren, Paris, May 1957); an exhibition announcement entitled "Pour Avigdor Arikha" (Galerie Claude Bernard, Paris, 1967); and a foreword to Avigdor Arikha, Dessins 1965-1970 (Archives d'Art Contemporain, Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, 1970). Bram van Velde, by Jacques Putman, Georges Duthuit, and Beckett, was published in 1958 (La Musée de Poche, Paris), but Beckett's contribution to it is the French translation of the text of his comments about van Velde in the third "Dialogue with Georges Duthuit", written nearly ten years earlier.

discussing his own stable concerns with the contraries he calls habit and spontaneity. This should, for the first time, furnish a justifiable basis for considering some, or all, as the case may be, of Proust, of interest to commentators on Beckett's own creative work.

### The Two Needs in Time

In Proust Beckett writes that for a subject who needs some object to attain his goal, i.e. to have his need satisfied, means that the subject must be in total possession of, and completely identified with, the object (P. 3, 41, 64). The subject is constantly and qualitatively changing as time passes:

Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday. (P. 3)

When the subject changes qualitatively in this way subsequent to having formulated a need for a given object, satisfaction is out of the question:

The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for today's. We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died - and perhaps many times - on the way. For subject B to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A is as illogical as to expect one's hunger to be dissipated by the spectacle of Uncle eating his dinner. (P. 3)

The reason for this disappointment is that our habitual, voluntary memory cannot help us to feel the same way about the object today as we did yesterday. The same applies even if it should happen, "by one of those rare miracles of coincidence" (P. 4), that the object is attained: we are still disappointed, being "incapable of appreciating our joy by comparing it with our sorrow" (P. 4) since voluntary memory can do nothing to evoke the sorrow we felt beforehand.

The fact that the subject is in a constant state of flux is, however, by no means the only obstacle standing in the way of satisfaction. When the object is not itself in flux, the subject "infects" it with his own mobility (P. 6) and, when both the subject and the object are

in flux, when, in other words,

it is a case of human intercourse, we are faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subjects, but independent and personal: two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation. (P. 6-7)

The "poisonous ingenuity of Time in the science of affliction" (P. 4) thus makes it impossible for man to be satisfied in Time:

So that whatever the object, our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable. At the best, all that is realised in Time (all Time produce), whether in Art or Life, can only be possessed successively, by a series of partial annexations - and never integrally and at once... But for every tumour a scalpel and a compress. Memory and Habit are attributes of the Time cancer. (P. 7)

This intolerable state of affairs is in fact made tolerable by habit, which shelters us from an awareness of the futility of our attempts to satisfy ourselves, and by voluntary memory, which screens us from an awareness of previous disappointments. Habit and voluntary memory, which are responsible in part for the fact that we are permanently dissatisfied, since they do not allow us to re-experience the feelings we had when we first formulated a need, are thus also responsible for making our dissatisfaction tolerable. As Beckett writes, Proust's "Janal, trinal, agile monster or Divinity" is:

Time - a condition of resurrection because an instrument of death; Habit - an infliction in so far as it opposes the dangerous exaltation of the one and a blessing in so far as it palliates the cruelty of the other; Memory - a clinical laboratory stocked with poison and remedy, stimulant and sedative....(P. 22)

Later references that Beckett makes to this lack of connection between subject and object justify the conclusion that the concern with the "perpetuum mobile of our disillusionings" (P.13) expressed in connection with Proust is shared by Beckett.

In his first article on the van Velde brothers' paintings he describes Geer van Velde's painting thus: "C'est la représentation de ce fleuve où, selon le modeste calcul d'Héraclite, personne ne descend deux fois" (PvV. 355). Heraclitus' conception of a world in flux is very similar to the conception of the changes effected by time in Proust. When the idea of need<sup>31</sup> is applied to the creative process - as Beckett

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31. We are here discussing need in general; the discussion of the particular role played in the creative process by each of the two different needs,

seems to think it should be<sup>32</sup> the subject is the representer, the artist, and the object is the represented, the "occasion" for the work of art. In the third of his dialogues with Duthuit, Beckett says that both these terms are unstable, and that what should concern us is "the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself" (DGD III, 125). He admires Bram van Velde for having, in his painting, faced up to "the absence of terms, or, if you like,... the presence of unavailable terms" (DGD III, 125) which annuls the relationship that is usually presumed to exist between subject and object. Thus Beckett here excludes the possibility of a satisfactory outcome in art. "Aux enthymèmes de l'art ce sont les conclusions qui manquent et non les prémisses" (DB. 3).

The two needs are elaborated on in "Denis Devlin" and in "Les Deux Besoins".

The one is the habitual need to make the unbearable bearable, to make the object seem accessible to the subject; the other is the spontaneous need to confront the "cruelties and enchantments of reality", to recognize that the object is inaccessible.

When we refer to habit's function as that of making existence bearable or tolerable we are again using words that Beckett uses in a specific and, in this case, quite literal sense. For our lives to be bearable does not necessarily mean that they are without misfortunes - or without joys. "The immediate joys and sorrows of the body and the intelligence are", Beckett writes, "so many superfoetations" (P. 3)

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31. (cont.) the habitual and the spontaneous, will follow.

32. Art should, Beckett suggests in "Denis Devlin", be "free to be derided (or not) in its own terms and not in those of the politicians, antiquaries (Geleerte) and zealots... In its own terms, that is in terms of need, not of opinion, still less of faction; opinion being a response to and at least (at best) for a time an escape from need, from one kind of need, and art, in this case these poems, no more (!) than the approximately adequate and absolutely non-final formulation of another kind... The only suggestions therefore that the reviewer may venture without impertinence are such as have reference to this fundamental. Thus he may suggest the type of need (Braque's is not Munch's, neither is Klee's, etc.), its energy, scope, adequacy of expression, etc. There seems no other way in which this miserable functionary can hope to achieve innocuity. Unless of course he is a critic." (DD. 289-190) In "La Peinture des van Velde" he describes Bram van Velde's painting as expressing "la chose seule, isolée par le besoin de la voir, par le besoin de voir" (PW. 352.)



and such joys and sorrows are all subsumed under the umbrella of habit, and are thus facets of the boredom of living which is tolerable. Real joy and real pain (which Beckett sees as linked) are possible only when habit is in abeyance, and these are intolerable in their intensity.

The world that we find bearable, even enjoyable, is a world projected by our habit which does not allow us to realise that subject-object relationships are illusory. The creature of habit is doggedly optimistic, sure that complete satisfaction is just around the next corner, or the one after that, and content in the interim to admire the progress he thinks he has made towards this goal. The need that corresponds to this, the need felt by the creature of habit, is what Beckett in "Denis Devlin" call the need of Dives. This is the need of

...the go-getters, the gerrymandlers, Davus and the morbid dread of sphinxes, solution clapped on problem like a snuffer on a candle, the great crossword public on all its planes: 'He roasteth roast and is satisfied. Yea, he warmeth himself and saith, Aha, I am warm.' (DD. 290)

Dives, acquisitive, possessive, turns aside from all the unsatisfactory aspects of his experience, aspects that it cannot reduce to the status of a comfortable and familiar concept, and devotes its attentions to projecting a satisfactory world. What it does, in other words, is to forge relations between things that are in reality unrelated; by doing so it makes possible the illusion that need is satisfiable. Habit shields us from the awareness of the terrifying flux of reality by creating and maintaining the illusion of fixity. It cannot cancel reality out, but it can, in extreme cases, consistently divert us from the implications that a vision of reality must have for our habitual illusions. Reality has necessarily changed since any particular habit was formed (reality is constantly changing), and that habit must die and be re-born in a new form that accommodates the reality of the present. If this does not happen, if habit refuses to acknowledge changed circumstances, and this consistently, its world will become increasingly remote from reality: the unchanging habitual projection of the world will differ more and more drastically from the real world which is continually changing.

The other kind of need in Beckett's view is the need to confront reality, to see a thing as unique, inexplicable, unrelated to any other

thing and in flux. In Proust Beckett says that exposure to temporal reality can only take place when for some reason habit is in abeyance: the suffering that results from such exposure is the sworn enemy of habit, whose duty it is to preserve a dull inviolability. When the suffering of being replaces the boredom of living one of two things will happen. If habit is dead or as good as dead (i.e. dying), the suffering will inaugurate a period of transition and will end with the construction of a new, changed habit which accommodates the new thing that caused the suffering. In this case exposure to reality will have provided a necessary corrective to the habitual world-view. In Proust's novel this process of total re-adjustment takes place on several occasions. The other possibility is that habit is only "sleeping". If this is the case there will be no transitional period and no new, changed habit<sup>33</sup> since the old habit will spring to attention and rob the mystery of its threat by reducing it to the condition of a comfortable, assimilable concept. In this case reality will have been deprived of its power to correct the habitual world-view, and the illusion will merely have been compounded. This, as I will show, happens with depressing frequency in Beckett's English fictions.

The need that thrives so briefly when habit is caught off guard is what Beckett calls the need of Lazarus, a need that is unsatisfiable since its subject and its object are real, unrelated, unidentifiable:

...the "Unbefriedigt jeden Augenblick" [unsatisfied at every moment], the need to need ("aimant l'amour"), the art that condenses as inverted spiral of need, that condenses in intensity and brightness from the mere need of the angels to that of the seraphim, whose end is its own end in the end and source of need. (DD. 290)

Lazarus is the need to see the world as it is in reality, the need to suffer from an awareness of one's total inability to comprehend its mysteries, the need to be amazed at its complexity. Man cannot live in a state of unceasing dissatisfaction. If subject and object are in reality unidentifiable, as Beckett says they are, man must construct an illusory world, a habit, in which he can live. Without the spontaneous

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33. "Habit may not be dead (or as good as dead, doomed to die) but sleeping. This second and more fugitive experience may or may not be exempt from pain. It does not inaugurate a period of transition." (p. 9-10)

need of Lazarus there is only boredom, stagnation, and the illusion of fixity. Without the habitual need of Dives there is only wonder and fear, terrifying, enchanting flux.

Neither need is, in reality, satisfiable (since in reality subject is absolutely unrelated to object), but the creature of habit thinks satisfaction is possible and can convince himself that he is satisfied, whereas the creature temporarily free of habit is aware of the illusory nature of satisfaction.

Up to this point there is no significant disagreement between what Beckett writes in Proust and what he writes in his later discursive work. The concepts used in Proust to describe the "perpetuum mobile of our disillusions" (P. 3) are echoed and elaborated on in Beckett's later comments on writers and painters. This discussion of the two needs has, however, concerned itself up to now solely with the condition of man in Time, and we have left man in the unenviable position of being unable to combine Dives and Lazarus since they are mutually exclusive, and of being unable to exist satisfactorily with either alone.

Proust resolves this dilemma out of Time. For Proust it is possible for involuntary memory to work a "miracle of evasion" from Time (P. 22): when Time is obliterated through involuntary memory, the extratemporal reality that is hidden from the victims of Time can be both revealed and possessed in a "brief eternity" of exaltation (P. 57). It is in this "mystical experience" of union with reality that Proust finds his "salvation" (P. 57). The difficulty of having either to combine the illusory satisfaction of Dives with the real dissatisfaction of Lazarus or to choose between them is solved by hoisting the whole question on to another, and a more elevated, plane. Involuntary memory allows of "inspired perception" which is defined as "the identification of subject and object" (P. 64). Thus by escaping Time, need is satisfied for Proust in a manner that is not illusory.

This is not a final solution, any more than the satisfaction thus experienced is a permanent satisfaction. It is precisely a brief eternity of exaltation, and it is inevitable that Time should reclaim its victim. In the Guermantes library Proust's Marcel experiences the negation of Time and of Death ("Death is dead because Time is dead" P. 56),

and when he then leaves the library he is "confronted by the spectacle of Time made flesh" (P. 57) in the faces and frailties of his dying acquaintances. Nonetheless Marcel does retain some permanent benefit from this experience of timelessness. Afterwards he can understand "the meaning of death, of love and vocation, of the joys of the spirit and the utility of pain" (P.59), and he can use this understanding to create a work of art when he becomes once more a victim of Time. Can this extratemporal salvation be seen as of interest to Beckett in other contexts?

This is a question that has never been discussed in commentaries on Beckett's work, and it is of crucial importance since any interpretation of the import of Beckett's aesthetics hinges on whether or not Beckett too can be justifiably considered as finding his fleeting salvation in the Proustian extratemporal ecstasy of fulfilment. There are, as I will show, equally strong reasons for concluding that Beckett does as for concluding that he does not feel that an extratemporal reality is accessible and a solution to the dilemma possible. I will first outline very briefly the evidence that could be cited in support of these conclusions separately, and then examine them together and discuss the possible reasons for the contradictions involved.

### The Possibility of Extratemporal Salvation

Proust saw men as victims of Time and saw hope only in evading it. The difference between this view and what Beckett writes about Time in connection with the van Velde's work is striking: to do as they have done, he says:

*...requiert un métier d'une souplesse et d'une légèreté extrêmes, un métier qui insinue plus qu'il n'affirme, qui ne soit positif qu'avec l'évidence fugace et accessoire du grand positif, du seul positif, du temps qui charrie. (PvV. 353; italics added)*

This suggests that we are on shaky ground when we assume complete agreement between Beckett's view of Time and Proust's. The fact that this is so rare an example of Beckett commenting on Time outside the Proustian context does not necessarily mean - although of course it may - that the concept of Time is of lesser importance to Beckett than it was to Proust. Perhaps Beckett merely takes Time for granted.

It is normally only when there is a real possibility of our being cut off from air that we concern ourselves with it, and it may be that it is similarly only when we conceive, as Proust does, of a real possibility of being cut off from Time that we concern ourselves to such an extent with Time. If this is the case, then clearly the difference between Proust and Beckett is very great.

Comments have been quoted that reveal Beckett's admiration for Bram van Velde's submission to the absence of any relationship between subject and object, as well as Beckett's view of the unsatisfiable nature of the spontaneous need of Lazarus. These seem to indicate that Beckett is not prepared to believe in the possibility of the satisfaction envisaged by Proust - or, for that matter, in any satisfaction. This is further supported by Beckett's closing argument in "Bram van Velde" that the painter (as interpreted by Beckett) has, after recognising the falsity of the subject-object relationship, refused to re-create it on a different plane. That Beckett then connects this refusal with what he has himself done in his own art seems like a definitive rejection of the Proustian solution:

My case, since I am in the dock, is that van Velde is the first to desist from this aestheticised automatism, the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence 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. No, no, allow me to expire. I know that all that is required now, in order to bring even this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation. I know that my inability to do so places myself, and perhaps an innocent, in what I think is still called an unenviable situation, familiar to psychiatrists.  
(DGDIII, 126)

There are countersuggestions elsewhere in the articles on both the van Velde brothers: "La Peinture des van Velde, ou le monde et le pantalon" and "Peintres de l'Empêchement".

"La Peinture des van Velde..." was written early in 1945, and is the most sustained piece of discursive writing the author ever wrote after Proust. In terms of the question under discussion, some

of the comments made here differ radically in their implications both from other comments found in the same article and from what is said in "Denis Devlin" and the dialogue "Bram van Velde". The fact that "Denis Devlin" was written in 1938 and "Bram van Velde" in 1949 seems to cancel out the possibility that Beckett changed his mind over this question at some point, and some other kind of explanation will have to be sought as to why he should contradict himself.

Describing the painting of Bram van Velde, Beckett in "La Peinture des van Velde..." writes:

Impossible de vouloir autre l'inconnu, l'enfin vu, dont le centre est partout et la circonférence nulle part; ni le seul agent capable de le faire cesser; ni le but, qui est de le faire cesser. Car c'est bien de cela qu'il s'agit, de ne plus voir cette chose adorable et effrayante, de rentrer dans le temps, dans la cécité, d'aller s'ennuyer devant les tourbillons de viande jamais morte et frissonner sous les peupliers. Alors on la montre, de la seule façon possible. (PvV. 353; italics added)

The artistic experience of Bram van Velde, Beckett is saying, is the experience of something terrifying and adorable,<sup>34</sup> and since to stop having this experience is to re-enter Time and "thisness", the experience itself must be extratemporal.

It has been shown how, in Proust, Beckett uses the concept of habit to show the illusory nature of what we choose to consider as fixity. He describes the use of names, for example, which help us to convince ourselves that Uncle Tom today is the same individual as Uncle Tom yesterday, as an instance of "a barbarous society's primitivism" (P. 32): like all of habit's arsenal, names help protect us from an awareness of the flux of reality. In "La Peinture des van Velde...", however, Beckett uses the idea of fixity, or immobility, in a very different

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34. There is a clear connection between this and the spontaneous experience of reality as described in Proust as "the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being" (P. 8). Suffering is there too seen as "the main condition of the artistic experience" (P. 16).

sense to describe further how Bram van Velde, a painter whom Beckett clearly admires,<sup>35</sup> has tackled the age-old problem of connecting himself, the subject, the representer, with his "occasion", the object, the representee:

A/braham/ van Velde peint l'étendue.

G/erardus/ van Velde peint la succession.

Puisque, avant de pouvoir voir l'étendue, à plus forte raison avant de pouvoir le représenter, il faut l'immobiliser, celui-là se détourne de l'étendue naturelle, celle qui tourne comme une toupie sous le fouet du soleil. Il l'idéalise, en fait en sens interne. Et c'est justement en l'idéalisant qu'il a pu la réaliser avec cette objectivité, cette netteté sans précédent. C'est là sa trouvaille. Il la doit à un besoin tendu à l'extrême de voir clair. (PvV. 353; italics added) 36.

Not only is Beckett here admiring van Velde's discovery of the thing as it really is, ideal, truly "congealed", which is very similar to what he describes in Proust as the "ideal real" (P. 56) (and very far from what he writes about the painter in the dialogue),<sup>37</sup> he has also, in this paragraph, contradicted another statement made elsewhere. His admiration, here, for van Velde's unprecedented clarity is directly at odds with what is said on the subject of clarity in "Denis Devlin" where, as we have seen, he considers that "art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear, does not make clear" (DD. 293) and in his interview with Tom Driver.<sup>38</sup>

35. Cf. Inter alia, "My case, since I am in the dock, is that van Velde is the first to desist from this estheticised automatism..." (DGD III. 125); and "On ne fait que commencer à déconner sur les frères van Velde./ J'ouvre la série./ C'est un honneur." (PvV. 356)

36. He has earlier in this article, in the same vein, written that: "La peinture d'A. van Velde serait donc premièrement une peinture de la chose en suspens, je dirais volontiers de la chose morte, idéalement morte, si ce terme n'avait pas de si fâcheuses associations. C'est-à-dire que la chose qu'on y voit n'est plus seulement représentée comme suspendue, mais strictement telle qu'elle est, figée réellement. C'est la chose seule, isolée par le besoin de la voir, par le besoin de voir. La chose immobile dans le vide, voilà enfin la chose visible, l'objet pur. Je n'en vois pas d'autre." (PvV. 352)

37. "I suggest that van Velde is the first whose painting is bereft, rid if you prefer, of occasion in every shape and form, ideal as well as material" (DGD III. 121).

38. This quotation about clarity from "Denis Devlin" (written in 1938) and the statement made on the same subject to Tom Driver in 1981 ("Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.) were used earlier as evidence that Beckett did not change his mind on this subject in that over twenty year period. While this still seems a valid comment, it now hardly seems sufficient: Beckett's admiration, in 1945, for the work of an artist whom he sees as achieving clarity does imply that Beckett uses the idea of clarity in a more complex way or in more ways than orig-

When Beckett writes, again in "La Peinture des van Velde...", of "le noir qui est aube et midi et soir et nuit d'un ciel vide, d'une terre fixe... C'est là que le peintre peut tranquillement cligner de l'oeil" (PvV. 352), he is not only reinforcing his identification of Bram van Velde's art with the experience of fixity, but also further tying the artist to what we might again have seen as a characteristic of habitual existence: peace. Since Beckett in all other contexts (and, indeed, in "La Peinture des van Velde..." also, in the discussion of the art of the younger brother, Geer)<sup>39</sup> connects art with disturbance, threat, and suffering, with the experience of intolerable reality, it is difficult to see how art can be connected with peacefulness or tranquillity.

An outline of what Beckett writes about Geer van Velde will prove that we are not mistaken in finding Beckett holding two very different views of art. What he says, moreover, about the connection - and the lack of connection - between these two brothers will help us to grasp the implications of this double aesthetic.

Contrasting him with his brother Bram who, as we have seen, is admired for his discovery of clarity, immobility, and peace, Beckett writes of Geer's painting that:

Ici tout bouge, nage, fuit, revient, se défait, se refait. Tout cesse, sans cesse... [G. van Velde] est entièrement tourné vers le dehors, vers le tohu-bohu des choses dans la lumière, vers le temps. Car on ne prend connaissance du temps que dans les choses qu'il agite, qu'il empêche de voir. C'est en se donnant entièrement au dehors, en montrant le macrocosme secoué par les frissons du temps, qu'il se réalise, qu'il réalise l'homme si l'on préfère,

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38. (cont.) inally supposed.

39. In connection with Geer van Velde's painting, Beckett writes: "On dirait l'insurrection des molécules, l'intérieur d'une pierre un millièrme de seconde avant qu'elle ne se désagrège" (PvV. 353).



dans ce qu'il a de plus inébranlable, dans sa certitude qu'il n'y a ni présent ni repos. C'est la représentation de ce fleuve où, selon le modeste calcul d'Héraclite, personne ne descend deux fois. (PvV. 353; italics added)

Everything in this passage contrasts markedly with the ideas Beckett expresses about Bram van Velde in this same article, and with those parts of Proust that deal with the Proustian miracle. And Beckett is aware of this. At the beginning of his discussion of the two painters he writes:

Il importe tout d'abord de ne pas confondre les deux oeuvres. Ce sont deux choses, deux séries de choses, absolument distinctes. Elles s'écartent, de plus en plus, l'une de l'autre. Elles s'écarteront, de plus en plus, l'une de l'autre. Comme deux hommes qui, partis de la Porte de Chatillon, s'achemineraient, sans trop bien connaître le chemin, avec de fréquents arrêts pour se donner du courage, l'un vers la Rue Champ-de-l'Alouette, l'autre vers l'île des Cygnes. (PvV. 351)

When, after analysing the work of the elder brother, he comes to the subject of Geer's painting, Beckett comments that "c'est un passage difficile":

Il serait préférable de ne pas s'exposer à ces deux façons de voir et de peindre, le même jour. Du moins dans les premiers temps. (PvV. 353)

So absolutely distinct are the two ways of seeing and of painting that two distinct types of aesthetic are necessary for them - and to use both types in one day is extremely difficult. The difference between the two brothers is a matter of style, but it is not only a matter of style:

L'analyse de cette divergence, si elle n'explique rien, aidera peut-être à situer les deux oeuvres, l'un vis-à-vis l'autre. Elle pourra éclairer notamment l'écart qu'ils accusent au point de vue style, écart dont il importe de pénétrer le sens profond si l'on veut éviter d'y fonder une confrontation toute en surface. On ne saurait trop y insister. (PvV. 354)

If the profound meaning of this difference in style, he is saying, is ignored or underemphasised, we will fail to realise how great is the gulf separating the two.

This gulf is, in fact, as wide as that which separates the individual caught in the Dives-Lazarus dilemma (in Time), of the total impossibility of a real identification of subject and object, from the individual who, like Proust, has found an extratemporal salvation which momentarily cancels the dilemma and allows of real satisfaction. Whenever we write

about or discuss these two we tend to take sides: it is perhaps impossible not to, so fundamental are the issues raised. And when we take one side we realise, in our inability at the time to even comprehend the other point of view, how totally distinct they are, and how exclusive. On the one side is chaos, meaninglessness, and confusion; on the other is order, meaning, and clarity. On the one side is our perception of a world hurtling through time, terrifyingly, beautifully, and our perception of ourselves as impotent, insignificant specks on an infinite horizon; on the other is our perception of what is constant, essential, and permanent, and our perception of ourselves as capable of understanding that and of grasping it.

At some eras in history this opposition has been expressed as the difference between appearance and reality, at others as the difference between damnation and salvation, and at yet others as the difference between matter and mind (or soul). It can be seen (although these are categories not used much by Beckett) as the contrast between the romantic and the classical, or between the immanent and the transcendent, or again between the artist and the philosopher. Beckett in his aesthetics (it is not irrelevant that he should use this everyman's land that combines art with philosophy as his means of discursive expression) uses the terms chaos (or mess, confusion, mystery, consternation) and form. If the locked door to his work is ever to be glimpsed at in this study, it must be through an attempt to see how the form and the chaos are related to habit and spontaneity and to each other in his work. We cannot do this by taking sides and blinding ourselves to the half - one - of his worlds: we must do it by setting aside beliefs and by looking at the shape of the ideas he uses.

### Contradictions

Beginning by insisting strenuously on the importance of not confusing the work of Bram van Velde with that of Geer van Velde, Beckett proceeds, in "La Peinture des van Velde...", to insist equally strenuously on the similarities between the "deux séries de choses, absolument distinctes" (PvV. 351). These two men's work, which lead away from each other as surely as those men walking across Paris in diametrically opposite directions, are at the same time heading for

the same horizon:

Il importe ensuite d'en bien saisir les rapports. Qu'ils se ressemblent, deux hommes qui marche vers le même horizon, au milieu de tant de couchés, d'assis et de transportés en commun. (PvV. 351) 40

After describing Bram as having found, "dans le noir", an experience of tranquillity, and after writing that in Geer's painting "le temps galope, il l'éperonne avec une sorte de frénésie de Faust à rebours" (PvV. 353), Beckett continues:

Avec cela c'est une peinture [Geer's] d'un calme et d'une douceur extraordinaires. Décidément je n'en comprends rien. Elle ne fait pas de bruit. Celle de A. van Velde fait un bruit très caractérisé, celui de la porte qui claque au loin, le petit bruit sourd qu'on vient de faire claquer à l'arracher du mur.

Deux oeuvres en somme qui semble se réfuter, mais qui en fait se rejoignent au coeur du dilemme, celui même des arts plastiques: Comment représenter le changement? (PvV. 353. )

Elements of the peacefulness characteristic of Bram's art are thus also relevant to Geer's, and elements of the disturbance characteristic of Geer's art are also relevant to Bram's.

Beckett's insistence on full understanding of the difference between the two works is thus followed by the opposite insistence, that "les deux choses devaient rester associées" (PvV. 353)

The relationship between what Beckett sees the two painters each representing - and at the same time the lack of relationship - is identical to how he uses opposites in all his discursive writings and, as I will show, in his fictions also. Beckett is using these two brothers in order to express his own aesthetics: the question of what they see themselves as doing or of what they intend to do in their art is, in the final analysis, irrelevant. Beckett concludes his discussion of their work by saying:

Il n'a d'ailleurs été question à aucun moment de ce que font ces peintres, ou croient faire, ou veulent faire, mais uniquement de ce que je les vois faire. (PvV. 354)

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40. This comment seems to have certain interesting implications as regards Beckett's most recent extended piece of prose fiction, The Lost Ones, in which four kinds of creatures are in the cylinder<sup>40</sup>: those

This use of opposites is most clearly expressed in his analysis of the problem shared by the two painters and of the opposite ways in which each attempts to cope with that problem. The problem, in both cases, is that of representing change. For each it is impossible.

Pour le peintre, la chose est impossible. C'est d'ailleurs de la représentation de cette impossibilité que la peinture moderne a tiré une bonne partie de ses meilleurs effets. (PW. 354)

If change cannot be represented, what remains that does allow of representation?

Il leur reste, à l'un [Geer] la chose qui subit, la chose que est changée; à l'autre [Bram] la chose qui inflige, la chose qui fait changer. (PW. 354.)

Each has chosen one half of the equation that cannot be stated in its entirety, at least not on canvas. Beckett expresses this again in a later article on the two brothers, "Peintres de l'Empêchement":

Que reste-t-il de représentable si l'essence de l'objet est de se dérober à la représentation?

Il reste à représenter les conditions de cette dérobade. Elles prendront l'une ou l'autre de deux formes, selon le sujet.

L'un dira: Je ne peux voir l'objet pour le représenter, parce qu'il est ce qu'il est. L'autre: Je ne peux voir l'objet, pour le représenter, parce que je suis ce que je suis.

Il y a toujours eu ces deux sortes d'artiste, ces deux sortes d'empêchement, l'empêchement-objet et l'empêchement-œil. Mais ces empêchements, on en tenait compte. Il y avait accommodation. Ils ne faisaient pas partie de la représentation, ou à peine. Ici ils en font partie. On dirait la plus grande partie. Est peint ce qui empêche de peindre.

Geer van Velde est un artiste de la première sorte (à mon chancelant avis), Bram van Velde de la seconde.

Leur peinture est l'analyse d'un état de privation, analyse empruntant chez l'un les termes du dehors, la lumière et le vide, chez l'autre ceux du dedans, l'obscurité, le plein, la phosphorescence. (PE. 7)

The fundamental theme common to all Beckett's criticism that can explain the contradictions within it is the theme of absolute opposition between contrary forces that are, at the same time, related and

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40. (cont.) that are searching (perpetually in motion), those who sometimes pause, those who seldom move unless forced to (the sedentary), and those who never move (the non-searchers). See pp. 13-14, The Lost Ones, Calder and Boyars, London, 1972.

interdependent. Beckett has identified (Bram van Velde's) art with clarity, and he has asserted that art has nothing whatever to do with clarity; he has explained how an artist can function only when he leaps beyond the constraints of Time (Proust, and Bram van Velde in *PvW*), and he has referred to Time as "le seul, le grand positif" (*PvW*. 353); he has praised the painting of a painter who has managed to discover the fixity, the dark, where he can blink peacefully, and also praised that of a painter in whose painting nothing is still, or fixed; he has admired the exploration of the inner life (Bram van Velde in *PvW*) and also that of the outer ("le macrocosme secoué par les frissons du temps" *PvW*. 353). It may be that not all of these are opposites, but Beckett sees them as such. So too, it may be that they are not all even conceivably related, but again it is necessary to stick to what Beckett says about them, for only thus will it be possible to grasp what he is doing with the concepts he uses.

Perhaps the most crucial of Beckett's contradictions is one which has not yet been mentioned. In the last of the "Dialogues with Georges Duthuit", Beckett writes of the incoercible absence of relation and of how he himself and, he thinks, Bram van Velde, have not, after recognising that incoercibility, turned it into a new term of relation. What this means is that Beckett sees himself and van Velde as not making the absence of relation between subject and object into a new object. To do that would be to make art expressive again, even if only of the impossibility of expressing anything. Earlier in this dialogue Duthuit suggests that van Velde is perhaps expressing the impossibility of expression, and Beckett replies: "No more ingenious method could be devised for restoring him, safe and sound, to the bosom of Saint Luke. But let us, for once, be foolish enough not to turn tail. All have turned wisely tail, before the ultimate penury..." (*DGD*. III. 122). This can be seen as a direct disagreement between Beckett's own views and those explained in connection with Proust, whose mystic salvation depends on an essential and real relationship between subject and object. The story does not end here, however. In "Peintres de l'Empêchement" Beckett writes:

A partir de ce moment il reste trois chemins que la peinture peut prendre. Le chemin du retour à la vieille naïveté, à travers l'hiver

de son abandon, le chemin des repentis. Puis le chemin qui n'en est plus un, mais une dernière tentative de vivre sur le pays conquis. Et enfin le chemin en avant d'une peinture qui se soucie aussi peu d'une convention périmée que des hiératismes et préciosités des enquêtes superflues, peinture d'acceptation, entrevoyant dans l'absence de rapport et dans l'absence d'objet le nouveau rapport et le nouvel objet, chemin qui bifurque déjà, dans les travaux de Bram et de Geer van Velde. (PE. 7)

This is directly contradictory with what he said one year later in the "Dialogues".<sup>41</sup> How can we, as Beckett himself asked in a different context, make sense of this division? Perhaps it will help to go back to the context in which Beckett asked - and answered - the question.

If life and death did not both present themselves to us, there would be no inscrutability. If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable. Take Augustine's doctrine of grace given and grace withheld: have you pondered the dramatic qualities in this theology? Two thieves are crucified with Christ, one saved and the other damned. How can we make sense of this division? In classical drama, such problems do not arise. The destiny of Racine's Phèdre is sealed from the beginning: she will proceed into the dark. As she goes, she herself will be illuminated. At the beginning of the play she has partial illumination and at the end she has complete illumination, but there has been no question but that she moves toward the dark. That is the play. Within this notion clarity is possible, but for us who are neither Greek nor Jansenist there is no such clarity. The question would also be removed if we believed in the contrary - total salvation. But when we have both light and dark we have also the inexplicable. The key word in my plays is 'perhaps'...<sup>42</sup>

The answer is the only answer possible to what was obviously a rhetorical question: we cannot make sense of the division. The same applies to the divisions we have found in Beckett's own 'theology': it is impossible to make sense out of two total contraries existing

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41. The last of the "Dialogues" was reprinted in a slightly abridged form (and not in dialogue form) as Beckett's contribution (dated 1949), in French, in Bram van Velde, op. cit. The French text shows how close the terminology used is to what was said in "Peintres de l'Empêchement": "Je n'ignore pas qu'il ne nous manque plus maintenant, pour amener cette horrible affaire à une conclusion acceptable, que de faire de cette soumission, de cette acceptation, de cette fidélité à l'échec, une nouvelle occasion, un nouveau terme de rapport, et de cet acte impossible et nécessaire un acte expressif, ne serait-ce que de soi-même, de son impossibilité, de sa nécessité. Et ne pouvant aller jusque là je sais que je me place, et avec moi peut-être un innocent, dans une situation peu enviable". (BvV. 14-15; italics added).

42. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.

side by side. Here we have the inexplicable in Beckett's discursive writings.

In his earlier reference to Augustine's doctrine, during his interview with Harold Hobson, Beckett had no interest in the intellectual puzzle inherent in it or in the problem it poses when it comes to choosing whether to believe in salvation or to believe in damnation: what mattered about the doctrine was, he said, the shape of the ideas Augustine expressed.<sup>43</sup>

Not only can we see how each of the contradictions found in Beckett's criticism may be linked with the opposition between salvation and damnation, we can also see how, if we abstract the question of belief, of what Beckett believes, the problems of how sense can be made of the division becomes, in each case, the problem of understanding the shape of Beckett's ideas.

When the difference between what Beckett says about Bram and about Geer van Velde is seen in the light of the salvation/damnation terminology used in Proust<sup>44</sup> it is easy to see the connection between this division and the division expressed by Augustine. Salvation, in Proust, is identical to the discovery of fixity, timelessness, clarity and peace that Bram van Velde is seen, in "La Peinture des van Velde", as having made. Damnation, in Proust, is identical to the failure or inability to find this extratemporal reality. Beckett admires Geer van Velde for concerning himself only with the things of Time. Similarly the empathy Beckett feels with both the van Veldes in "Peintres de l'Empêchement", where he sees them both as creating a new relationship between subject and object out of the ashes of the defunct relationship, can be seen as connected to the Proustian salvation (which depends on the existence of a real relationship between - indeed on the identification of - subject and object). And the empathy he feels with Bram van Velde in the dialogue about him, where he admires the painter's in-

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43. Harold Hobson, "Samuel Beckett: Dramatist of the Year", loc. cit.

44. Time, Beckett writes in Proust, is a "double-headed monster of damnation and salvation" (P. 1) - and salvation is "the one compensation and miracle of evasion tolerated" by the "tyranny"

ability to recreate any relationship is further akin to damnation in Proust.

If we take Beckett seriously when he says that he is interested in the shape of ideas even when he does not believe in them, and I consider this should be taken seriously, we are not forced to conclude that Beckett has no beliefs, but only that beliefs are not his main concern in his work. I will, therefore, refrain from trying to make what in any case must be a totally arbitrary judgement about whether or not Beckett believes in the kind of salvation he discusses in Proust and (as far as Bram only is concerned) in "La Peinture des van Velde...", and again (regarding both brothers) in "Peintres de l'Empêchement". What I will do instead is to point out that to think of Beckett in terms of belief is misleading as far as his own expressed intentions and interests are concerned, and to suggest that we cannot even begin to understand the divisions and contradictions, in his writings if we choose one side of the coin and forget the rest. I use 'the rest', as opposed to 'the other' on purpose for it is a question of 'the rest' - as in the old Chinese riddle about the difference between one hand clapping and two hands clapping, the point is that to admit only one side is to deny more than just a half. There is no clapping without two hands, and there is no coin without two sides: the junction of the two is more than just the sum of the two taken separately. To single out what Beckett says about salvation in Proust (where he is writing about Proust, who does believe in the possibility of salvation), and to ignore the countersuggestions found in others of Beckett's critical writings, is to grasp less than the half of Beckett's meaning. The same is true of anyone who singles out the statements made in "Bram van Velde" (the dialogue) to show Beckett's rejection of salvation in favour of damnation, ignoring what is said in Proust and elsewhere. Both must be taken into consideration, and the result is as inexplicable as the clapping that results when

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44. (cont.) of Time (and habit and voluntary memory): "This accidental and fugitive salvation in the midst of life may supervene when the action of involuntary memory is stimulated by the negligence or agony of habit, and under no other circumstances, nor necessarily then. (P. 22)



the silent left hand hits the silent right hand. It is also of infinitely greater value: "two birds in the bush are of infinitely greater value than one in the hand." (P. 16)

It was relatively easy for us to accept that we must cope with both life and death, both dark and light, and both damnation and salvation. It was even relatively easy to accept both form and content and both order and chaos. Those were abstractions. It is, however, somewhat more difficult for us to overcome our resistance to the actual contradictions discovered in various of Beckett's critical articles. The idea of mutually contradictory opposites is beginning to acquire a power and an inexplicability that are not fully appreciated when they are merely conceptualised.

In terms of the shape of ideas, the similarity between the various pairs of opposites that have been our main concern up to this point is remarkable. Habit is related to spontaneity as

form : content

as

order : chaos (mess, confusion, mystery)

as

new relation : fidelity to incoercible absence  
(in Proust, of relationship between subject  
PE, etc.) and object (in DGD III)

as

Bram van Velde : Geer van Velde  
(in PvV) (in PvV)

as

salvation : damnation

as

peace : disturbance

as

clarity : lack of clarity

as

Dives : Lazarus

as

dark : light

as

boredom : suffering

This list can go on: silence is to sound as sense is to nonsense, as microcosm is to macrocosm, and as extratemporal is to temporal experience, etc.

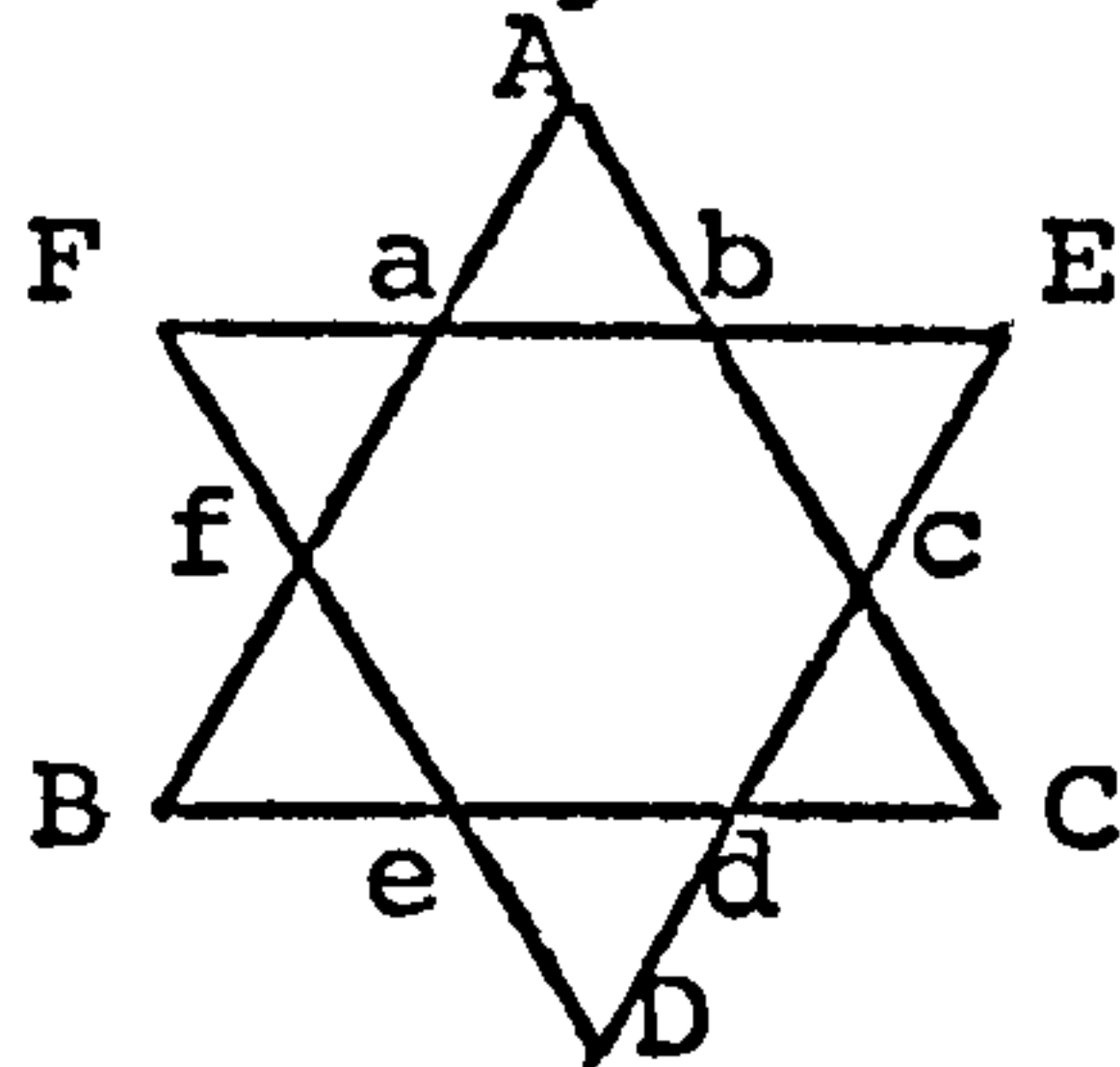
These pairs are similar only in terms of the relationship existing between each of the opposites. The type of relationship existing between form and content, for example, is similar to that existing between habit and spontaneity, but form cannot be identified with habit, nor content with spontaneity. We have here, to use a phrase Beckett used in another context, an "identity made up of cathexes not only multivalent but interchangeable" (DD. 291).<sup>45</sup> It is quite possible that form might be a habit. This appears to be the basis for Beckett's criticism of classical art: gesturing towards the Madeleine in Paris, Beckett told Driver, "This does not allow the mystery to invade us. With classical art, all is settled. But ~~it~~<sup>it</sup> is different at Chartres. There is the unexplainable, and there art raises questions that it does not attempt to answer".<sup>46</sup> Equally it is possible that the chaos that Beckett feels should be the content of art can be a habit if we wallow in mystery and make a dogma out of inexplicability. The same kind of interchangeability or relativism applies to all the other pairs of opposites. Though habit may stand in the same kind of relationship to spontaneity as silence to sound, the experience of silence may be either habitual or spontaneous (as may be the experience of sound); light (or dark) may clarify or it may not; life (or death) may mean salvation or damnation; the microcosm (or the macrocosm) may produce the experience of sense or of nonsense. When, following one concept through all its possible meanings, we look at more than merely the interrelationships between two pairs of opposites, we are confronted with infinite regression: form may mean either habit or spontaneity which in turn may mean either peace or disturbance, either salvation or damnation, either dark or light, either silence or sound, etc. The opposite of this is to look at these concepts not in either-or terms but rather in both-and terms. Silence may be both peaceful and disturbing, as

45. To illustrate this, Beckett quotes Devlin's poem, "Est Prodest":  
the "multiply netting/ of lives distinct and wrangling/ Each  
knot all other's potential" (DD. 291).

46. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.

may sound. Instead of infinite regression we then have: form may mean both habit and spontaneity, which in turn may mean both clarity and lack of clarity, which again may mean both peace and disturbance, both salvation and damnation, both dark and light, both silence and sound, etc. Analysis (and/or synthesis) of Beckett's opposites can easily become tedious and ridiculous.

Beckett himself on one occasion in his discursive writings did indulge in this kind of exercise. In "Les Deux Besoins" he discusses the permutations and (/or!) combinations of the two kinds of need, which he even goes so far as to represent graphically:



Besoin d'avoir besoin (DEF) et besoin dont on a besoin (ABC), conscience du besoin d'avoir besoin (ab) et conscience du besoin dont on a besoin - dont on avait besoin (de), issue du chaos de vouloir voir (Aab) et entrée dans le néant d'avoir vu (Dde), déclenchement et fin de l'autologie créatrice (abodef), voilà par exemple une façon comme une autre d'indiquer les limites entre lesquelles l'artiste se met à la question, se met en question, se résout en questions, en questions rhétoriques sans fonction oratoire. (DB. 2)

This passage is, characteristically, prefaced with "falsifions davantage", and the diagram is afterwards referred to as a "dodécaèdre régulier, trop régulier". The shape of Beckett's ideas can clearly not be represented in this way, complex though it undoubtedly is, and the fact that Beckett used it (presumably because it was the closest approximation he could think of) in spite of what he recognised as its falsity, may well give us leave to doubt that a diagram can adequately represent the shape of his ideas. Some of what he says elsewhere in this article may, however, help us understand what kind of relationship exists between one and, since they are all similarly related, all of the pairs of opposites.

The artist, Beckett writes in "Les Deux Besoins", never ceases devoting himself to "la monotone centralité de ce qu'un chacun veut, pense, fait et souffre, de ce qu'un chacun est" (DB. 1) and it is

impossible to talk about this "centralité" or "foyer" or, indeed, about any substantial entity, without falsifying the idea of it. Beckett chooses, faute de mieux, to call it need, one kind of need. Those who are not artists, those countless individuals who are sanctimonious and sane in spirit ("les innombrables béats et sains d'esprit" DB.1) are not aware of this need: "ils ne laisser /sic/ rien monter chez eux qui puisse compromettre la solidité des planchers" (DB. 1). These individuals live as vegetables, they live in the only way possible, namely through a completely different kind of need:

C'est à l'exclusion de grand besoin, sur lui si j'ose dire, qu'ils vaquent aux petits. D'où cette vie toute en marge de son principe, cette vie faite de décisions, de satisfactions, de réponses, de menus besoins assassinés, cette vie de plante à la croisée, de choux pensant et même bien pensant, la seule vie possible pour ceux qui se voient dans la nécessité d'en mener une, c'est à dire la seule vie possible. (DB. 1-2)

These 'thinking cabbages' exist through the need that is the need Beckett characterised in "Denis Devlin" as the need of Dives, habitual need - "solution clapped on to problem like a snuffer on a candle" (DD. 290). This is not only the only kind of life that is possible for human beings, it is also a life that is entirely marginal to the very principle of life. That principle is the great need that artists concern themselves with (DB.1), and the connection between it and the need of Lazarus is clear: Beckett describes Lazarus in "Denis Devlin" as "the need to need", and here, in "Les Deux Besoins", he uses the same expression of this fundamental need which is "besoin d'avoir besoin" (DB.2). It is the result of the two, Dives and Lazarus, combined, that somehow produced art: "Deux besoins, dont le produit fait l'art" (DB. 2).<sup>47</sup>

Beckett emphasises that we should not give pride of place either to the one or the other of these needs:

Qu'on se garde bien d'y voir un primaire et un secondaire...  
Préférer l'un des testicules à l'autre ce serait aller sur les  
platebandes de la métaphysique. (DB. 2)

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47. Cf. also the diagram re-drawn on p. 66 and the subsequent text, which show how the limits within which the artist functions are composed of interrelations between the need to need (Lazarus) and the need that is needed (Dives).

The two different kinds of needs are equal in stature. Beckett then, after 'falsifying further' with the help of the dodecahedron, discusses a subject that he was to come back to in the third of his dialogues with Duthuit and in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women": the "somber secret" (DB. 3) of the Pythagoreans that the diagonal of a right-angled triangle is incommensurable with the other two sides.

Côté et diagonale, les deux besoins, les deux essences, l'être qui est besoin et la nécessité où il est de l'être, enfer d'irraison d'où s'élève le cri à blanc, la série de questions pures, l'oeuvre. (DB. 3)<sup>48</sup>

Art, like the right-angled triangle, is a construction based on incommensurables. We can call these incommensurables two kinds of needs - "c'est une façon comme une autre" - as Beckett does in "Les Deux Besoins", or we can call them by any of the other names used in other reviews and articles for similarly connected opposites. What is important is the recognition that Beckett is in all cases concerned with a symbiosis of opposites. The names are relevant only to the extent that they conveniently signal that this is indeed a symbiosis of totally contradictory entities. Discussing Dives and Lazarus, the names for the two needs in "Denis Devlin", Beckett stresses the importance equally of the unbridgeable gulf dividing them and of the necessary connection between them:

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48. The passage continues: "Dodecaèdre régulier, trop régulier, suivant les dimensions duquel l'infortuné Tout-puissant se serait proposé d'arranger les quatre éléments, signature de Pythagore, divine figure dont la construction dépend d'un irrationnel, à savoir l'incommensurabilité de la diagonale de carré avec le côté, sujet sans nombre et sans personne. N'est-ce pas pour avoir trahi ce sombre secret que Hippasos a péri avant terme, lynché par la meute d'adeptes affamés, vierges et furibonds dans un égout public?" (DB. 3).

In "Bram van Velde" Beckett writes that "the history of painting... is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure... with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature" (DGD III. 125); and in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" he uses the idea of a "Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect" as a criticism of the procedure used by most novelists (D. 8), and he further describes Belacqua as an "incommensurate demiurge" (D. 112).

See Appendix for an outline of the meaning of the term incommensurable and of its connection with the Pythagoreans.

The Dives-Lazarus symbiosis, as intimate as that of fungoid and algoid in lichen (to adopt the Concise New Oxford Dictionary example). Here scabs, lucre, etc., there torment, bosom, etc., but both here and there gulf. The absurdity, here or there, of either without the other, the inaccessible other. In death they did not cease to be divided. Who predeceased? A painful period for both. (DD. 290-291) 49

What the dictionary in fact says <sup>is</sup> in that "according to modern theory a lichen consists of a fungus and an alga symbiotically united". Out of the symbiosis of Dives and Lazarus is created a new thing, different from either: the work of art.

In "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", Beckett writes that we should not concern ourselves with attempting to choose between "any pair of large contrary human factors": to do that would be to choose between Paradise ("the static lifelessness of unrelieved immaculation") and Hell ("the static lifelessness of unrelieved viciousness"). We should, rather, concern ourselves with the problem of the conjunction of these contraries in what Beckett, again using Dante's word, calls Purgatory. Beckett considers that Joyce's work is purgatorial in this sense: "in the absolute absence of the absolute"; that Joyce is not concerned with the conditions of static lifelessness, whether of Hell or of Paradise, but with "this earth, that is Purgatory", with the "flood of movement and vitality released by the conjunction of these two elements", with "resistance" against the currently dominant of the contraries, and with its "explosion" (DBV 21-22).

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49. The source of this "Gospel conte cruel", as Beckett calls it (DD. 291), is Luke 16:19-26: There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said Father Abraham have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence."

"Dives" (the name commonly attributed to the unnamed rich man) is a Latin adjective meaning rich or wealthy, and Lazarus is the paradigm

Resistance Against the Currently Dominant Contrary

It may be objected that though a flood of movement and vitality may apply to Joyce's work, it seems far removed from the decaying worlds of Beckett's, as does the idea of symbiosis, the creation of a new thing, and explosion. This is true, but it doesn't mean that these ideas are irrelevant to Beckett's art. An indication of why these ideas are important even though they are absent from Beckett's works can be found by comparing the passage from "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" more carefully with what has already been established about Beckett's own consistently held views on the subject of contraries.

In Joyce's work, Beckett writes"

There is a continuous purgatorial process at work, in the sense that the vicious circle of humanity is being achieved, and this achievement depends on the recurrent predomination of one of two broad qualities... On this earth that is Purgatory, Vice and Virtue - which you may take to mean any pair of large contrary human factors - must in turn be purged down to spirits of rebelliousness. Then the dominant crust of the Vicious or Virtuous sets, resistance is provided, the explosion duly takes place, and the machine proceeds. And no more than this; neither prize nor penalty; simply a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail. (DBV. 22)

Over a particular period of time we may have made a habit of Vice. Our Vicious habit can only perpetuate its dominance over our existence if it can successfully blind us to everything that is inconsistent with the worldview we have while under Vice's control. Virtue is thus a potential threat to our current Vicious habit. Under some circumstances beyond our control, Virtue will invade us, and it may happen that our Vicious habit dies and we are, for a moment, spontaneous. When the period of transition ends, a new habit of Virtue has formed. In time that habit of Virtue will itself give way to spontaneity and ultimately to a new habit of Vice. The machine proceeds.

When we are creatures of Vice, an awareness of Virtue is directly at odds with our (Vicious) habit and is thus equivalent to spontaneity: it is spontaneous for us to be aware of Virtue if our habit opposes such

49. (cont.) of the beggar, the poor man, the leper. In "Bram van Velde" Beckett mentions the "antithesis possession-poverty" as one of the ways in which he has tried to express himself (DGD III, 123).

awareness. However, as soon as our new habit of Virtue forms ("the dominant crust" of the Virtuous "sets") it is clearly no longer Virtue that has the potential to threaten us: an awareness of Vice is now equivalent to spontaneity.

Thus, while our existence is dominated by one particular habit, the contrary of that habit is what can threaten us. When Marcel was used to a low ceiling, it was a high ceiling that could torture him.

Habit and spontaneity are themselves a pair of contraries that are mutually ousted from positions of dominance. In the case of Vice and Virtue, Beckett is saying that each must in turn replace the other. That this is also true of habit and spontaneity themselves is consistent with the analysis of the behaviour of habit and spontaneity in Proust: a habit forms and becomes the dominant contrary, shutting out spontaneous perception; spontaneity can intervene, cause the death of habit, and initiate a period of transition; and the brief dominance of the terrifying and beautiful experience of spontaneity will then come to an end with the re-formation of habit. In Proust; moreover, Beckett echoes the implications of the "neither prize nor penalty" phrase when he writes of the "pendulum" oscillating between habit (the "boredom of living") and spontaneity (the "suffering of being"): "Considered as a progression, this endless series of renovations leaves us as indifferent as the heterogeneity of any one of its terms" (P. 16).

Elsewhere Beckett shows that he is by no means indifferent to the explosion that takes place when contraries conjoin and a previously dominant quality of solidity gives way to its opposite. Reviewing Sean O'Casey's Windfalls, he says:

Mr. O'Casey is a master of knockabout in this very serious and honourable sense - that he discerns the principle of disintegration in even the most complacent solidities, and activates it to their explosion... If "Juno and the Paycock", as seems likely, is his best work so far, it is because it communicates most fully this dramatic dehiscence, mind and world come asunder in irreparable dissociation".<sup>50</sup>

This, Beckett feels, is the essential O'Casey. Beside this the poems in

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50. "The Essential and the Incidental", op. cit., p. 11. The reference to disintegration recalls "La Peinture des van Velde...", where Geer van Velde is described as painting the interior of a stone a millionth of a second before its disintegration (PvV 353), and the reference to complacent solidities recalls the "solidity of the floorboards" on which the petty needs of Dives are satisfied (DB 1).



Windfalls are, he says, "like the model palace of a dynamiter's leisure moments".

Perhaps the reason why Beckett is not indifferent in this case is that here he is not considering the series of renovations as a series (or as a progression), that here he is isolating one such renovation and considering it valuable: in Proust, too, the victory of spontaneity over habit is considered valuable ("the maximum value of our being is restored" P. 9) when such victories are not viewed as a progression. This would also explain the importance he attaches to a single renovation in the interview with Tom Driver"

The confusion is not my intention. We cannot listen to a conversation for five minutes without being acutely aware of the confusion. It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess.<sup>51</sup>

The terminology used here is similar to that in Proust, where the suffering of being, spontaneity, is described as opening a window on the real and where the alternation/conjunction of habit and spontaneity is described as renovation (P. 16). What he is saying to Driver is, in other words, that the only chance we have now is to let our habit of ignoring confusion (and of distorting reality to fit in with our comfortable preconceptions) die and be superseded for a moment by spontaneity, which will restore the maximum value of our being. The crucial word is now. Beckett seems to be saying that a particular habit of shutting out confusion is now in a dominant position, and hope for renovation now means hope that spontaneity will briefly come to the fore. The concepts of habit and spontaneity are here clearly being used in a much wider sense than is the case in Proust: they are being used to apply to the contemporary historical situation rather than only to isolated individuals. It is thus possible to interpret Beckett as saying that a habit of shutting out confusion is in a dominant position and that hope for our individual and/or collective renovation now means hope that our spontaneity will come to the fore, letting confusion in: a terrifying (and enchanting?) prospect.

One possible objection to this interpretation is that the view Beckett expressed to Driver in 1961 is not necessarily related to the ideas

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51. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.

expressed in the early articles on Proust, the van Veldes, etc. It might specifically be objected that this implies that one contrary is being preferred to the other in Beckett's comments to Driver, and that this is inconsistent with his insistence, in "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" and in "Les Deux Besoins", on not choosing between any pair of large contrary human factors. A brief review of some of the points made in this chapter should show that these objections are not valid.

Of the two contrary kinds of aesthetics expounded in Beckett's discursive writings and in his comments on his own work, one may be broadly identified with what he writes of Bram van Velde in "La Peinture des van Velde..." (or of the Proustian extratemporal salvation), and the other with what he writes of Geer van Velde in that same essay (or of the Proustian dilemma in Time). The former aesthetic stresses the value of fixity, calm, peace and clarity; the latter the value of flux, disturbance, threat and the impossibility of clarity. There is no reason to view either of these as superior to the other, and there is no reason to view either as absolutely or intrinsically preferable to the other: Beckett refuses to engage in the kind of metaphysical speculation that such a preference would imply. The reason for this refusal on his part is, I would suggest, that the contraries are paradoxically not only mutually exclusive but also interlinked: Geer's frenetic painting is uncannily still, and Bram's tranquil painting conveys the sound of a door shutting. To choose one as being intrinsically preferable to the other is thus impossible, since the one reveals traces of what is most characteristic of the other.

The same applies to habit and spontaneity. The characteristics of the creature of habit that are most frequently mentioned in Proust are boredom and security, both of which result from habit's function as a shield protecting the creature from anything that might disrupt his peace of mind. The ability to "blink peacefully" is attributed to Bram van Velde. Bram van Velde is, however, in Beckett's opinion an extraordinarily fine artist, and it is spontaneity that is the main condition of the artistic experience. Peacefulness is thus not necessarily identifiable with habit. This being the case, an absence of peacefulness cannot necessarily be identified with spontaneity. Beckett writes disparagingly of Rilke's Poems as having "the fidgets", a "disorder" which, although it may very well give rise to poetry of a high order (as with the best of Rilke), does

not have this effect in the poems being considered.<sup>52</sup> While thus always insisting that both of any two contraries must be considered at once, and that to prefer one to the other is to engage in metaphysical speculation, Beckett has at the same time repeatedly stressed the spontaneous side of the coin. The reason for this is, I think, that he feels spontaneity is usually underemphasised if not completely ignored.

In "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" he discusses the interdependence of form and content and writes of "Work in Progress" that "here form is content, content is form". At the same time, however, he recognises that many readers of "Work in Progress" are disturbed by Joyce's form, by his "direct expression", since they prefer to be able to comprehend content almost without bothering with the form (DBV 13). Under these conditions, the hope that readers will come to appreciate Joyce's achievement must be linked primarily with the hope that they will appreciate the form he has used: there is clearly no danger that the content will be ignored.

Similarly, in "Denis Devlin", Beckett writes of Dives and Lazarus:

As between these two, the need that in its haste to be abolished cannot pause to be stated and the need that is the absolute predicament of particular human identity, one does not of course presume to suggest a relation of worth. Yet the distinction is perhaps not idle, for it is from the failure to make it that proceeds the common rejection as 'obscure' of most that is significant in modern music, painting and literature. (DD. 289-290)

The words that Beckett uses to describe Dives and Lazarus both here and in "Les Deux Besoins",<sup>53</sup> and the ways in which he writes about habit and spontaneity in Proust<sup>54</sup> show that he does always retain a preference of some kind for Lazarus and spontaneity: he is acknowledging the current dominance of their contraries, i.e. of Dives and habit, and providing the "resistance" mentioned in "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce". The importance of

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52. Review of Poems by Rainer Maria Rilke, op. cit., p. 706.

53. The "menus besoins" (DB 1) of Dives felt by cabbage-like creatures (DB 1) are needs that "in their haste to be abolished cannot pause to be stated" (DD 289), while the "grand besoin" (DB 1) of Lazarus felt by artists (DB 1) is "the need that is the absolute predicament of particular human identity" (DD. 289).

54. "Habit is the ballast that chains the dog to his vomit" (P. 8), and "the pernicious devotion of habit paralyses our attention" (P. 9), while "the maximum value of our being is restored" (P. 9) when we are free of habit, and it is "the best of our many selves that is stored out of reach of habit". (P. 18)

opening our eyes, of spontaneous perception, is not inconsistent with the double-barrelled aesthetics outlined above, but is rather complementary to it.

This conditioned preference for spontaneity seems to imply that Beckett feels people today are in general creatures of habit. Of course this is true of nearly all times and places, but does it justify us in thinking that Beckett considers spontaneity intrinsically preferable to habit? Under different conditions, such as those perhaps of a revolutionary period, an invasion from another planet, or any other disorienting event inaugurating a period of transition, Beckett might conceivably feel that the formation of a new habit would be preferable to spontaneity, if only because this would enable the "machine" to proceed again: if habit does not re-emerge, there is only death. This, however, is speculation, since Beckett nowhere discusses the dominance of disruptive conditions, and it must remain doubtful whether spontaneity is intrinsically preferable.

As he shows a preference, at least under prevailing conditions, for spontaneity rather than habit, so too he shows a preference for any characteristic that is, at least at a particular time and under particular circumstances, experienced spontaneously. There is no way of defining what such characteristics might be except by examining the situation prevailing at the time. Thus if we are currently habituated to having noise - maybe a radio playing or a clock ticking - in the background while we work, we will find silence profoundly disorienting and may thus experience silence spontaneously. The opposite is true, and we may experience sound spontaneously, if we are currently used to silence. Beckett's preferences are based on his interpretation of which of any two contraries is currently dominant: he prefers the contrary that is not dominant. This is not because of any mischievous 'contrariness', and it is not because he believes the one is intrinsically better than the other, but because he feels that it is his job, as an artist, to provide resistance against the habits dominant in his time, to awaken people to what their current habits have been denying.

This brings us to the question of what he, as a "sensitivity" rather than as a philosopher, feels is the kind of habit that is dominant today. It also leads us from what he has written about other artists to his own specific interpretation of the world he lives in. He told Driver that the only hope for renovation now is to open our eyes and see the mess, to let

the confusion in. Since the choice of words here (renovation, opening) is, as I have said, identical to that in the discussion of spontaneity in Proust, and since Beckett indicates that he is talking about a situation prevailing "now" (rather than about a permanent human condition), I have concluded that he considers our current habit to be of such a type that it puts a premium on order, clarity and serenity, shielding us from an awareness of the mess, confusion, and consternation. This does not mean that he considers confusion any more real or true than order, but only that, given the prevailing circumstances, he feels we can experience spontaneity only if we experience confusion.

Driver also reports Beckett as saying that it is the task of the artist now to find a form that accommodates the mess, that manages to express confusion without annulling the power that confusion has to disturb. And Shenker reports him as saying that, while consternation is in Kafka's form, consternation is behind the form in his own work. Form, which has always been the hallmark of art, is the very opposite of chaos, and yet chaos must be the artist's concern today. Somehow the artist must accommodate chaos in his form by making us aware of what lies behind the form. Identifying spontaneity here with chaos and the mess, Beckett thus appears to be saying that he has tried to accommodate spontaneity by allowing it to threaten the formal order from which it is excluded.

Another possible objection to the interpretation offered above in connection with the hope of renovation is that it seems to turn Beckett into an artist with a mission, a kind of revolutionary of the spirit distributing leaflets among the cabbages at the crossroads, to urge them to change their ways and allow their old habits to die so that renovation can take place. My interpretation does not imply this. Beckett does not urge us to do anything. All I am saying is that, judging for the moment only by the aesthetics, there seems no reason to deny that Beckett sees, and thinks artists should act upon, the necessity of providing resistance against our current habit. David H. Hesla has written:

"Suffering", said Beckett in Proust, "opens a window on the real", and he expands the phrase "suffering of being" to mean "the free play of every faculty". In the light of these comments, Beckett's mission can be seen as the attempt to awaken man to the grim facts about his life. And what he said in Proust he only repeated to Tom Driver some twenty years later: "The confusion is not my intention... It is all around us and our only chance now is to let in it. The only chance of renovation is to open

our eyes and see the mess." 55

While I would not only hesitate to equate the reality of which we are aware when we are not creatures of habit with "grim facts" about our lives (reality has, according to Beckett, its enchantments as well as its cruelties, P. 22, and his view of reality seems improperly understood in the idea of "facts" as used here), but would further disagree with Hesla's use of the word "mission", I do nonetheless consider that Beckett is trying to "awaken" us.

This does not imply that we have the freedom to resist our own habits of mind. Beckett gives no reason for thinking we have any such freedom. Habit is an automatic adjustment of the human organism to the conditions of its worlds (P. 9), and it is as futile to resist our habits of mind as it is to resist the urge to blink out a particle of dust. There seems to be no doubt about this lack of freedom even though we are composed not only of habitual needs but also of spontaneous ones, even though our existence is not determined solely by the automatic adjustments made by habit. Certainly we also need to be disturbed and enchanted because we need to confront, as well as to be protected from, reality, and spontaneity in any of its forms is certainly freedom (P. 9), but this does not mean that we can ever be free to will an end to the dominance of any particular habit. The will is necessarily a habitual mechanism ("will, the will to live, the will not to suffer, Habit" P. 29) and, as will be seen, particularly in the case of Belacqua in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women", the will to overthrow habit is just a kind of habit. Beckett makes it clear that it is always by accident (P. 54), and under certain circumstances over which we have no control (P. 4), that we experience the freedom of spontaneity. This being the case, the idea of Beckett's preference (under certain conditions) for one contrary must be understood in the sense that he likes that contrary more than the other, that he considers it better, not that he considers it an alternative that we can choose to attain.

Spontaneity is in much the same position for Beckett as grace is for a Christian: it is a dispensation.<sup>56</sup> Do not despair, wrote Augustine, one

55. David H. Hesla, The Shape of Chaos, op. cit., p. 165.

56. Beckett uses this word in Proust ("the rare dispensation of waking madness" P. 19) to describe a state of being that can be conducive to the action of (spontaneous) involuntary memory; this state of being, like spontaneity generally, is accidental in the sense that it cannot be willed.

of the thieves was saved; do not presume, one of the thieves was damned. In the same way as the awareness that human beings have no control over whether or not they will receive God's grace did not prevent Augustine from saying that the only chance was to lead a Christian life, Beckett's awareness that we have no control over whether or not we receive that rare dispensation that is the spontaneous experience of reality does not prevent him from saying that our only chance is to open our eyes to the "mess". Beckett cannot urge us to open our eyes since he recognises that we are not free to change ourselves, but he can and does consider spontaneity valuable, and he does hope that this "maximum value of our being" will be restored, that we will open our eyes, see the "mess", and be renovated. By looking for a form that accommodates the mess, he is trying to let confusion, chaos, inexplicability into art (by excluding them from any formal expression) so that those who read his novels and see his plays will find their habits of mind disturbed and threatened, and will find themselves unable, like Watt and his pot, even to articulate what bothers them to their satisfaction.

Beckett has no mission - there is no foundation of faith and no attempt (since the attempt must necessarily be doomed ) to convince us we should act in a certain way. The only hope for renovation, our only chance, is to let the confusion in: Beckett is looking towards the future, hoping for change, and unable to do anything to prompt it other than to create works of literature that tell us "how it is" and that may possibly act as one of the circumstances under which our current habit of shunning confusion may be threatened and die.

If renovation does take place it will, of course, be temporary. There can be no final solution. All that is possible is that the "machine" will proceed again, after having been stalled because of our refusal to let confusion in.

"What is more true than anything else? To swim is true, and to sink is true. One is not more true than the other".<sup>57</sup> Thus, in the interview with Driver, Beckett established the kind of opposition that he feels is invading our experience at every moment and that must be allowed in. When,

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57. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.

instead of allowing it in we admit only one of the contraries, then the hope that we will let the inscrutability of the opposition, the mess, to invade us must be tied to the hope that we will admit the other contrary. There can be no lichen if fungus grows and alga does not; and there can be no symbiosis and no flood of movement and vitality if one of the habitual contraries is consistently dominant. Both contraries are true, but when only one is admitted as being true (i.e. when a particular habit remains continuously dominant), then we do not have what Beckett calls "life on earth, that is Purgatory". That Purgatory is what he finds in Joyce's "Work in Progress". In his own writings we have, rather, the Ante-Purgatory and the prototype of all Beckett's protagonists, Belacqua, who in Dante's Purgatorio was one of the late-repentant whom Dante and Virgil meet on the lower slopes of the mountain, and who is unable to ascend into Purgatory (unless a soul in grace prays for him) until he has spent as long in Ante-Purgatory as he spent on earth.

This analysis of Beckett's aesthetics shows that it is dangerous to identify the views Beckett expresses on the Proustian extratemporal solution as adequately reflecting his own concerns. The possibility of salvation is relevant, but so too is its impossibility, and Beckett seems to feel that the latter is more in need of stress now than the former.

In what follows I use the views Beckett has expressed discursively to see what light they shed on his English fictions. Some of these views are, of course, far from unproblematical, and these will themselves be explored further in the light of what is learnt about the fictions.

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## CHAPTER II

DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLING WOMEN

"Thus little by little Belacqua may be described, but not circumscribed, his terms stated, but not summed. And of course God's will be done should one description happen to cancel the next, or the terms appear crazily spaced. His will, never ours."

Samuel Beckett, "Dream", p. 111.

In "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" Beckett tells the story of several months in the life of Belacqua, a young man living in Dublin who has no very clear means of livelihood and who divides much of his time between pursuing women, fleeing from women and all that is external to himself, and seeking a mystical experience of "gloom" that he calls Limbo. At the beginning of the novel he has just parted from his current one-and-only, the Smeraldina-Rima, an Irish girl living with her parents in Austria, and not long afterwards Belacqua follows her to the Continent. His affair with her in Austria, however, degenerates quickly after she "rapes" him, and he soon leaves her and spends a couple of months in Paris with his friends Lucien and Liebert and a girl called the Syra-Cusa, and mainly on his own, until just after Christmas. Summoned back to Austria by the Smeraldina's mother, who tells him how depressed Smerry is without him, Belacqua returns and spends a few days at New Year with the girl before their relationship falls completely apart and he leaves forever. When he returns to Ireland he travels around for a short while with a friend named Chas, and then settles down in Dublin paying court to the Alba and writing poetry. The last we hear of him in "Dream", which is unfinished, is in connection with a party given by an acquaintance known as the Frica which Belacqua agreed to attend only when he was sure he would see the Alba there.

Belacqua's name and one of his chief characteristics, indolence,

are derived from the fourth canto of Dante's Purgatorio.<sup>1</sup>

Beckett's Belacqua in "Dream" is "bogged in indolence" (D. 107). This indolence is, however, characteristic of only one of the three personae of Beckett's protagonist who does at times have commerce with the world outside himself, particularly with women, and who at other times is intent on solipsistically withdrawing into himself. These other two personae are in opposition to each other and to the indolent Belacqua. Beckett writes:

At his simplest he was trine. Just think of that. A trine man! Centripetal, centrifugal and... not. Phoebus chasing Daphne, Narcissus flying from Echo and... neither. (D. 107)

The example Beckett gives, in "Dream", of the centrifugal, Phoebus, aspect of the trine Belacqua is his chase across the continent for the Smeraldina. When the Smeraldina "rapes" him, and the affair turns into a fiasco, Belacqua evinces his centripetal, Narcissistic aspect by fleeing to Paris, and the "Smeraldina-Daphne" becomes instead the "Smeraldina-Echo" (D. 107).

That third aspect, which is neither centrifugal nor centripetal, is his indolence. When he is in this third state he is apparently indifferent both to others and to himself:

The third being was the dark gulf, when the glare of the will and the hammerstrokes of the brain doomed outside to take flight from its quarry were expunged, the Limbo and the wombtomb alive with the unanxious spirits of quiet cerebration, when there was no conflict of flight and flow and Eros was as null as Anteros and Night had no daughters. He was bogged in indolence, without identity, impervious alike to its pull and goading. The cities and forests and beings were also without identity, they were shadows, they

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1. Purgatorio, IV, 97-133.

exerted neither pull nor goad. His third being was without axis or contour, its centre everywhere and periphery nowhere, an unsurveyed marsh of sloth. (D. 107)

When the mind is "enwombed and entombed" (D. 4), Belacqua is "sheltered from the winds and sheltered from the waters" (D. 38); here the mind is "its own asylum, disinterested, indifferent... suddenly reprieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body":

The lids of the hard aching mind close, there is suddenly gloom in the mind; not sleep, not yet, nor dream, with its sweats and terrors, but a waking ultra-cerebral obscurity, thronged with grey angels... In the umbra, the tunnel, when the mind went wombtomb, then it was... live cerebration that drew no wages and emptied no slops. In the tunnel he was a grave paroxysm of gratuitous thoughts, his thoughts, free and unprofessional, non-salaried, living as only spirits are free to live... He was in the gloom, the thicket, he was wholly a gloom of ghostly comfort, a Limbo from which the mistral of desire had been withdrawn. (D. 39)

This state is, Belacqua finds, the most pleasant of the three, and he decides quite definitely that "if he were free he would take up his dwelling in that curious place, he would retire and settle down there, like la Fontaine's catawampus" (D. 109). There is, however, clearly "no authority for supposing that this third Belacqua is the real Belacqua". The "real" Belacqua stands in the same relationship to the Limbese being as the Syra-Cusa (the girlfriend in Paris) stands in relation to an abstract drawing of her (D. 108).<sup>2</sup>

If he cannot be identified with the Limbese (let alone with the Apolline or the Narcissistic personae) neither can he be identified with some conglomeration of just these three beings:

At his simplest trine, we were at pains to say so, to save our bacon, save our face. He is no more satisfied with the three values, Apollo, Narcissus and the anonymous third person, than he would be by fifty values, or any number of values. And to know that he was would be precious cold comfort. For what are they themselves - Apollo, Narcissus and the inaccessible Limbese? Are they simple themselves? Like hell they are! Can we measure them once and for all and do sums with them like those impostors that they call mathematicians? We can not. We can state them as a succession of

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2. "There is no authority for supposing that this third Belacqua is the real Belacqua any more than that the Syra-Cusa of the abstract drawing was the real Syra-Cusa". (D. 108)

terms, but we can't sum them and we can't define them. They tail off vaguely at both ends and the intervals of their series are demented. (D. 111)

Each one of Belacqua's three beings is an indefinable and unmeasurable complex. Not only this, but Belacqua, who is "at his simplest trine", in whom, in other words, all three of these beings exist, is by no means composed only of these beings. Also important, in our understanding of Belacqua, are the "demented" intervals between them that cannot be stated as a succession of terms, that cannot, in fact, be stated at all.

Belacqua spends more or less protracted periods of time in each of these three states of being, and each is in a very definite sense, a contrivance of his conscious or unconscious will. In Proust ("will, the will to live, the will not to suffer, Habit" P. 29) Beckett identifies the will with habit and makes it clear that it is impossible for any human being to exist for any extended period of time without habit. It seems, therefore, that Apollo, Narcissus and the Limbese must all be aspects of Belacqua's very curious habit. (There are countersuggestions insofar as the Limbese is concerned, and these will be discussed in due course.)

Their willed character, and the way in which these three aspects are linked is revealed at the beginning of the novel.

Belacqua is sitting at the end of the Carlyle Pier in Dublin. He has just bid the "supreme adieu" to the Smeraldina-Rima who has sailed off for the continent, and who is a "slob of a girl" with whom Belacqua is in love "from the girdle up" (D.2). His problem now involves how he will react to the parting:

He sat working himself up to the little gush of tears that would exonerate him. When he felt them coming he switched off his mind and let them settle. (D. 2)

His "technique" (D.3) for working himself up to a "little teary ejaculation" consists in his concentrating on how Smerry had waved her beret at him from the boat. All goes well until this "fetish" (D. 3) stops working:

He switched on as usual... and nothing happened. The cylinders of his mind abode serene. That was a nasty one for him if you like,

a complete breakdown of the works like that. He cast around in a kind of panic for some image that would do to start things moving again...and all to no purpose. His mind abode serene and the well of tears dry. (D. 3)

This "dark pang" (D. 4) of being incapable of pumping up a few tears is the first stage in Belacqua's descent into the melancholy gloom that he finds pleasant. This descent is from the conscious to the unconscious<sup>3</sup> contrivance of his will which shields him from the possibility of suffering by immersing him in a wonderfully pleasant gloom. The danger in this habitual procedure is in the interspaces between the stages. Belacqua fears above all that his "machinery of despond" may be unexpectedly dismantled, "hauling him high and dry out of his comfortable trough" (D. 4). This has not happened in the descent from generating tears to the "dark pang". The momentary panic he feels when his mind refuses to obey the injunction to generate tears is nicely accounted for:

There had been no lull of any consequence between the breakdown of the love-ache and the onset of the pang. Indeed whatever little interspace there was had been filled by an ergo, the two terms had been chained together beautifully. (D. 4)

The same easy transition marks the further descent into gloom. He can cope quite nicely with his grievance about having an insubordinate mind that will not conjure up tears. What he fears is that when this grievance will have "shot its bolt" he may be left in a "disarmed condition" that would be "most disagreeable". However, his habit has a defence mechanism prepared for this eventuality. He will be disarmed, he will undergo the "Great Dereliction" of being unable to cling any longer to his bearable grievance, but he will not suffer since he sees this dereliction as "the silver lining" signifying the onset of an even more pleasant state. "In the very process of his distress" (D. 5) at being afflicted with the dark pang of an insubordinate mind, is "being concocted a gloom"

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3. In Proust Beckett identifies his use of the word habit with Schopenhauer's use of "will", which is characteristic of (unconscious) flowers and animals as much as of human beings. Cf. A. Schopenhauer, "Psychological Observations", in Studies in Pessimism, Modern Library, New York, p. 85. nd.

that will ensure that he will spend a "wonderful night" (italics added). That the stages in this descent into his "darling gloom" are familiar to him is evident, although this particular occasion is particularly pleasing and he is "crowned in gloom" (D. 7) "in a style that had never graced the climax of any similar series in his previous experience of melancholy" (D. 5). He has sunk very successfully into his "comfortable trough".

That Belacqua can pass from one of the three aspects of his habit to another, as here, without suffering and in an unbroken sequence, shows that these are aspects of one habit rather than three different habits dying and succeeding one another. The death of a particular habit, Beckett writes in Proust, is "inseparable from suffering and anxiety - the suffering of the dying and the jealous anxiety of the ousted" (P. 10), and consecutive habits are separated by the periods of transition in which we experience the "suffering of being" (P. 8; italics added).

This description of Belacqua's descent shows the connection that exists between each of the three states of his being. When at the beginning his "love-ache" is uppermost, he is Phoebus chasing Daphne, and his contrived tears show that he is here a creature of habit, unable to feel or act spontaneously because of the shield which habit sets up between him and the possibility of suffering. When this contrivance fails, his concern is no longer for the outer world, but for himself, for his insubordinate mind, and he becomes Narcissus. Beckett makes the connection between these two opposites, which he calls "the extremes of the pendulum" (D. 107), clear when he explains that they are not irreconcilably opposite, but can, at times, be merged and their differences annulled when "the wings of flight to the centre [are] harnessed to flight thence" (D. 107).

The third state, the gloom of Limbo, is closely connected with the state of will-lessness, while being a product of Belacqua's will in this instance at least. This third state, Beckett tells us, "suits his [Belacqua's] accursed complexion much better than the dreary fiasco of oscillation [between Apollo and Narcissus] that presents itself as the only alternative" (D. 109). If he had his

way he would spend his life in the "blessedly sunless depths" of his indolence.

But the wretched Belacqua was not free and therefore could not at will go back into his heart, could not will and gain his enlargement from the gin-palace of willing. Convinced like a fool that it must be possible to induce at pleasure a state so desirable and necessary to himself, he exhausted his ingenuity experimenting... All for nothing. He was grotesque, wanting to "troglodyse" himself, worse than grotesque... It was stupid to imagine that he could be organised as Limbo and wombtomb, worse than stupid... How could the will be abolished in its own tension? ... He remains, for all his grand fidgeting and shuffling, bird or fish, or, worse still, a horrible border creature, a submarine bird, flapping its wings under a press of water. The will and nill cannot suicide, they are not free to suicide. That is where the wretched Belacqua leaves the rails. And that is his wretchedness, that he seeks a means whereby the will and nill may be enabled to suicide and refuses to understand that they cannot do it, they are not free to do it... (D. 109-110)

On all the occasions in "Dream" when Belacqua sinks into his precious gloom, he has contrived to do so. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that he consciously submerges himself in melancholy (the adjustments which habit makes are automatic, Beckett says in Proust, P. 9) but that, faced with confusion or disturbance, Belacqua's habit sets up barriers to protect him from all that could cause him suffering, from all that could provoke the death of his habit.

After the affair with the Smeraldina has turned into a "gehenna of sweats and fiascos and tears and an absence of all douceness" (D. 16), Belacqua leaves her and goes to Paris. Beckett describes this as the change from Belacqua-Apollo to Belacqua-Narcissus (D. 107). The Narcissus stage does not, however, last very long. No sooner is he in Paris than he sets about "throwing up a ring of earthworks" around himself:

It was his instinct to make himself captive, and that instinct, as never before or since, served him well and prepared a great period of beatitude stretching from October to Christmas... For two months and more he lay stretched in the cup, sheltered from the winds and sheltered from the waters, knowing that his own velleities of radiation would never scale the high rim that he had contrived all around and about... He lay lapped in a beatitude of indolence... He moved with the shades of the dead and the dead-

born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born, in a Limbo purged of desire. (D. 38; italics added)

There are suggestions both that this is a habitual state and suggestions that it is not. It is unlikely that Beckett would think any human being could exist without habit for as long as two months. Moreover, it is characteristic of the action of habit that it should shelter its creature: when a habit dies we are exposed to the unbearable beauties and cruelties of reality. The notion of a beatitude of indolence seems, furthermore, far from what Beckett means by the convulsions of freedom from habit. When a habit dies, man is certainly paralysed, but it is a paralysis of terror and of enchantment and by no means a comfortable experience. Beckett certainly classes all forms of "contrivance" with habit: the experience of the creature who is for a moment free of habit is, he writes, both in Proust and in "Dream", a "dispensation" that cannot be importuned, an accident that we cannot will to happen: it either happens or it doesn't.

The countersuggestions are, however, also in evidence. Belacqua feels that in his tunnel he finds "real thought and real living", and that there he is a "grave paroxysm of gratuitous thoughts, his thoughts, free and unprofessional, non-salaried, living as only the spirits are free to live".

The same ambivalence is in evidence on the next occasion. This takes place when Belacqua is back in Dublin paying his peculiar court to the Alba. He is talking to the Frica about a party she is planning to give. When she mentions the Alba Belacqua blacks out:

It was the miracle, our old friend, that whale of a miracle, taking him down from his pangs, sheathing him in the cerements of clarity. It was the descent and the enwombing, assumption upside down, tête-bêche, into the greyness, the dim press of the disaffected angels. It was at last the hush and indolence of limbo in his mind prodded and chivvied into taking thought, lounging against the will-pricks, it was the mercy of salve on the prurigo of living, dousing the cock-robin of living. In a word in fact he was suddenly up to his eyes in his dear slush. (D. 161)

Here at last, is one's first impression, is an unequivocal statement of what the experience of existence without habit must be like, coupled with a statement that it has happened to Belacqua.



Shortly afterwards, however, Belacqua is talking to the Alba and it turns out that he blacked out at the Frica because he didn't want to have to commit himself to going to the party until he knew if the Alba was going (D. 170). This "miracle" seems hardly devoid of the will or of utilitarian considerations<sup>4</sup> and therefore rather more akin to habit than to the death of habit.

Two considerations other than the element of will seem to indicate that these "descents" of Belacqua's are, in fact, only a peculiar form of habit.

The first is the contrast between Belacqua's "states of peace" and what Beckett has said about the "suffering of being". The death of habit, which is inseparable from suffering and anxiety (P. 9), seems quite incompatible with Belacqua's experience of the "unanxious spirits of quiet cerebration" (D. 107) in the dark gulf of his beatitude of indolence. Moreover, in the "suffering of being" we experience both terrors and enchantments; Belacqua's gloom is entirely pleasant and there is nothing to suggest there is any kind of terror involved.

The second is the contrast between these comfortable enwombings and certain other events which genuinely seem to disturb Belacqua's habit. There are several occasions, in "Dream", when there is a suggestion that Belacqua is faced with the kind of experience that can cause his

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4. In Proust Beckett makes it clear that utilitarian considerations are the concern of habit: curiosity, which is "the hair of our habit tending to stand on end" is, even when apparently disinterested, "seldom exempt from utilitarian considerations"; when involuntary memory "consumes habit and all its works" it is abstracting the useful, the opportune, etc. (P. 18, 20). See also "Assumption", op. cit., p. 42, where Beckett describes "what was at worst the purely utilitarian contrivance of a man who wished to gain himself a hearing".

habit to die. The first of these are found at the beginning of the novel when Belacqua has bid the Smeraldina adieu and he suffers a few moments' panic when he finds himself unable to conjure up his tears. Here, as we have seen, he gets over this disturbance by moving on to his narcissistic self.

While Belacqua is still on the pier he has another somewhat disturbing experience. This is a minor incident which does not seriously threaten Belacqua's habit, but his reaction is of the same kind as before. He is rudely asked by the wharfinger, who wants to get home to his tea, to get off the pier. Belacqua thinks this a reasonable request and dives into his pocket for a shilling for the man. To his embarrassment he finds he has only tuppence:

Belacqua blushed. He did not know where to look. He took off his glasses in his confusion. But of course it was a case of locking the stable door after the steed had flown. Dare he offer such a heated man twopence? (D. 6)

As before, his reaction to a disturbance is that of a creature of habit who, instead of opening his eyes to let the confusion in, hastily tries to repair the damage by reducing visibility.

Later, after the chase to Vienna, after the flight to Paris, after the two months' beatitude, Belacqua returns after Christmas to Vienna where his relationship with the Smeraldina once again degenerates very quickly into "the usual fiascos and semi-fiascos" (D. 68). The "copious tiff" he has with her on the only evening they spend out alone together<sup>5</sup> has a very bad effect on Belacqua:

He felt very bad. Would he last into the New Year, that was the question. He feared to fall to pieces. He thought he was going light, not so much in the head as in the centre, vaguely the midriff. The least heedlessness on my part, he thought, and I fly at once to pieces. (D. 68)

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5. Belacqua had objected to going out "to be frozen to death when there was nothing to prevent him hatching a great thought over the stove" (D. 68). This is one of the very few allusions to Descartes (the "poêle") in "Dream". Another is that Belacqua, returning from the continent by boat, is described thus: "To begin with, of course, he moved forward, like the Cartesian earthball, with the moving ship, and then on his own account to the windy prow. He can go no further with security" (D. 120).

Like Marcel in Proust's novel, who is always most likely to suffer the death of his habit when he is tired and ill, Belacqua is sick. He does, however, put up a strong resistance nonetheless. Though he is "convulsed" (D. 77) and anguished by a very severe "spasm" - terms, incidentally, very like those that describe the experience of reality in Proust and very different from those used of Belacqua's comfortable trough of indolence - and though we are informed that "death may occur on third or fifth day" (D. 77), death does not occur. When he goes out with the Smeraldina on New Year's Eve<sup>6</sup> he needs a drink very badly at the beginning but is soon arguing heatedly and even laughing with the "Mandarin", Smerry's father. The next day he and the Smeraldina sever their connection - "that was that, and small credit to either of them" - and Belacqua seems safely out of danger: "she continued to bother him as an infrequent jolt of sentimental heartburn, nothing to write home about. Better, he thought, the odd belch than the permanent gripe" (D. 97). By the time he leaves her again, this time for good, a few days later, he is seeing her "through a veil of nausea, and she was metamorphosed into a hiccup" (D. 98)! Rid of the Smeraldina he is rid of the source of the disturbance that had endangered his habit.

There are no further disturbances of note. If he storms and batters the Alba's claim that her "soul has no use for an anchor" (D. 170) since that is a subject which happens to be "rather near and dear to him", he ends up merely resentful; if he is unable to bear his doubt about the Alba's dress, a telephone call calms him; and if he is badly in need of comfort on his way to the Frica's party he is soon satisfied by the bottle of Bisquit which he finds in his pocket. Beckett writes at one point that:

What we are doing now, of course, is setting up the world for a proper slap-up explosion. The bang is better than the whimper.  
(D. 158)

and he promises that this explosion is "timed for about ten or fifteen thousand words hence" (D. 158). There is, so far as I can

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6. The fact that Belacqua does go out to the Silvester party makes it clear that "death" is not associated with any kind of physical ailment here.

trace, nothing remotely like an "explosion" in the succeeding sixty-odd pages (sixteen or seventeen thousand words) of the manuscript,<sup>7</sup> which tails off rather inconclusively with the description of the night of the Frica's party.<sup>8</sup>

If we agree that there is much to be said for considering Belacqua's Limbese experiences in "Dream" as a manifestation of his habit, we are still faced with the countersuggestions.

To describe the Limbese state as the experiences of "real thought and real living" and of "living as only the spirits are free to live" (D. 39) seems to indicate that this is not a habitual state: it is only when habit dies, Beckett writes in Proust, that we are "for a moment free" and exposed to reality (P. 9). Yet if Belacqua's Limbo is spontaneous, why has Beckett referred to it as a "contrivance", as lasting for two months (on one occasion), and as a "shelter", and why does he repeatedly show Belacqua shying away from everything that disturbs him? These, in Proust, are characteristics of habit.

This contradiction is a concrete example of the kinds of contradictions that I have discussed in connection with Beckett's aesthetics, particularly with the article "La Peinture des van Velde...". In this article Beckett stresses the difference between the work of the two brothers, and describes Bram's painting as peaceful and extratemporal, Geer's as frantic and temporal. There exists the same kind of relationship between Bram's and Geer's painting as between habit and spontaneity, but neither of the brothers' work can be seen as simply habitual or as simply spontaneous. The reason for

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7. "Our old friend, that whale of a miracle" that engulfs Belacqua in his "dear slush" when the Frica is telling him about her party, occurs about a thousand words later, on p. 161.

8. Pages 178-214 of the manuscript are almost identical to the story entitled "A Wet Night" in More Pricks Than Kicks (MP. 53-88).

this is that there are elements in Bram's painting - such as its making a noise like a door shutting - that link it to disturbance (and hence to spontaneity) and elements in Geer's - such as its silence - that link it to peace (and hence to habit), and so it is not only the total opposition between the two, but also their similarity, that must be taken into account.

In his Limbese state, Belacqua is not completely cut off from disturbance, much as he strives for such immunity:

During the two months odd spent in the cup, the umbra, the tunnel, punctuation from the alien shaft was infrequent and then, thanks to his ramparts, mild. Even so they used to drive him crazy...  
They: Lucien, Liebert, the Syra-Cusa... (D. 40)

It is impossible for any human being ever to be completely cut off from disturbance. It is, however, possible for human beings to ignore the implications that disturbances may have for them, and to refuse to allow their habit to die to let the confusion in. Whether or not this applies to Belacqua will depend on whether or not he can be seen as a creature of habit when in Limbo.

I have shown that of any two co-existing contraries, one is necessarily dominant at any particular time, and that Beckett sees the artist's task as to explode the currently dominant. What this means, in terms of habit and spontaneity, is that it is the artist's task to pose a threat to our current habit of living by startling us out of our preconceptions.

It seems significant that it is only when Beckett is discussing both of the van Velde brothers that he stresses what can be interpreted as the habitual elements in Bram's painting - peace, fixity, etc; on these occasions the spontaneity of Geer's art acts as a balance. When he discusses Bram alone (as in the dialogue with Duthuit) it is the spontaneity of his painting that is attended to - incommensurability, acceptance of non-relation between subject and object, impossibility of expression, etc. As I have argued, he does not prefer one to another except in the sense that he finds it necessary to stress the one that he feels is currently dominated in order to provide resistance against the one that is currently dominant; and he feels that the habit of rejecting "the mess" in favour of a clear, orderly and serene outlook is now dominant.

The main question I am asking in this chapter is whether there is any reason for seeing Beckett as providing resistance against habit in "Dream". The answer to this depends on the answer to another question: why is it that Beckett on occasion describes the Limbese state as non-habitual? The role of the narrator in the novel is central to one possible answer to this question.

The narrator figures importantly in the novel; he does not, or not only, stand outside it. Near the beginning he intrudes to explain that "the fact of the matter is that we<sup>9</sup> do not quite know where we are in this story" (D. 7), and he goes on to outline some of the difficulties he is finding. These difficulties are the result of the conflict between his desire for clarity on the one hand and the distressingly unclear nature of what he is writing about on the other.

It is possible that some of our creatures will do their dope all right and give no trouble. And it is certain that others will not. (D. 7)

He continues that "it is to be hoped that" some at least of his characters will "do their dope", will "stand, that is, for something or can be made to stand for something", and he tells a story about China to "orchestrate" what he means by this.

Ling-Liŭ...went to the confines of the West, to Bamboo Valley, and having cut there a stem between two knots and blown into some was charmed to constate that it gave forth the sound of his own voice when he spoke, as he mostly did, without passion. (D. 8)

He cuts eleven more stems, corresponding to the sounds he hears from the phoenix, and then he brings all twelve of these "liŭ-liū" to his master. Beckett uses the one-to-one relationship between each of the liŭ-liū and the sound to which it corresponds to illustrate what he means by clarity in art.

Now the point is /the narrator continues/ that it is most devoutly to be hoped that some at least of our characters can be cast for parts in a liŭ-liū. For example, John might be the Yellow Bell and the Smeraldina-Rima the Young Liŭ and the Syra-Cusa the Stifled Bell and the Mandarin the Ancient Purification and Belacqua himself

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9. "We", we are told, is, "here and hereafter, consensus of me" (D. 3).

the Beneficent Fecundity or the Imperfect, and so on. Then it would only be a question of jiggling like Confucius on cubes of jade and playing a tune. If all our characters were like that - liú-liū-minded - we could write a little book that would be purely melodic, think how nice that would be, linear, a lovely Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect, a one-fingered telephony that would be a pleasure to hear. (Which is more or less, if we may say so, what one gets from one's favourite novelist.) (D. 8) 10

One character, Nemo, cannot ("at least not by us" D.7), the narrator knows, be made to stand for anything. He "will not for any consideration be condensed into a liu" since he is "not a note at all but the most regrettable simultaneity of notes... a symphonic, not a melodic unit":

Our line bulges every time he appears. Now that is a thing we do not like to happen, and the less so as we are keenly aware of the infrequency of one without two. Dare we count on the Alba? Dare we count on Chas? Indeed we tend, on second thoughts, to smell the symphonic rat in our principal boy. (D. 9)

The narrator would find it much more pleasant if his characters could be condensed into lius, and is dismayed to realise that it is impossible to do this with any of them: each of them, like Nemo, turns out to be "simply not that kind of person" (D. 7).

About half way through the novel there is another extended authorial intrusion:

All these liús and liūs! How have they stayed the course? Have they been doing their dope?... The fact of the matter is, we do not trust them. (D. 100)

He analyses what has happened so far to the Smeraldina, and he discerns four quite separate "editions" of this girl: the Dublin edition that bewitched Belacqua; the edition that de-flowered Belacqua in "Hesse-land"; the third edition, "her pages out and clumsily out and bespattered with the most imbecile marginalia", which appeared when Belacqua decided to throw her over; and the final edition which in some way "abides in his little heart" (D.101-102). These four

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10. It is moreover what we get from the narrator of "Dream" when he is describing Belacqua's descent into gloom at the beginning of the novel: the different stages of this descent were "chained together beautifully" by an "ergo" (D. 4).

do not exhaust the Smeraldina - there are many others which have not been presented since "they make us tired" (D. 102) - but even so the narrator cannot help thinking that she has turned out a very poor kind of liu. Similarly for all the other characters. The Smeraldina's mother, the 'multipara', is the "best" of them, since her actions "hang together, they produce the desired monotony", but the reason for this is that she has never been called on to any large extent. The narrator is quite sure that if he does "let himself loose on her", give her a chance "to be herself", she will "collaborate energetically in the general multiplication of tissue" (D. 103).

The narrator has to admit that his book is "degenerating into a kind of Commedia dell' Arte, a form of literary statement to which" he, wanting nothing better than "liū-liū-minded" characters, "objects particularly" (D. 104):

The lius do just what they please, they just please themselves... We are afraid to call for the simplest chord. Belacqua drifts about, it is true, doing his best to thicken the tune, but harmonic composition properly speaking, music in depth on the considerable scale is, and this is a terrible thing to have to say, ausgeschlossen. (D. 104)

The movements of his characters are based on a principle of repulsion: they strain away from all that is not they and from themselves, "a little more and they explode". The problem of describing them is further complicated by the fact that they have "odd periods of recueillement, a kind of centripetal backwash that stops the rot" (D.106). His description of this "nervous recoil into composure" has implications like those of his description of the liū-liū: both are described in terms that allow us to see how an artist who is dominated by habit treats his characters:

To the item thus artificially immobilised in a backwash of composure precise value can be assigned. So all the novelist has to do is to bind this material into a spell, item after item, and juggle politely with irrefragible values... To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude, he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages and can rely on their staying put wherever needed or staying going at whatever speed in whatever direction he chooses. The whole thing, from beginning to end, takes place in a spell-bound



backwash. We all love and lick up Balzac, we lap it up and say it is wonderful, but why call a distillation of Euclid and Perrault Scenes from Life? Why human comedy? (D.106-107)

The narrator is torn between his need for characters like Balzac's Chesnel and, since he realises that the "commendable symmetry" which such unwavering "cabbages" allow for is "all falsity" (D. 106), his need to depict characters that are human. It is when he succumbs to the need for clarity that he classifies Belacqua as trine. It is when he revolts against the falsity of that clarity that he admits how ludicrous that classification is since the three terms "tail off vaguely at both ends and the intervals of their series are demented". These "demented" intervals disturb the writer who "devoutly" hopes that he can make his characters stand for something. When he finds himself confronted by characters who refuse to "do their dope", who are "incommensurate", it is all he can do "not to get into a panic". His habitual need for order and clarity is being challenged by intractably disorderly material:

What is needed of course is a tuning fork... that is to say the gasping codetta, to mix with the treacherous liūs and liūs and get a line on them. That is what we call being a liu on the grand scale. Someone like Watson, or Figaro, or Jane the Pale... someone who could always be relied on for... the right squawk in the right place, just one permanent liū or liū, sex no bar, and all might yet be well... We picked Belacqua for the job. (D. 112)

Since, however, there are demented intervals between all of the terms that can be applied to Belacqua, who therefore "cannot be petrified in the moment of recoil, of backwash into composure, any more than the rest of them" (he too is "simply not that kind of person" D. 111), he is "not able" to do the job the narrator wanted him to do (D. 112).

As a creature of habit needing orderliness, terrified by incommensurability, the narrator wishes for himself a state of beatitude like that which he describes Belacqua as achieving. In connection with the Polar Bear (Belacqua's father), the narrator writes:

He merits peace. Per viam pacis ad patriam perpetuae claritatis - that is the fond hope and the vow... that we make, both now and ever, for the poor old P.B. We cannot do fairer than that. We would not ask better for ourself. By paths of peace to the land of everlasting clearness...! Can you beat it? (D. 159)

The narrator further dissociates himself from confusion when he

concludes his description of Belacqua's three beings by saying:

Thus little by little Belacqua may be described but not circumscribed; his terms stated, but not summed. And of course God's will be done should one description happen to cancel the next, or the terms appear crazily spaced. His will, never ours.  
(D. 111)

The narrator would like to be able to be clear about Belacqua in the same way as Belacqua himself longs to be shrouded in the ceremonies of clarity. Unlike Belacqua (as described by the narrator), however, the narrator has himself no experience of such clarity - the characters in his novel are all refusing to "do their dope". The fact that the narrator is a creature of habit who deplores confusion may be connected with the kind of description we have of Belacqua: the problem is not only that, as found by the narrator, Belacqua is complex and indefinable, but also that, as we ourselves find, the narrator himself, on whom we depend for our knowledge about Belacqua, is torn between two different kinds of portrayal. He had picked Belacqua for the job of unifying his narrative, of being the one stable character in the novel: as an artist he needed such a character on which to hang his material. Unfortunately (for his habit) he cannot deny that by using Belacqua in this way he is falsifying Belacqua. After the lengthy description of Belacqua as "trine", the narrator cannot deny that Belacqua is far more complex than such a description allows for. After the lengthy discourse on lius the narrator retracts and even regrets ever having mentioned lius. He realises soon enough how ludicrous it is to consider the "chain-chant solo of cause and effect" an adequate mode, and he eventually declares himself "heartily sorry that [he] ever fell into the temptation of putting up that owld Tale of a Tub concerning Christopher Ling-Liun and his bamboo Yankee Doodle" (D. 159). Similarly, after describing Belacqua's Limbese state as the experience of reality and of living in freedom, a description that would not only simplify Belacqua but also fix him conveniently in a spell-bound backwash, the narrator goes on to retract and to mock Belacqua's deluded attempts at becoming Limbese. He does this both directly, by commenting on Belacqua's stupidity and by treating him ironically, and indirectly, by making it clear that his own idea of reality and of freedom is very different from Belacqua's.

During his two months' "beatitude" in Paris Belacqua is described lying on his bed, "gawking out like a fool at the end of the day" (D. 46), and later on, as I have shown, the narrator finds that Belacqua "leaves the rails" with his futile attempts to "wilfully suppress the bureaucratic mind".

The narrator does not deny the desirability of Belacqua's Limbese state, but he does cast serious doubt on whether or not any of the instances in the novel which purport to describe Belacqua in this state are genuine experiences of the "dispensation". What is crucial is the annulment of the will, and as I have shown, all the occasions in the novel in which Belacqua is supposedly Limbese are in one way or another willed by Belacqua. He feels himself and his world "lapse downwards through darkness" often enough, but this is, in the last analysis, "all for nothing", and he succeeds only in making himself grotesque, "worse than grotesque" (D. 110).

The fact that the narrator does not deny the desirability - or the possibility, under certain circumstances - of Limbo, while revealing Belacqua's failure to achieve it, gives us a tentative indication of why it may be that the non-habitual terminology of reality and freedom is applied to this state. If the will is annulled, then habit dies and the creature is for a moment free, exposed to reality. It is however, Belacqua's failure to abolish the will (and his failure to realise that he cannot will the abolition of will) that shows that he does remain a creature of habit: he is approximating the state of Limbo while remaining a creature of habit, and in doing so he achieves a state that is as close as possible to the state of Limbo, yet infinitely far from it in all essential respects.

Belacqua wants peace and clarity. The narrator also would like peace and clarity ("We would not ask better for ourself. By paths of

peace to the land of everlasting clearness...! Can you beat it?" (D. 159). What distinguishes the narrator from Belacqua is that where Belacqua stops with this need for peace and clarity, shying away from all that might disturb or confuse him, the narrator feels the need not to falsify as well as the need for peace and clarity. These are incompatible: when once incommensurability is admitted, there can be no peace, and the narrator does admit the incommensurability of his materials and of his "demiurge" (D. 112), Belacqua. The narrator cannot, except by falsifying, create a little book that would be purely melodic, a "lovely Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect", so he creates instead a book that is confused, and whose lines "bulge" (D. 9). As Beckett told Tom Driver:

If life and death did not both present themselves to us, there would be no inscrutability. If there were only darkness, all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable. 11

The reason why incommensurability describes so well the "confusion" that Beckett is concerned with in all his work is that it accommodates the idea of two fundamentally different kinds of values which, however, both exist simultaneously, as in that right-angled triangle. The incommensurability arises not from the irrationality of the length of the diagonal any more than from the rationality of the length of the other two sides. Each, taken on its own, is a clear enough concept. The incommensurability arises, by definition, from the fact that both rationality and irrationality exist simultaneously in the one figure. The inexplicability of existence arises from the co-existence at all times of both of any two contraries.

Belacqua's habit allows him awareness only of one of any two contraries at any one time. He is, of course, as all human beings are, in reality, incommensurate, but it is the narrator who discovers, and who is appalled by, that: Belacqua himself recoils from such

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11. Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", loc. cit.

awareness, preferring the dark gulf of clarity.

Just as Belacqua is satisfied when an interspace between two states is "filled by an ergo", when the two are "chained together beautifully" (D. 4), so too the narrator thinks of how nice it would be if all his characters would be "liŭ-liŭ-minded", petrified in the moment of recoil in "a lovely Pythagorean chain-chant solo of cause and effect" (D. 8). The latter, however, realises soon enough how ludicrous it is to consider the "chain-chant" an adequate mode. His only excuse for having used the liŭ-liŭ concept is that he was at one time "inclined to fancy [himself] as the Cézanne, shall we say, of the printed page, very strong on architectronics" (D. 159). At one point the Mandarin criticises Belacqua for demanding "a stable architecture of sentiment" (D. 91), and the criticism goes unanswered. Belacqua cannot answer it: he never admits the falsity of his comforting ergo.

As has been seen, Belacqua comes nearest to the point where his habit might die when, just before Silvester, he fears to "fly to pieces" since he feels himself going light in the centre. This danger, from which his habit finally rescues him, is similar to what the narrator says of those characters who are a simultaneity of notes and who cannot be condensed into a liu (and here again the falsity, where human beings are concerned, of architecture, is mentioned):

They are no good from the builder's point of view, firstly because they will not suffer their systems to be absorbed in the cluster of a greater system, and then, and chiefly, because they themselves tend to disappear as systems. Their centres are wasting, the strain away from the centre is not to be gainsaid, a little more and they explode. (D. 106)

The narrator realises that the "nervous recoil into composure" is only a very small part of the full story about any human being, including Belacqua (or, for that matter, Balzac's Chesnel). Belacqua himself, however, like Balzac, refuses to admit this: he recoils from confusion, from the awareness that his centre is wasting.

Whenever it is a question of facing up to two different kinds of values at the same time, Belacqua does not do so. Instead he invariably recoils into the clarity of the unambiguous.

Where the narrator, even while finding it regrettable, will admit that his characters, including Belacqua, are not *lius*, not notes at all but rather a simultaneity of notes, Belacqua himself vociferously denies simultaneity. Talking to the Mandarin, who has criticised Belacqua's "cock-eyed continuum", Belacqua retorts "wildly" that "there is no such thing... as a simultaneity of incoherence, there is no such thing as love in a thalamus. There is no word for such a thing, there is no such abominable thing" (D. 91). He continues, using the notion of Beatrice and the notion of a brothel as the opposites which he refuses to admit simultaneously:

"I admit Beatrice... and the brothel, Beatrice after the brothel or the brothel after Beatrice, but not Beatrice in the brothel, or rather, not Beatrice and me in bed in the brothel. Do you get that" cried Belacqua "you old dirt, do you? not Beatrice and me in bed in the brothel." (D. 91-92)

He will admit that each of these notions is "incoherent", but he insists on compartmentalising incoherence, on marking the incoherence of Beatrice off from the incoherence of the brothel. He will not allow "dirty erotic manoeuvres" (D. 91) to be mixed up with Beatrice, he will not envisage the simultaneity of immanence and transcendence.

On the subject of the "predicateless" of beauty, the narrator has earlier chided Belacqua, who has sought to differentiate between the Smeraldina's and the Syra-Cusa's beauty, for blindness to the simultaneity of contraries:

Take it, deary, from us: beauty is one and beauties uni generis, immanent and transcendent, totum intra omnia, deary, et totum extra, with a centre everywhere and a circumference nowhere. Put that into your pipe, dear fellow, and smoke it slowly. (D. 31)

Belacqua will admit death, but not life. In his Limbese state he moves with "the shades of the dead and the dead-born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born" (D. 38). He will admit the dark but is "intolerant of light" (D. 72): in Limbo he is "altogether swathed in the black arras of his sloth" (D. 108). He will admit

the mind but not the body: in Limbo his mind "is suddenly reprieved, ceasing to be an annex of the restless body" (D. 39). He will admit indolence, but not energy (unlike the narrator, who describes "the ultimate mode and factor of the creative integrity" as "the mind suddenly entombed, then active in an anger and a rhapsody of energy" D. 14). He will admit the intervals between terms, but not the terms themselves: the narrator comments ironically on Belacqua's musings on the book he (Belacqua) would like to write:

The experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, not the terms, of the statement... I shall state silences more competently than ever a better man spangled the butterflies of vertigo. I think now (he waddled up and down... convinced he was a positive crucible of cerebration) of... the implication lurking behind the pictorial pretext. (D. 123; italics added)

The same idea comes up in his discussion with the Mandarin when Belacqua explains what he means by an "incoherent reality":

I was speaking of ... the incoherent reality as expressed by, say, Rimbaud or Beethoven. Their names occur to me. The terms of whose statements serve merely to delimit the reality of insane areas of silence, whose audibilities are no more than punctuation in a statement of silences. How do they get from point to point. That is what I meant by the incoherent reality and its authentic extrinsecation. (D. 91)

Belacqua's total reliance on silence, and his concomitant dismissal of sound as "no more than punctuation" is not shared by Beckett. In an unpublished letter to a friend in Germany, Axel Kaun, when he discusses Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, in which the tonal surface is "eaten into by large black pauses", Beckett writes that the symphony is perceived as "a vertiginous path of sounds connecting unfathomable abysses of silence".<sup>12</sup> Belacqua's "incoherent reality" is found in insane areas of silence; Beckett's is found there, but also in the "vertiginous path of sounds".<sup>13</sup> This insistence on both of two contraries is expressed by the narrator of "Dream":

The nightfirmament is abstract density of music, symphony without end, illumination without end, yet emptier, more sparsely lit than the most succinct constellations of genius. Now seen merely, a depthless lining of hemisphere, its crazy stippling of stars, it

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12. See Lawrence E. Harvey, "Samuel Beckett on Life, Art and Criticism", Modern Language Notes, LXXX (December 1965), p. 555. The letter is dated 1937.

13. George Steiner quotes Beckett as having said, "I look for the voice of my silence". See George Steiner, Extra-Territorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution, Faber & Faber, London, 1972, p. 15.

is the passional movements of the mind charted in light and darkness... The inviolable criterion of poetry and music, the non-principle of their punctuation, is figured in the demented perforation of the night colander. (D. 14)

The narrator concludes this description of the night sky by saying: "nothing whatever of the kind of course entered his [Belacqua's] fetid head, nor was there room in his gravid heart for such strange feeling" (D. 15). Indeed Belacqua, who delights in silence, darkness, and in his tunnel, has room in his gravid heart for only half - and hence nothing - of what is experienced by one who recognises simultaneously both music and emptiness, both light and dark, both the depthless coalsacks and the craziness of the stars, both the intervals and the terms. To accommodate, as Belacqua does, only one of each pair is to experience clarity: it is the simultaneity of the two incoherent realities in each case that produces the strange feeling, the "suffering of being", that is the main condition of the artistic experience. The perforated night colander is "demented" because it consists of both light and dark, sound and silence, stars and coalsacks, etc., and because both the crazy stippling of the stars and the depthless coalsacks are incoherent.

When Belacqua's affair with the Smeraldina first goes "kaputt" he becomes anxious and starts feeling that his "fragile dykes" are caving in on him, threatening to drown him. He looks up at the night sky and sees it "stretched like a skin" over the rim of his now dangerous "funnel", and he resolves to "scale the inner wall, his head would tear a great rip in the taut sky, he would climb out above the deluge, into a quiet zone above the nightmare" (D. 23). Far from accommodating the implications of the simultaneity of incoherence in the sky, his need, when confronted by this nightmare, is to escape from it into a "quiet zone".

#### 14. The 11

The role played by the narrator in "Dream" is certainly significant in the indications it provides of why it may be that the Limbese state is so ambiguously depicted in the novel, but it cannot provide a sufficient explanation for this ambiguity. Interesting though the narrator's own dilemma about the falsity of his lius may be, it cannot be deemed conclusive evidence that Limbo, in "Dream", is a habitual rather than a spontaneous experience. Entirely convincing



evidence is, however, not available, possibly because the novel is unfinished, possibly because this is a question on which Beckett was himself unclear. Equally, of course, the weight of the evidence for thinking Limbo habitual precludes the possibility of convincing arguments to show that Limbo is spontaneous. Towards the end of the novel as it stands, the Alba's thoughts about Belacqua are revealed,<sup>14</sup> and the comment that the narrator then makes confirms our impression that it is not possible to draw neat conclusions about Belacqua's third, Limbese person from "Dream":

All this pallor and umbilicism à deux might be... the very thing for him, permanent and pertinent and all the rest of it for him. But it was fundamentally all my eye for her... She used to say affectionately that he would get over this and that... but her real opinion the whole time was that there was little hope for him, that he was too irremissibly naive for her altogether, too permanently selfish, faithful to himself, trying to be like himself as he fancied himself all the time, an irretrievable stickler for his own wretched standard, and wretched was what she thought, and wretched was what she meant. He lay coiled up in the shadow, always in the shadow, of the dread of leze-personality, at his own hands or another's. Personality! That old bugbear bastard of hell! She thought he would not get over it, that he did not want to get over it, that he thought of getting over it as the sin against the Belacqua third person... When she would make up her mind finally that all that was so, that he was inextricably Limbese, then that was where she stepped off. He could rot away in his darling gloom if that was what he wanted, she would not be there to listen. Nolle consolari ab aliqua creatura..! The filthy blague! To hell with purity, fake purity, to hell with it and to hell with it.

How far she was right and how far wrong belong to another story, a far far better one. (D. 172-173)

That really is the question that we are left with: is Belacqua's experience of Limbo in "Dream" a false or a true purity? We can respond to this question by quoting the comment about Limbo as "real thought and real living... living as only the spirits are free to live", and conclude that the Alba is wrong in finding it false, or

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14. The Alba's relationship with Belacqua is described in the same kind of terms as those used in Proust to describe "human intercourse", which is problematical because it involves "two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation" (P. 7): the Alba and Belacqua, Beckett writes in "Dream", "were a great deal more likely to break down and come unstuck in two separate non-synchronised processes each on his and her side of the fence than to sink their differences" (D. 149).

we can conclude with the Alba's tirade against Belacqua:

"I hate Omar" she said "and your fake penumbra. Haven't we had enough of that in this festering country. Haven't we had enough Deirdreeing of Hobson's weirds and Kawthleens in the gloaming hissing up petticoats of sorarrhoca? Haven't we had enough withered pontiffs of chiarinoscurissimo? 'The mist'", she sneered, "'an' it rollin' home UP the glen and the mist agin an' it rollin' home DOWN the glen'. Up, down, hans arown. Merde. Give me noon." (D. 176)

To claim that the novel comes out resoundingly in favour of the one or the other of these seems unwarranted, since both are in evidence. Belacqua's Limbo, his "dark gulf" of peace and contemplation, is apparently both attractive and repellent to the narrator of "Dream". Although it is unwise to identify the narrator too closely with Beckett, it remains true that Beckett allowed both the attractiveness of Limbo and the repellent sides of Belacqua's bliss to be exposed in the novel, while Belacqua sees this state only in terms of its attractiveness. This difference between Beckett (and the narrator) and Belacqua is crucial, for it establishes a distance between them that prohibits any identification between Belacqua's desires and goals and those of his creator.

Belacqua is treated critically on those occasions when the repellent side of his "dark gulf" is expressed, and on other occasions Limbo is treated sympathetically. The composite judgement of the narrator, however, must be critical because, unlike the narrator, Belacqua is entirely one-sided. Although there clearly are, in the narrator's view, positive features of Limbo, these are at least counterbalanced by negative features. To do as Belacqua has done is to shut out awareness of the voice that is not a liu but that rather emits a symphonic note; to shut out one half of reality and thus, as before, all of its incomprehensibility, all of its reality. By allowing the contrary of Belacqua's view a place in his novel, Beckett is providing resistance against the view that is dominant in Belacqua. The promised explosion, however, does not take place.

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## CHAPTER III

MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS

Oh I am ashamed  
of all clumsy artistry  
I am ashamed of presuming  
to arrange words  
of everything but the ingenuous fibres  
that suffer honestly

Samuel Beckett, from "Casket of Pralinen for a  
Daughter of a Dissipated Mandarin", The European  
Caravan, Brewer, Warren and Putnam, N.Y., 1931,  
pp. 476-478.

Belacqua is the protagonist not only of "Dream of Fair to Middling Women" but also of the collection of ten short stories that are in part based on the unfinished novel and known as More Pricks Than Kicks. Two stories, "A Wet Night" and "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux", are taken almost in their entirety from "Dream", and a certain amount of the material in the other stories is clearly derivative from the novel. Belacqua is in all essential respects the same individual as the protagonist of "Dream", although his third Limbese person is never referred to as such in the stories. The reason for this is not necessarily that Belacqua is not as Limbese in the stories as he was in "Dream", although it is true that the stories tend to focus more on the centrifugal and centripetal aspects of his character; it may be that he appears less Limbese because the narrator, on whom we are largely reliant for explicit information on this aspect in the novel, seldom intrudes into the stories. Although there are occasions, notably in "Ding-Dong", when the narrator does enter into the stories with comments about Belacqua, and though we are aware of the presence of a narrator not too far in the background, for the most part he plays the novelistic narrator's role more traditionally than in "Dream", standing outside the action and reporting it from a god-like standpoint. In "Dream" the narrator laments at one point that he is "neither Deus enough nor ex machina enough" (D.

104) to manipulate his characters in a pleasing way; the narrator of More Pricks Than Kicks generally has no cause for such a lament. Belacqua does, however, remain an incommensurate demiurge.

The ten stories are, as perhaps all such collections are, uneven in quality. Alvarez considers the first, "Dante and the Lobster", the best of Beckett's writings before Godot,<sup>1</sup> and though very few critics would go so far, there is some agreement that it is, at least, the best of the stories. It is certainly the tightest in its construction and, through this compression and control, it does compare favourably with much of the extravagance and wordiness of the other stories. This, however, is not my principal concern; I am interested here less in the quality of the stories than in their relationship with Beckett's ideas on aesthetics<sup>2</sup> and on the habitual/spontaneous aspects of his people. In these terms "Dante and the Lobster" is the most interesting of the stories, but it is by no means the only one that can be illuminated through such an analysis. Before embarking on a discussion of this story I will look briefly at how the Belacqua of the stories is presented in comparison with the Belacqua of "Dream", and will examine two of Beckett's concerns first found in "Dream", namely the mind/body relationship and death, that are more fully developed in More Pricks Than Kicks.

The only sustained discussion of Belacqua's nature in the stories is found in "Ding-Dong", and this reveals basic agreement with what was written about him in "Dream".

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1. A. Alvarez, Beckett, op. cit., p.25.

2. Although Beckett does himself on occasion make comparative value judgements on works that he is discussing in his aesthetics, he considers this of at best secondary importance. In "La Peinture des van Velde..." he writes: "Il n'y a pas de peinture. Il n'y a que des tableaux. Ceux-ci, n'étant pas des saucisses, ne sont ni bons ni mauvais. Tout ce qu'on peut en dire, c'est qu'ils traduisent, avec plus ou moins de pertes, d'absurdes et mystérieuses poussés vers l'image, qu'ils sont plus ou moins adéquats vis-à-vis d'obscures tensions internes. Quant à décider vous-même du degré d'adéquation, il n'en est pas question, puisque vous n'êtes pas dans la peau du tendu. Lui-même n'en sait rien la plupart du temps. C'est d'ailleurs un coefficient sans intérêt... Tout ce que vous saurez jamais d'un tableau, c'est combien vous l'aimez (et à la rigueur pourquoi, si cela vous intéresse)." (PvV. 350-351)

In "Ding-Dong" Belacqua is described as believing that "the best thing he had to do was to move constantly from place to place" (MP. 39). This is not out of any particular preference for one place over another but rather out of a need to keep on the move: "the mere act of rising and going, irrespective of whence and whither, did him good. That was so." (MP. 39). He is pleased to think he can give what he calls "the Furies" the slip just by setting himself in motion. Unlike Belacqua in "Dream", he does not have the means to indulge this humour on a large scale by moving hither and thither on land and sea,<sup>3</sup> but he does move about within his room, within the building he lives in, and from one end of Dublin to the other. This need to move about is at odds with his indolent nature:

Being by nature however sinfully indolent, bogged in indolence, asking nothing better than to stay put at the good pleasure of what he called the Furies, he was at times tempted to wonder whether the remedy were not rather more disagreeable than the complaint. (MP. 39)

The simplest form of this exercise of moving from place to place is "boomerang, out and back".

As in "Dream", Belacqua is torn between the pendulum of motion between two extremes and the indolence that annuls both extremes, but here he likes to think he has reconciled these drives by living what he calls "a Beethoven pause", a "moving pause", or a "pure blank movement" (MP. 40-41). The example given of this is an excursion Belacqua made from College Street, where he found himself unable to choose between moving right or left, backward or forward, until he saw what he interpreted as a "sign", along Pearse Street and into Lombard Street where he entered a public house which, because of the fact that he is known in it, is "a very grateful refuge for Belacqua" (MP. 44). This Beethoven pause, we are told, is a manoeuvre of Belacqua's own "contriving" (MP. 44).

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3. The only mention of any travelling overseas in More Pricks Than Kicks is in "Fingal", where Belacqua mentions "Saône-et-Loire" (MP. 26) and his companion, Winnie, thinks to herself, "You make great play with your short stay abroad" (MP. 26), and in "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux" (from "Dream") which mentions a previous visit Belacqua made to Austria (MP. 164-166) and the possibility of his returning within two weeks of her letter (MP. 165).

This indicates that Belacqua's Beethoven pauses are conditioned by habit,<sup>4</sup> a conclusion that is further supported by events that take place inside the pub. He is normally very pleased with the furnishings, the bottles, all the paraphernalia in this pub, but on this particular occasion "the objects in which he was used to find such recreation and repose lost gradually their hold upon him, he became insensible to them little by little, the old itch and algos crept back into his mind" (MP. 45-46). Belacqua's awareness of irritation is suggestive of the furtive awareness of the spontaneous need of Lazarus, of something that is threatening his habitual pleasure in the objects in which he was used to find recreation.

It is in this precarious and unforeseen state that he is sitting staring at his drink, waiting for something to rescue him from his paralysis, when he looks up and sees a woman come in selling seats in heaven. Asked if he would buy "four fer a tanner", he finds himself saying no, although "it had not been his intention to deny her" (MP. 47), and he quickly becomes extremely embarrassed:

This was unforeseen with a vengeance, if not exactly vaudeville. Belacqua was embarrassed in the last degree, but transported also. He felt the sweat coming in the small of his back, above his Montrouge belt...

Belacqua scarcely knew where to look. Unable to blush he came out in this beastly sweat. Nothing of the kind had ever happened to him before. He was altogether disarmed, unsaddled and miserable... (MP. 47-48)

What seems to have happened is that for some reason Belacqua's habit is not properly fulfilling its function of sheltering him, and that he has been exposed to a circumstance unforeseen in the "curriculum" of his habit. This is very much the same kind of experience as that which the Belacqua of "Dream" had on the wharf when he found himself confronted by an angry wharfinger and with only twopence in his pocket.

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4. Cf. the discussion on p. 102 above of Belacqua's plans as an artist in "Dream".

It is not a particularly significant instance of habit's dominance being challenged, but it does show Beckett, in More Pricks Than Kicks, translating the ideas expressed in Proust into a fictional framework in much the same way as in "Dream".

### The Mind/Body Relationship

The concern with the mind/body relationship that is common to many of the stories is significant not only within the stories themselves, but also in the wider context of Beckett's long-standing interest in this theme. It had been broached in "Dream", where Belacqua consistently shies away from any bodily contact with women. Not only is he in love with the Smeraldina "from the girdle up" (D. 7), and anxious to make it clear to her that he intends to keep their affair "pewer and above-bawd" (D. 16), not only does he eschew the bawdy houses of Paris (D. 33) and resent the intrusions of the Syra-Cusa (and those of Lucien and Liebert) into his "gloom", he further cannot countenance using a woman he loves as a "private convenience" (D. 90) and cannot view the flesh in any terms other than that it "smells" (D. 90).

It was because he was a poor performer that he was pleased to despise the performance. He was blind to the charms of the mighty steak and jug-dugs of the Smeraldina-Rima and angered by the Priapean whirli-jiggery-pokery of the Syra-Cusa because in both cases he was unable to rise to such superlative carnal occasions. It is time I learnt, he thought... /I/ t might be just as well to leave well alone. If he could not he could not. It was a bloody business and what did it matter? (D. 121)

Even when he is "Phoebus chasing Daphne", Belacqua in "Dream" is very much, and exclusively cerebral. The Alba, with whom, we are explicitly told, Belacqua has not "lain" (D. 158), says of him that you can see "from a mile off" that Belacqua is "the cerebral type" (D. 146). The same is largely true of his relations with women in More Pricks Than Kicks, although here he is rather more willing, on occasion at least, to rise to carnal occasions.

In "Fingal" he takes Winnie out to the country to the Hill of Feltrim, and it is not long after they reach the top that he begins "to feel a very sad animal indeed" - a reference to Galen's omne

animal post coitum triste est. "Love and Lethe" tells of Belacqua and another girl, Ruby, and of their suicide pact which goes wrong when the revolver goes off accidentally, hurting neither of them but startling them both. Recovering from the shock of thinking themselves shot, they "came together in the inevitable nuptial" (MP. 105). Belacqua is not even upset at this: for once, indeed, he has just about done what he set out to do for "l'Amour et la Mort", as the narrator quotes, "n'est qu'une mesme chose" (MP. 105). In "Walking Out" Belacqua is engaged to be married to an enchanting young woman called Lucy, and he is worried about how he can convince her to establish their married life on a "solid basis of cuckoldry" (MP. 110). He wants Lucy, in other words, to consent to take a cicisbeo so that he won't have to satisfy her sexually. His main delight, in this story, is in peeping on lovers in the woods, which suggests a preference for vicarious pleasure in sexuality over personal involvement. Lucy is accidentally crippled by a speeding car, and when he marries her he, at least, is content since the question of cicisbei does not arise, and they sit up till all hours playing the gramophone (MP. 121).

Two years after her accident, Lucy dies, and Belacqua does not delay overlong in falling "madly in love with a girl of substance - a divine frenzy; you understand, none of your lewd passions" (MP. 126). This (fairly) young lady, Thelma bboogs, has what are called "expectations" and, as the narrator says in "What a Misfortune", Belacqua would have to have been "an even greater imbecile than he was" to have ignored the advantages of such material prospects (MP. 127). Thelma has no particular good looks and is quite definitely not beautiful, but:

What she did have, as Belacqua never wearied of asserting to himself, was a most cherharming personality, together with intense appeal, as he repudiated with no less insistence, from the strictly sexual standpoint. (MP. 127)

The two get married, and, driving away together to Connemara after a disastrous wedding party, Belacqua muses about "the mule, up to its knees in mire, and astride its back a beaver, flogging it with a wooden sword" (MP. 160). This refers to the legend of the beaver hunted for his testicles, which were used in the making of perfume. According to tradition the beaver would bite them off in order to save his life.



(In "Dream" Belacqua has the same thought: "The beaver bites his off, he said, I know, that he may live. That was a very persuasive chapter of Natural History. But he lost no time in reminding himself that, far from being a beaver or the least likely to sympathise with its aspirations, he was no less a person than the love of the Belacqua Jesus and a very inward man" D. 56.) Lawrence Harvey, in Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, justifiably interprets this comment from "What a Misfortune" as signifying that Belacqua fears woman's physicality and that he identifies himself with the pursued creature whose escape is impeded by the mire in which his sterile mount is bogged down.<sup>5</sup>

During the course of "Yellow", which describes a morning Belacqua spends in hospital waiting for an operation, the hospital staff forget to auscultate him when he is under an anaesthetic, and he dies. The wife who survives him is the Smeraldina, Thelma nee bboogs having "perished of sunset and honeymoon that time in Connemara" (MP. 189). Of the Smeraldina we now read:

Bodies don't matter but hers went something like this: big enormous breasts, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock-knees, square ankles, wobbly, popputa, mambose, slobbery-blubbery, bubbububbub, the real button-busting Weib, ripe. Then, perched away high out of sight on top of the porpoise prism, the sweetest little pale Pisanello of a birdface ever. She was like Lucrezia del Fede, pale and belle, a pale belle Braut, with a winter skin like an old sail in the wind... (MP. 190)

This passage continues for about another three hundred words, and the Smeraldina's nose, upper and lower lips, skull, ears, eyes, hair, brows are all exhaustively described before the passage concludes with the question: "But what matter about bodies?" (MP. 190).

There is no reason to consider either mind or body as necessarily identifiable with habit or, for that matter, with spontaneity. The pursuit of bodily satisfactions can clearly be a habit as much as the refusal to engage in such a pursuit. Not only, however, do Beckett's protagonists generally shy away from sexual involvements - which seems to indicate that they are more comfortable with mental than with bodily adventures -

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5. Lawrence E. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, op. cit.p. 259.

there are also several indications that this is generally an aspect of their habits. In More Pricks Than Kicks this is most clearly to be seen in "Fingal", which concerns itself not only with Belacqua's relations with a woman, the most common way in which Beckett brings up the mind/body issue in his early writings, but also with another crucial aspect of this issue, the value of sensory perception.

From the top of the hill of Feltrim Belacqua and Winnie look over to Fingal which Belacqua considers a "magic land" (MP. 26).

"I often come to this hill" he said "to have a view of Fingal, and each time I see it more as a back-land, a land of sanctuary, a land that you don't have to dress up to, that you can walk on in a lounge suit, smoking a cigar". What a geyser, she thought. (MP. 27)

She can see nothing particularly noteworthy about Fingal, but gazes at the area of contention:

...and he willed her not to speak, to remain there with her grave face, a quiet puella in a blurred world. But she spoke (who shall silence them at last?), saying that she saw nothing but the grey fields of serfs and the ramparts of ex-favourites. Saw! They were all the same when it came to the pinch - clods. If she closed her eyes she might see something. He would drop the subject, he would not try to communicate Fingal, he would lock it up in his mind. So much the better. (MP. 27)

Fingal is a mysterious emblem for Belacqua for peace from everything that disturbs him - when he is embarrassed by an act of goodwill on the part of Winnie, he turns "to Fingal to cover his confusion" (MP. 26) - and, with its ramparts, its comfort, its asylum, and its sanctuary, a symbol of the shelter provided by habit.

Fingal clearly has some inner meaning for Belacqua unconnected with its unremarkable physical attributes (which are all that Winnie notices). In Proust Beckett writes that "the only world that has reality and significance" is "the world of our own latent consciousness" (P. 3). This does not mean that the inner meaning Belacqua attributes to Fingal is its real meaning. Nothing in the Beckett landscape has a single real meaning (and thus strictly speaking nothing in it has any definable meaning). The point to be raised in connection with the quotation from Proust is whether the experience that is assimilated into (see P. 3) the world of our latent consciousness (our spontaneity) is an experience of the external environment or rather an experience of our own organic eccentricities. It can be either, and there is thus no necessary

connection between inner (mental) experience and the real world. Here, in Belacqua's case, the inner experience can justifiably be seen to be habitual rather than spontaneous, as can his outer experience of Winnie.

Belacqua's attitude to the body, in terms of his sexual relationship with Winnie and in terms of his conviction that Winnie would "see" Fingal better if she closed her eyes, illuminate Belacqua's habit and reinforce the connection between his habit and Fingal.

Winnie has a friend who works in the Portrane Lunatic Asylum on the other side of the estuary in Fingal, and Belacqua claims that his heart is there, so they set off together for Portrane. When nearly there, they stop and rest, and soon Belacqua is a sad animal again. Looking down from the hill on which they are sitting they see the asylum, a nearby church, and a square bawnless tower where Belacqua says he has "sursum corda" (MP. 30). He is starting to feel run down, but "scoff[s]" at the idea of a sequitur from his body to his mind" (MP. 31), and when Winnie spies her friend, Dr. Sholto, Belacqua excuses himself, saying he wants to have a look at the church. They all agree to meet back at the asylum in an hour.

Instead of heading for the church, Belacqua steals a bicycle he had seen lying on the grass, rides quickly past the church and on to the tower. His sadness has fallen from him like a shift (MP. 33). After kicking in the door of the tower, and going inside for a short while, he rides off and abandons Winnie altogether. By the time she and Dr. Sholto have their chase properly under way, Belacqua is drinking and laughing in a public house in another village.

In "Walking Out" Belacqua derived vicarious satisfaction, which he termed "sursum corda"<sup>6</sup> (MP. 115), from watching unsuspecting lovers in the woods; in "Fingal" Belacqua's "sursum corda" in the tower may not be unconnected with the fact that Dean Swift was supposed to have kept Stella locked up in this tower. (Winnie is told that "Dane

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6. The phrase means 'lift up your hearts'. When the truth about Belacqua's peeping dawns on Lucy when he gives "sursum corda" as his reason for not wishing to spend the evening with her, she comments: "Corda is good" (MP. 115).

Swift...he kep a motte in it...of the name of Stella" MP. 34). There is no more than a suggestion that the same kind of vicarious satisfaction is involved in both cases<sup>7</sup>: the nature of Belacqua's delight in the tower is unspecified and we learn nothing of his experience after he has kicked the door in. What is clear is that Belacqua prefers the bicycle and his "sursum corda" in the tower to Winnie. His sexual relationship with her comes a very poor second when he is faced with the choice between her and his solitary joys. There is, however, no reason to conclude from this that he despises the body in the same way that Belacqua does in "Dream": he has, after all, been a "sad animal" twice during the day, and even when he abandons Winnie he delights in physical sensations on the bicycle. If he scoffs at the idea of a sequitur from his body to his mind he can still find pleasure in bodily as well as in mental activities. There further seems no reason to consider the one a "higher" kind of pleasure than the other or that the one is spontaneous and the other habitual: both seem habitual to the extent that he is comfortable with both physical and mental pursuits. However, there are certain indications in "Fingal" that are the forerunners of Beckett's later concern with the mind/body issue, and even though they are inadequately developed in the story to allow any conclusions to be drawn, a discussion of them will stand us in good stead as a preparation for "Dante and the Lobster", Murphy and Watt.

First of all, Belacqua does see his mind as cut off from his body, and it is instructive that in this story, in which the mind/body split is first explicitly mentioned as such, Beckett should also have introduced the bicycle, a machine that, ever since Kenner's discussion of the Cartesian elements in Beckett's work, has rightly been associated with this split: the bicycle is used in much of Beckett's work as an image

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7. It is perhaps not irrelevant that, as Winnie's informant says, Swift (according to the Dublin Telegraph) kept Stella imprisoned in the tower and came down from Dublin to see her: "Little fat Presto, he would set out early in the morning, fresh and fasting, and walk like camomile" (MP. 35). Presto, of course, means 'swift' in Italian, and it is the name used for Swift in his Journal to Stella (see Letter #2 and passim in the edition edited by Harold Williams, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1948); Belacqua too, "a pale fat man" (MP. 34), has set out from Dublin in the morning (MP. 25) for the Fingal tower, and has resolved to "lock" Fingal up in his mind (MP. 27). "Sursum corda" in both "Walking Out" and "Fingal" may mean masturbation, with a play on the word "cord" as used in "spermatic cord". It seems characteristic of Belacqua that he should prefer masturbation to "intercourse", sexual or otherwise.

for the Cartesian view of the body as a machine. After quoting Descartes' description of the body as "a machine made by the hands of God", Kenner writes:

The Cartesian Centaur is a man riding a bicycle, mens sana in corpore disposito... The intelligence guides, the mobile wonder obeys, and there is no mysterious interpenetration of function... So body and mind go each one nobly about its business, without interference or interaction... 8

The implications of Cartesian mind/body dualism are not explored in "Fingal", but the connection between the bicycle and human beings is hinted at when both the bike<sup>9</sup> and its owner<sup>10</sup> are described as machines.

Secondly, Belacqua's comment that if Winnie would close her eyes she might "see" Fingal is indicative of a devaluation of the physical senses that will be characteristic of many of the protagonists of Beckett's later work. The role played by the senses, particularly sight, in the later work is, like all Beckett's concerns, ambiguous and variable: there are times when the reliance on sensory information will only serve to reinforce habitual preconceptions, when, in other words, Beckett's people see only what their habit allows them to see, and equally there are times when they see something that instead disturbs their preconceptions, when they see spontaneously. In "Fingal", however, the fact that Belacqua finds Fingal such a comforting concept is linked with a reluctance to allow physical vision to disturb his fanciful notion of the "magic land". He wills Winnie to keep silent and to close her eyes because he wants her to agree with him about Fingal and because her words and her matter-of-fact description of the physical attributes of his precious sanctuary disturb his reverie. Her "sensible" habit is disturbing his non- (or anti-) "sensible" habit. A further indication of his

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8. Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study, op. cit., p. 121.

9. Belacqua comes "to where the bicycle lay in the grass. It was a fine light machine... The machine was a treat to ride." (MP. 33)

10. Winnie and Belacqua stop on their way to Portrane to ask the owner of the bicycle for directions, and the man takes his time pondering what route might be best for them: "The man began to work this out. Belacqua had no one but himself to blame if they never got away from this machine." (MP. 29)

reluctance to open his eyes to disturbing elements in the world around him that might challenge his preconceptions is found in the narrator's comment that "landscapes were of interest to Belacqua only in so far as they furnished him with a pretext for a long face" (MP. 31): he does not want to discover anything through what he sees, and he therefore sees only what will reinforce his habitually gloomy nature.

While physical pursuits can certainly be - and in "Fingal" are - habitual, it must at the same time be stressed that the possibility of overcoming the dominance of any particular habit almost always depends on unexpected sensations from the physical environment (that are then assimilated into the world of our latent consciousness). This is certainly the case in Proust's novel, where it is the cruelly precise vision of his grandmother that shocks Marcel into realising that he doesn't know the woman at all, and where it is the taste of the madeleine dipped in tea that first allows him to experience the permanent reality of past and present. Each of the eleven instances cited by Beckett in Proust of the workings of the miracle of involuntary memory is, as his list of them shows, dependent on a physical sensation: the sight of the steeples of Martinville, the musty smell in a public lavatory, the sight of the three trees near Balbec, the sight and smell of the hedge of hawthorn near Balbec, the sensation of stooping to unbutton his boots, the feel of the uneven cobbles in the courtyard of the Guermantes hotel, the noise of a spoon against a plate, the feel of the starched napkin on his face, the sound of water in the pipes, and the memory of the sound of his mother's voice reading George Sand's François le Champi (P. 23). As Beckett says, "the source and point of departure of this 'sacred action' [of involuntary memory], the elements of communion, are provided by the physical world, by some immediate and fortuitous act of perception" (P. 23). The statement that this process is "almost one of intellectualised animism" (P. 23; italics added) makes it clear that the physical world is not a sufficient condition for the experience of spontaneity. Not only do our minds presumably have to register the disturbing import of the physical sensations that shock us, there are also occasions when it may <sup>be</sup> an idea, rather than a sensation, that disturbs us in the first place. This is the case, in Proust, when Marcel is disturbed by the idea of Albertine visiting a friend (P. 6)

and in Beckett's story, "Yellow", when it is the idea of his forthcoming operation that disturbs Belacqua.

Beckett's own comments on physical sensations show that he shares this view of their importance in overthrowing the habitual and allowing for spontaneous experience. Habit is the boredom of living; the death of habit, spontaneity, is the suffering of being: Beckett has said that probably the most perfect expression of Being would be an ejaculation.<sup>11</sup> In his criticism he denigrates mental exercises in favour of physical experiences. Upset with his own attempts to conceptualise the paintings of the van Veldes, he mocks himself by saying "la boîte crânienne a le monopole de cet article" (PvV. 352); insisting that the painters are not themselves guilty in this way as he is, he writes, "les peintres n'ont pas de tête, lisez donc canevas à la place, ou estomac, aux endroits où je les en affable" (PvV. 354) and "je tiens à le répéter, de crainte qu'on ne les prennent pour des cochons d'intellectuels" (PvV. 356).<sup>12</sup> This same anti-intellectual conviction is at the root of his own vehement denial of philosophical content in his work and of his insistence on being a sensibility rather than an intellectual.<sup>13</sup> His prolonged preamble to the article on the painting of the van Veldes is a sardonic, even bitter, commentary on the effect of applying preconceived notions to art: Beckett is convinced that it is only by being unprepared for the uniqueness of a work of art that it can affect us - we should just open our eyes and see a painting - and he is correspondingly critical of all those who take it upon themselves to explain works of art and to point out what the gallery-goer should look out for in paintings.<sup>14</sup> The same

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11. See Lawrence E. Harvey, "Samuel Beckett on Life, Art and Criticism", op. cit., p. 562.

12. Bram van Velde in particular, Beckett writes, "ne doit commencer à se rendre compte de ce qu'il a fait qu'environ dix ans après. Entendons-nous. Il sais chaque fois que ça y est, à la façon d'un poisson de haute mer qui s'arrête à la bonne profondeur, mais les raisons lui en sont épargnées" (PvV. 356). Rayner Heppenstall, in The Fourfold Tradition (Barrie and Rockliff, London, 1961, p. 257), tells of an (unnamed) long-time friend of Beckett's, a psycho-analyst, who says that when Beckett has finished writing a work, "he hardly knows what he has done".

13. See "En Attendant...Beckett", the interview with Gabriel d'Aubarède (op. cit., p. 7). Also in "Assumption" Beckett writes of "the vulgar, uncultivated, terribly clear and personal ideas of the unread intelligentsia" (op. cit., p. 41).

14. The effect of being told what to expect of a particular painter is that the gallery-goer chooses, takes sides, accepts a priori, rejects

kind of comment is made in Proust when Beckett elaborates on the workings of habit, whose action is:

precisely to hide the essence - the Idea - of the object in a haze of conception-preconception... Normally we are in the position of the tourist... whose aesthetic experience consists in a series of identifications and for whom Baedeker is the end rather than the means. Deprived by nature of the faculty of cognition and by upbringing of any acquaintance with the laws of dynamics, a brief inscription immortalises his emotion. The creature of habit turns aside from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his intellectual prejudices, that resists the propositions of his team of syntheses, organised by habit on labour-saving principles. (P. 11-12)

The work of art is described in "La Peinture des van Velde..." as "tout neuf", "un non-sens" (PvV. 349), "unique", inexplicable (PvV. 352); in Proust these are words used to characterise the enchantments and cruelties of reality that are experienced when habit dies:

when the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance, then and then only may it be a source of enchantment. (P. 11)

The action of habit, as far as vision is concerned, consists in interfering a prism between the eye and its object, in allowing us to see only what we should see (see P. 15), only what fits in with our intellectual prejudices. If we close our eyes, as Belacqua wills Winnie to do,<sup>15</sup> and if we lock an idea up in our minds, as Belacqua intends to do, we may be shutting out the chance of our being jolted out of our preconceptions. The same is true of the more general retreat from the physical world evidenced in "Dream", as is shown by the recurrent connection between the physical world (contact with women especially) and disturbance: Belacqua, as a

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14. (cont.) a priori, stops looking, stops existing, when faced with a painting that might just have liked (PvV. 349): "Tout ce que vous saurez jamais d'un tableau, c'est combien vous l'aimez (et à la rigueur pourquoi, si cela vous intéresse). Mais cela non plus vous ne le saurez probablement jamais, à moins de devenir sourd et d'oublier vos lettres. Et le temps viendra où, de vos visites au Louvre, car vous n'irez plus qu'au Louvre, il ne vous restera que des souvenirs de durée: 'Suis resté trois minutes devant le sourire du Professeur Pater, à le regarder.' (PvV. 351)

15. Winnie herself is, as I have said, a creature of habit, and it is a function of her "sensible" habit to consciously examine physical features. She might experience spontaneity if she did close her eyes.



creature of habit, chooses to minimise the possibility of disturbance by isolating himself from its most obvious sources and by living in a world that he can cope with.

While we can still not define what reality is - reality is indefinable - we can now take our earlier connection between reality and awareness further. Reality has been preliminarily understood as that of which we are intensely aware (painfully and joyfully) when we are not creatures of habit. We are now able to say that this can be an awareness either of the outer, physical world or of the inner, mental world. The macrocosm and the microcosm are equally real and either (or both) can be the occasion for spontaneous experience, just as either can, so long as our habit protects us from their reality, be habitual.

### Death

Another of Beckett's concerns that is introduced in "Dream" but that receives its first significant elaboration in the short stories is his idea of death. In "Dream", as we have seen, Belacqua seems on the verge of dying on New Year's Eve in Austria. Death, we read, may occur on the third or fifth day (D. 77) after the New Year, but Belacqua still goes to a party with the Smeraldina, engages in a heated discussion with her father, and makes a seemingly miraculous recovery from whatever ailed him when he and the Smeraldina break up. The indications that his ailment was not what is usually thought of as a terminal illness, and that the death that was expected for him was not what we normally think of as death, are plain enough and, as I have suggested, it seems rather more likely that he was in danger of suffering the death of his habit. The same is true in "Assumption", the very first of Beckett's prose works ever to be published. In this very short story Beckett describes a young man's experiences thus: "each night he died and was God, each night revived and was torn, torn and battered..."<sup>16</sup> This cannot have anything to do with what we normally mean by death, but neither here nor in any other of the creative works is Beckett's unusual way of viewing death explained. This idea of death plays, in More Pricks Than Kicks, its most significant role in the stories that concern themselves with the prelude to and with the

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16. "Assumption", op. cit. p. 44.

aftermath of Belacqua's own death: "Yellow" and "Draff". In these stories it is possible to see how the link between the death of habit and unforeseen circumstances, between habit and the attempt to plan for all eventualities, that is abstractly expressed in Proust receives fictional expression.

"Yellow" begins with Belacqua waking up in a hospital bed at five o'clock in the morning. He is to be operated on at noon, he has been informed, for a tumour on the back of his neck and is also to have part of a toe removed. Lying back, smoking, after his early morning tea, he considers his position:

Carry it off as he might, he was in a dreadful situation. At twelve sharp he would be sliced open - zeeep! - with a bistoury. That was the idea that his mind for the moment was in no fit state to entertain. If this Hunnish idea once got a foothold in his little psyche in its present unready condition, topsyturvy after yesterday's debauch of anxiety and the good night's sleep coming on top of that, it would be annihilated. The psyche, not the idea, which was precisely the reverse of what he wished. (MP. 171-172)

Beckett is using "mind" and "psyche" here in the same way as he uses "habit" (and sometimes "ego") in Proust, i.e. as a name for that internal mechanism which shelters human beings from disturbance. Belacqua is clearly in a somewhat precarious position: his earlier anxiety and his night's sleep have conspired to weaken his habit, and the disturbance has made itself felt.<sup>17</sup> In Proust Beckett says that this can only happen through the negligence or inefficiency of habit, and describes incidents from Proust's novel that show that such negligence or inefficiency can be associated with anxiety: "in consequence of his [Marcel's] journey and his anxiety, his habit is in abeyance, the habit of tenderness for his grandmother, ... and he realises with horror that his grandmother is dead..." (P. 15) and, on another occasion, "all his faculties are on the alert, on the defensive, vigilant and taut... Habit has not had time to silence the explosions of the clock" (P. 12). The death of habit "is inseparable from suffering and anxiety - the suffering of the dying and the jealous anxiety of the ousted. The old ego dies hard" (P. 10). Belacqua's anxiety, in "Yellow", does not necessarily signify the

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17. The very fact that he knows the time of his operation may also have contributed to his anxiety. In Proust, Beckett describes how Marcel's indifference at parting from Albertine is "transformed into the most horrible anxiety" when he hears her make plans for the following evening, saying "Tomorrow, then, at half-past eight",

imminent death of his habit, but it does mean that his habit will have to exert itself if such a death is to be avoided. His psyche, or habit, is in an "unready condition" (MP. 171-172): like Françoise in Proust's novel, he has encountered a circumstance unforeseen in the "curriculum" of his habit (P.9) and is hard put to cope with it. If he does not, his habit will die, which is "precisely the reverse" of what he wishes (MP. 172).

In Proust, the workings of a threatened habit are often described in terms of warfare, armour, and defence against danger. Habit is "the generic name for the countless treaties concluded between the countless subjects that constitute the individual and their countless correlative objects" (P. 8; italics added). When it is opposed (P. 10) by an unfamiliar phenomenon, when it "betrays its trust as a screen to spare its victim the spectacle of reality" (P. 10), then it disappears "with wailing and gnashing of teeth" (P. 10). Our potential for spontaneity and for involuntary memory is stored "in that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which habit does not possess the key, and does not need to, because it contains none of the hideous and useful paraphernalia of war" (P. 18). One of the reserve forces that the habit defence establishment can call on in case of emergency is curiosity: "Curiosity is a non-conditioned reflex, in its most primitive manifestations a reaction before a danger-stimulus and seldom exempt... from utilitarian considerations. Curiosity is the hair of our habit tending to stand on end... Curiosity is the safeguard, not the death, of the cat... The more interested our interest, the more indelible must be its record of impressions. Its booty will always be available, because its aggression was a form of self-defence, i.e. the function of an invariable" (P. 17-18). The false world projected by habit, i.e. the world that we consider we live in, is described as a "carapace of paste and pewter":<sup>18</sup> carapace

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17. (cont.) and Beckett comments: "The tacit understanding that the future can be controlled is destroyed. The future event cannot be focussed, its implications cannot be seized, until it is definitely situation and a date assigned to it. When Albertine was his prisoner, the possibility of her escape did not seriously disturb him, because it was indistinct and abstract, like the possibility of death" (P. 5-6).

18. It is in the "ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being" that is stored our potential for spontaneity, which Beckett calls the

is the technical name for the lobster's armour, its tough shell protecting it from its enemies in the sea.

Belacqua views the disturbance as something challenging his peace of mind and as an enemy that he must get the better of:

Six hours separated him from the ordeal, six hours were allotted to him in which to make up his mind, as a pretty drab her face for an enemy. His getting the fleam in the neck, his suffering the tortures of the damned while seeming to slumber as peacefully as a little child,<sup>19</sup> were of no consequence, as hope saved they were not, so long as his mind were master of the thought of them. What he had to do, and had with typical slackness put off doing till the last moment, was to arrange a hot reception in his mind for the thought of all the little acts of kindness that he was to endure before the day was out. (MP. 172-173)

Further disturbed by the dawn breaking - "daybreak, with its suggestion of a nasty birth, he could not bear" (MP. 172) - he switches on the lamp in his room "to postpone daybreak until he should feel a little more sure of himself", and then switches it off and closes his eyes. Vision is again, as in "Fingal", a possible source of disturbance and danger, and thus is to be avoided if habit is to survive:

He would close his eyes, he would bilk the dawn that way. What were the eyes anyway? The posterns of the mind. They were safer closed. (MP. 173)

To avert what he recognises as a potentially disastrous - for his habit - situation, Belacqua does his best to "make himself ready" (MP. 174) so that the worst will have been foreseen in his curriculum; he will "ginger up his little psyche for the occasion" (MP.174). The 'military' terminology becomes more marked: he is described as

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18. (cont.) "pearl that may give the lie to our carapace of paste and pewter (P. 19). The carapace of the lobster in "Dante and the Lobster", which had survived its enemies in the marine environment to which it is accustomed (and in which its carapace can ensure survival) is useless, as habit is useless, when the environment is drastically changed. The lobster, after breathing secretly "in the midst of its enemies" (MP. 21), is to die in a pot of scalding water, an enemy for which it has not evolved a defence mechanism, and any given habit will die when faced with a circumstance against which its defence mechanisms are helpless.
19. "My sufferings under the anaesthetic, he reflected, will be exquisite, but I shall not remember them." (MP. 172)

having a very dull irksome morning, "preparing for the fray in this manner"; the narrator asks, "What were his tactics in this crisis?"; and replies:

In a less tight corner he might have been content to barricade his mind against the idea. But this was at the best a slipshod method, since the idea, how blatant an enemy soever and despite the strictest guard, was certain to sidle in sooner or later, and then the game was up...

His plan therefore was not to refuse admission to the idea, but to keep it at bay until his mind was ready to receive it. Then let it in and pulverise it. Obliterate the bastard. He ground his teeth in the bed... But by what means. Belacqua ransacked his mind for a suitable engine of destruction. (MP. 174-175; italics added)

The idea that comes to mind as an engine of destruction is a phrase from Donne, viz. "Now among our wise men, I doubt not but many would be found, who would laugh at Heraclitus weeping, none which would weep at Democritus laughing" (MP. 175), and Belacqua decides to choose either laughter or tears as his means of "perforat[ing] his adversary" (MP. 175). Fearing that if he resorts to tears he ("and, by extension, his late family also" ! MP. 177) would be disgraced since all the hospital staff would think that "far from grinning and bearing" he "had piped his eye, or had been on the point of doing so", Belacqua decides in favour of laughter:

So now his course was clear. He would arm his mind with laughter, laughter is not quite the word but it will have to serve, at every point, then he would admit the idea and blow it to pieces. (MP. 177; italics added)

The narrator then asks, "How did he proceed to put this plan into execution?" and replies: "He has forgotten, he has no use for it anymore" (MP. 177; italics added). The whole of "Yellow" is written in the past tense with this single exception, which suggests that Belacqua has no use for the plan at some point after the story ends, i.e. after his death. The implications of this, and of further indications of a possible life after death, will be discussed in connection with "Draff".

We do not discover how he puts his plan into execution, but that he does do so seems clear, and he seems, provisionally at least, to have solved his problem. The whole potentially disastrous situation seems to have become innocuous and his habit is still

intact. For the remainder of the morning, until he is just about to leave for the operating theatre, he is calm and undisturbed, enjoying watching the nurses go about their business, and making light conversation with them while "the sun, that creature of habit, shone in through the window" (MP. 179). His cheerfulness is once more threatened when he is having his toe bandaged by one of the nurses for the operation:

...she transferred her compassion to the toes. She scoured the whole phalanx, top and bottom. Suddenly she began to titter. Belacqua nearly kicked her in the eye, he got such a shock. How dared she trespass on his programme! He refusing to be tickled in this petty local way... and she forgetting herself, there was no other word for it. There were limits, he felt, to Democritus. (MP. 182)

His cheerfulness has been the result of his having carried out his Democritean strategy of laughing, and the fact that he can be shocked by tittering and tickling indicates the limits of this strategy and bodes ill for its effectiveness as a defence mechanism. At this stage, however, Belacqua swallows his choler (MP. 182) and temporarily regains his equanimity - until the nurse comments almost inaudibly that "his [i.e. Belacqua's toe's] troubles are nearly over" (MP. 182):

Belacqua broke down completely, he could not help it. This distant voice, like a cor anglais coming through the evening, and then the his, the his was the last straw. He buried his face in his hands, he did not care who saw him.

'I would like' he sobbed 'the cat to have it, if I might.' (MP. 182)

Despite this collapse, which reveals that he is still very much in a precarious position, Belacqua's habit is surviving:

His heart gave a great leap in its box with a fulminating sense that he was all wrong, that anger would stand by him much better than the other thing, the laugh seemed so feeble, so like a whinge in the end. But on second thoughts no, anger would turn aside when it came to the point, leaving him like a sheep. Anyhow it was too late to turn back. He tried cautiously what it felt to have the idea in his mind... Nothing happened, he felt no shock. So at least he had spiked the brute, that was something.

At this point he went downstairs and had a truly military evacuation, Army Service Corps. Coming back he did not doubt that all would yet be well. (MP. 183)

Even the nurse giving him an injection does not unduly upset his equanimity - "she had the weapon into his bottom and discharged

before he realised what was happening" (MP. 183) - and, though he insists ("it is my right" MP. 183) on knowing the purpose of the injection and suspects that there may be "a conspiracy in this place to destroy him, body and soul" (MP. 183), he is confident of his ability to cope with what may be in store for him at noon: "The day was out of danger, any fool could see that" (MP. 184).

When he has his theatre-socks on and the ends of his pyjamas tucked into them ("like a cyclist's" MP. 185), he stands up, ready to go. "His hour was at hand, there was no blinking at the fact" (MP. 185). He goes down the elevator and into the theatre, ignoring the surgeon (who is washing his hands) and flashing a dazzling smile at one of the nurses ("she would not forget that in a hurry" MP. 186), and bounces up on to the operating table where he is anaesthetised:

The mixture was too rich, there would be no question about that. His heart was running away, terrible yellow jerks in his skull. 'One of the best', he heard those words that did not refer to him. The expression reassured him. The best man clawed at his tap.

By Christ! he did die!

They had clean forgotten to auscultate him! (MP. 186)

The "By Christ! he did die!" is a follow-up to a story that Belacqua had laughed at before leaving his room, about a parson taking part in an amateur theatrical production. All the parson had to do was to snatch at his heart when a revolver went off, cry "By God! I'm shot", and drop dead. The parson objected to saying "By God!" on such a secular occasion, so it was agreed that he should replace "By God!" with "Mercy!", "Upon my word!", or "Oh my!" The production was so amateur that the revolver did in fact go off, and the man of God was transfixed. "Oh" he cried, "oh...! BY CHRIST! I AM SHOT!" (MP.184).

When examined in terms of habit and spontaneity, the point of the story about the parson, and of "Yellow" as a whole, is that in each case an entirely unforeseen circumstance - the revolver going off on the one hand, and the negligence of the hospital staff on the other - upsets all carefully laid plans, and results in the death

of the individual who had laid the plans. It is characteristic of the creature of habit, when threatened, to try to 'outwit' whatever forces are threatening him by making detailed plans and by leaving as little as possible to chance. The whole course of Belacqua's morning is evidence of this. As he wonders at the length of the bandage the nurse is winding round his toe, he thinks to himself:

She would never have done with her bandage, it cannot have measured less than a furlong. But of course it would never do to leave anything to chance, Belacqua could appreciate that.  
(MP. 182)

It is, however, impossible to foresee all eventualities, and the feeling of (false) security that results from having done one's utmost to ward off danger - a feeling Belacqua clearly experiences just before his operation - may in fact contribute to the disastrous effect of the unforeseen circumstance since the one thing that cannot be reconciled with a feeling of security is a preparedness for shock.

The next story, "Draff", which opens with the notice of his death in the newspaper ("Shuah, Belacqua, in a Nursing Home" MP. 189), is largely concerned with his funeral, and all the obvious signs indicate that he does die physically on the operating table. Some curious remarks in "Draff", however, suggest this was no ordinary, or rather not only an ordinary, death.

The Smeraldina, seeing her husband's death notice next day is, we are informed, reading "in the paper that she had begun to survive him" (MP. 189; italics added); his forehead, as she touches it, is "much less chilly than she had expected" ("but that no doubt was explained by her own peripheral circulation, which was wretched" MP. 191); Belacqua "had often looked forward to meeting the girls, Lucy especially, hallowed and transfigured beyond the veil. What a hope! Death had already cured him of that naïveté" (MP. 195); cements, it is agreed by all concerned with the funeral arrangements, do not suit the defunct Belacqua, "somehow they made him look so put-upon and helpless, almost as though he had not done dying" (MP. 197); the coffin is covered as the small party is about to set off for the cemetery, and now, we are informed, "he [presumably Belacqua] was grinning up at the lid at last" (MP. 198); the only individual other than Smerry,



the parson, and the undertaker (Nick Malacoda) and his men, to attend the funeral is Capper Quin, known as 'Hairy' ("he was so glabrous" MP. 134), a friend of Belacqua's of whom we learn:

Belacqua dead and buried, Hairy seemed to have taken on a new lease of life... Perhaps the explanation of this was that while Belacqua was alive Hairy could not be himself, or, if you prefer, could be nothing else. Whereas now the defunct, such of his parts at least as might be made to fit, could be pressed into service, incorporated in the daily ellipses of Capper Quin without his having to face the risk of exposure. Already Belacqua was not wholly dead, but merely mutilated. *The Smeraldina appreciated this without thinking.* (MP. 200-201; italics added)

and the Smeraldina herself seems to have "suffered the inverse change":

She had died in part. She had definitely ceased to exist in that particular part which Belacqua had been at such pains to isolate... Her spiritual equivalent, to give it a name, had been measured, confined and covered by Nick Malacoda. As material for anagogy ... the worms were welcome to her. (MP. 201)

There are intimations here both of a process of dying that is not yet over for Belacqua ("she had begun to survive him", "as though he had not done dying", "already Belacqua was not wholly dead") and of the existence of some form of awareness after death ("death had cured him of that naïveté", and the earlier comment, in "Yellow", that he has forgotten how he executed his plan of attack on the troublesome idea because at some point after the time covered in that story he stops having any use for it (MP. 177)).

The idea of some form of post mortem awareness is only intelligible in the context of what we normally mean by death if we accept that there is some kind of life after death, and it is extremely unlikely that Beckett ever seriously entertained this notion;<sup>20</sup> the idea of not having finished dying after having died is totally unintelligible in this context. When we look at these ideas in terms of habit and spontaneity, however, they are not only intelligible but also necessary

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20. In Proust he writes that voluntary memory, that "enissary" of habit, assures us when we wake up that our "'personality' has not disappeared with [our] fatigue", i.e. that we are the same now as we were when we fell asleep, and he continues: "It is possible (for those that take an interest in such speculations) to consider the resurrection of the soul as a final piece of impertinence from the same source. It [habitual, voluntary memory] insists on that most necessary, wholesome and monotonous plagiarism - the plagiarism of oneself." (P. 33)

conditions at certain stages in life. The idea of awareness after the death of habit is essential to the view of human existence expounded by Beckett in Proust and, as we have seen, elsewhere: it is only in the spontaneity experienced briefly when habit dies that we are ever really aware; as creatures of habit we are precisely unaware, shielded from awareness of reality. So too we may, like Belacqua in "Yellow" and on New Year's Eve in "Dream", undergo a process of dying that may or may not (depending on the strength of our habit and the extent of the disturbance involved) conclude with the death of our habit, and since the habit--death of habit (spontaneity)--rebirth of habit cycle is supposed to be continuous, the process of dying of one habit would necessarily come after the previous habit has already died.

These considerations are enough to give us reason to stop, when we find Beckett discussing death or dying or re-birth in his work, and examine whether he is discussing such processes in dictionary terms and/or in his own terms of habit and spontaneity. The difference between the two kinds of death is crucial, and on our interpretation of what he means by death in any particular case will depend our whole view of the meaning of the work being discussed.

In Endgame,<sup>21</sup> for example, Hamm says on two occasions that outside of the shelter is death (E. 9, 70), and it clearly possible to take him literally. If we do so, then it is not unreasonable to interpret the play as depicting a kind of refuge for the few surviving members of the human race: the Zagreb Drama Theatre performed the play during their 1958-59 season as a depiction of an atomic shelter after global destruction.<sup>22</sup> It is, however, also possible to interpret the shelter as a dramatic image for habit, and

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21. Endgame, Grove Press Inc., New York, 1958.

22. See Darko Suvin, "Beckett's Purgatory of the Individual", op. cit., p. 34.

this interpretation explains a lot that the other type of interpretation has difficulty coping with. Hamm's lack of interest in the small boy, for example, is understandable if death is seen as meaning the death of the old habit (i.e. spontaneity), for the boy can then be seen as representing the reality outside the shelter<sup>23</sup> and the hope for renovation that Hamm refuses to allow to disturb his preconceptions about the imminence of a definitive end to his world. Allowing for the possibility that death, in the play, may mean the death of habit (and I don't have the space to argue this here) allows for the possibility of renovation and of hope, however uncertain it may be whether such renovation will actually take place. For those that assume that death is being used only in the normal sense, there can be no hope.

Belacqua does die physically. What is not certain is whether or not his habit died beforehand (or simultaneously). That there should, in "Draff", be suggestions both of an unfinished process of dying (which is indicative of a habit not annihilated, although threatened) and of a post-mortem awareness (indicative of the spontaneity that comes with the death of habit), cancels out the possibility of deciding between these two possibilities: we cannot say definitely either that Belacqua's habit survived or that it died.

### "Dante and the Lobster"

When "Dante and the Lobster" opens, Belacqua is puzzling over a difficult passage in Canto II of Dante's Paradiso, the first of the canti describing Dante and Beatrice's sojourn on the moon. Dante has asked Beatrice for an explanation of the markings on the moon which are visible from earth and which human beings associate with the

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23. Martin Esslin asks, "Is this boy a symbol of life outside the closed circuit of withdrawal from reality", in "Samuel Beckett: The Search for Self", Twentieth Century Interpretations of Endgame, edited by Bell Gale Chevigny, Prentice-Hall, Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969, p. 29.

story of the outcast Cain. The poet's own suggestion is that differences in density between various parts of the moon's substance cause the moon to reflect light in varying degrees and thus to appear spotty. Beatrice begins by refuting this notion, and Belacqua, reading the canto, has no difficulty with her rebuttal of the theory suggested by Dante:

Part one, the refutation, was plain sailing. She made her point clearly, she said what she had to say without fuss or loss of time. (MP. 9)

Beatrice then proceeds with part two, her own explanation. Since she has her explanation from God himself, Belacqua can be sure it is "accurate in every particular" (MP. 9), but he finds it impossible to "make head or tail" of this demonstration, and is "bogged indeed" (MP. 9). This passage in the Paradiso is, as the Ottolenghi says later in Beckett's story, a "famous teaser" (MP. 18): to understand Beatrice's explanation it is necessary to be familiar with the conception of the universe in the Divine Comedy. The enigma that Belacqua finds troubling is of interest to us here, however, only inasmuch as it bears directly on "Dante and the Lobster". It does this by introducing the notion of the victim who in turn victimises another, a notion which provides the thematic framework within which the short story is set.

As midday strikes, Belacqua "at once switche[s] his mind off its task" (MP. 9), holds the Divine Comedy on his two palms under his nose, and slams it shut, "squinting at it angrily" (MP. 9) for a time before putting it aside. Then:

He leaned back in his chair to feel his mind subside and the itch of this mean quodlibet die down. Nothing could be done until his mind got better and was still, which gradually it did. (MP. 10)

Belacqua then ventures to consider his next moves. Three large obligations present themselves. First he has to organise his lunch, then he has to pick up a lobster from the fishmongers, and finally he has to go to his Italian lesson with Signorina Adriana Ottolenghi.

The enigma of Beatrice's explanation of the markings on the moon is, of course, a quodlibet, but the discourse with which she introduces this explanation is soon seen to have immediate bearings on

Belacqua's afternoon. This is a discourse on the interrelationships binding the different parts of creation together in gradations of being of perfection inversely proportional to the distance from the Empyrean, the abode of God. The planets, the moon, the gradations of earthly creation, work, Beatrice explains, "from grade to grade, as each is acted on by those above and acts on those below".<sup>24</sup> God alone, the Unmoved Mover, is not acted upon, but only acts on what is below, i.e. the created universe. Every thing that is created must, Beatrice says, "be branded and in turn impose its brand"<sup>25</sup> as dictated by the will of the Mover, God. In the Paradiso this discourse allows Beatrice to explain the markings of the moon by showing that the moon, being the sphere furthest from the Empyrean, receives less of excellence than the other spheres, with the result that various parts of the moon differ from one another and reflect light unequally. In "Dante and the Lobster" it allows us to understand the direction taken by Belacqua's thoughts during the afternoon that follows his reading of the canto. The discourse itself is not quoted in the short story, but it becomes clear that the notion that each created part of the universe must be branded and in turn impose its brand is relevant to the events that follow during Belacqua's afternoon.

The quodlibet died down just after noon, but it returns to Belacqua while he is controlling the broiling of the bread for his lunch and waiting for the second slice to be "done to a dead end" (MP. 11). Set in the middle of the detailed description of Belacqua's elaborate preparations for his lunch is the following unexpected paragraph:

For the tiller of the field the thing was simple, he had it from his mother. The spots were Cain with his truss of thorns, dispossessed, cursed from the earth, fugitive and vagabond. The moon was that countenance fallen and branded, seared with the first stigma of God's pity, that an outcast might not die quickly. It was a mix-up in the mind of the tiller, but that did not matter. It had been good enough for his mother, it was good enough for him. (MP. 11-12)

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24. Paradiso, II, 122-123: "di grado in grado, / che di suprendono et di sotto fanno..."

25. Paradiso, II, 132: "La moto e la virtu de santi giri, / come dal fabbro l'arte del martello, da beati motor convien chi spiri; / e'l ciel cui tanti lumi fanno bello, / della mente profonda che lui volve / prende l'image e fassene suggello..."

This explanation is good enough for Belacqua, and the problem once again is forgotten. The procedure that Belacqua follows in preparing his lunch shows him acting out, in ritual fashion, a drama connected in several ways with the Biblical drama of the marking of Cain.

The first thing that Belacqua does is to lock the door to ensure complete privacy. He spreads an old newspaper out on the table and sees "the rather handsome face of McCabe the assassin" (also known as the Malahide murderer, MP. 17) staring up at him. Having set the toaster "precisely on the flame" of the gasring, and adjusted the flow, he evens the end of the loaf of bread off "on the face of McCabe" and cuts two rounds, the main elements of his forthcoming meal.

All these preliminaries were very hasty and impersonal.

It was now that the real skill began to be required, it was at this point that the average person began to make a hash of the entire proceedings. (MP. 11)

In the proceedings which follow, Belacqua's aggression is directed against the two rounds of bread which are metaphorically humanised:

He laid his cheek against the soft of the bread, it was spongy and warm, alive. But he would very soon take that plush feel off it, by God but he would very quickly take that fat white look of its face. (MP. 11)

The first "candidate" is toasted slowly and evenly until it is "done to a dead end, black and smoking", when it is replaced by its "comrade" (MP. 11). Belacqua is "on his knees before the flame" throughout this procedure, and long before both rounds are done, the room is "full of smoke and the reek of burning" (MP. 12). Returning the scorching toast<sup>r</sup> to its nail on the wall, Belacqua sears a great weal in the wallpaper. This is "hooliganism pure and simple" (MP. 12) - as opposed, I would suggest, to the more complex kind of hooliganism involved in Belacqua's treatment of the bread. The repetition, in this context, of the word seared, which was used in the previous paragraph to describe God's marking of Cain, suggests that God too was guilty of some kind of hooliganism.

Belacqua now works a thick paste of Savora, salt and pepper into the "pores" of each of the pieces of charred toast, and he looks forward to the moment when he will eat his meal:

This meal that he was at such pains to make ready, he would devour it with a sense of rapture and victory, it would be like smiting the sledded Polacks on the ice. He would snap at it with closed eyes, he would gnash it to a pulp, he would vanquish it utterly with his fangs. Then the anguish of pungency, the pang of the spices, as each mouthful died, scorching his palate, bringing tears. (MP. 12)

The references to the sledded Polacks smitten by Hamlet's father in an "angry parole" (Hamlet, I.1,62-63) and to the anticipated death of each mouthful, reinforces the connection between the toast and human beings, as well as underlining Belacqua's almost inhuman ("fangs") fury. He is, however, getting ahead of himself in anticipation, for he is not yet ready to eat:

...he was not yet all set, there was yet much to be done. He had burnt his offering, he had not yet fully dressed it. Yes, he had put the horse behind the tumbrel. (MP. 12)

A tumbrel is, of course, a kind of cart, but the word is, in this context, far more powerful than 'cart' would have been (even if 'to put the cart before the horse' weren't a cliché). 'Tumbrel' is the word commonly used of those carts that carried men and women to execution at the guillotine in France. In the context of the humanisation of the two rounds of toasted bread, a context into which the idea of an "offering" has now been incorporated, the word 'tumbrel' completes the image of a human sacrifice.

The cheese is missing. He claps the two rounds of toast together, wraps them up in a piece of paper, and sets out for the grocer's. "His whole being was straining forward toward the joy in store" (MP. 13). All that "human care and skill" (MP. 12) could do to ensure an excellent lunch has been done. Nonetheless he is not yet sure of his private ecstasy:

If he were accosted now he might just as well fling his lunch into the gutter and walk straight back home. (MP. 13)

His journey is happily without incident, but it is with a very suspicious eye that he inspects the cheese that the grocer has set aside for him, for "what he wanted was a good green stenching rotten lump of Gorgonzola cheese, alive" (MP. 14) and the piece he finds is a "cadaverous tablet" with only a "faint fragrance of corruption" (MP. 14). He complains heatedly to the grocer but ("It was sweating.

That was something." MP. 13) accepts it sullenly and continues on his way to the public house to consume his meal.

The lunch turns out to be "a notable success" since the cheese proved astonishingly strong after all, and

...then the food had been further spiced by the intelligence, transmitted in a low tragic voice across the counter by Oliver the improver, that the Malahide murderer's petition for mercy, signed by half the land, having been rejected, the man must swing at dawn in Mountjoy and nothing could save him. Ellis the hangman was even now on his way. Belacqua, tearing at the sandwich and swilling the precious stout, pondered on McCabe in his cell. (MP. 17)

What better added ingredient could have been imagined? The bread alive, the cheese alive, only the viscid salve of Savora, salt and pepper inanimate - and then to find a living spice! Belacqua's "teeth and jaws had been in heaven" (MP. 17). An excellent lunch: "It would abide as a standard in his mind" (MP. 17).

This reference to McCabe connects the end of the discussion of Belacqua's lunch with the beginning. Belacqua had locked the door to his room to ensure that "nobody could come at him" (MP. 10). The example given of the kind of interruption that, in the interests of making his lunch enjoyable, Belacqua is anxious to avoid is that of a "brisk tattler" who might "come bouncing in... with a big idea or a petition" (MP. 10). If someone had brought round McCabe's petition for mercy to be signed when Belacqua was set on his lunch, Belacqua would clearly not have signed it. The sacrificial victim of Belacqua's frenzied (MP. 13) hunger ("more of mind, I need scarcely say, than of body" MP. 13) for his lunch is thus associated with McCabe, the news of whose impending execution has perfected Belacqua's meal.

The moon was that countenance fallen and branded, seared with the first stigma of God's pity, that an outcast might not die quickly. (MP. 12; italics added)

Belacqua, slowly searing his "live" lunch - "it took time, but if a thing<sup>g</sup> was worth doing at all it was worth doing well" (MP. 12) - wiping the "fat white look" off the "face" of his bread, sliced on the rather handsome "face of McCabe" (who, like Cain, is a murderer), and rejoicing in the strength of his pale soapy piece of veined cheese,



is "branding" his victim as surely as God branded Cain.

Belacqua is also, at least potentially, a victim himself, himself branded. The first hint of this, of Belacqua's being 'marked', is found when Belacqua is complaining to the grocer:

"Sir" said the grocer. This was not a question, nor yet an expression of acquiescence. The tone in which it was let fall made it quite impossible to know what was in the man's mind. It was a most ingenious riposte.

"I tell you" said Belacqua with great heat "this won't do at all. If you can't do better than this" he raised the hand that held the packet "I shall be obliged to go for my cheese elsewhere. Do you mark me?"

"Sir" said the grocer. (MP. 14)

Cain was marked with "the first stigma of God's pity"; the grocer feels "sympathy and pity" (MP. 15) for his customer. We can clearly draw no more conclusions from this incident than Belacqua can draw about the meaning of the grocer's inscrutable "sir", but a question - is Belacqua 'marked'? - has been raised that the story will proceed to answer.

Cain killed his brother and thus was branded because God had unaccountably refused Cain's offering, accepting Abel's. McCabe is to swing at dawn because the petition for mercy, signed by "half the land", has been rejected. McCabe has no more recourse now ("nothing could save him") to the authorities that rejected his petition than Cain had to the God who rejected his offering, and presumably neither Cain nor McCabe had any idea why they should have been so unlucky: they are the victims of factors beyond their control.

While Belacqua is organising his lunch, it is precisely those factors which he cannot control that he fears. He does all that "human care and skill" can do to ensure a good lunch, but he can do no more and is, as in "Yellow", potentially at the mercy of circumstances that he cannot be sure of avoiding. He locks himself into his room to exclude brisk tattlers; he threads his way rapidly, his head bowed, towards the grocer's, hoping fervently to avoid being accosted. It is only when he is in a shabby quarter of Dublin (rarely frequented by "the incontinent bosthoons of his own class, itching to pass on a big idea or inflict an appointment" MP. 15) on his way

to the pub where he is known to the extent that his presence there will provoke "no comment or laughter" (MP.15) from the regulars that he can feel that his lunch is "as good as a fait accompli" (MP. 15), and can feel "free to consider items two and three" on his agenda for the afternoon, "the lobster and the lesson, in closer detail" (MP. 15).

He has been lucky with his lunch, his plans have not been disrupted by any unforeseen circumstance - even the cheese turns out well in spite of his misgivings - and his fears now are for the outcome of his transaction with the fishmonger. These fears punctuate the very specific plans that he makes on his way to the pub. "Assuming... that his lousy old bitch of an aunt had given her order in good time that morning" (MP. 15; italics added) so that Belacqua won't be delayed when he picks up the lobster on his way to the school, he can stay on at the pub until closing time and still get to the school by three o'clock. He is estimating how he will spend his half-crown when he interrupts his reverie again: "Always assuming, of course, that the lobster was all ready to be handed over. God damn these tradesmen, he thought, you can never rely on them" (MP. 15; italics added). Then, after planning what he and the Ottolenghi will talk about in this afternoon's lesson, Belacqua concludes:

Everything was all set now and in order. Bating, of course, the lobster, which had to remain an incalculable factor. He must just hope for the best. And expect the worst, he thought gaily, diving into the public, as usual. (MP. 16; italics added)

As it happens, here, as in his fears of being disturbed when set on his lunch, nothing happens to thwart his plans, and his anger at the tradesmen is unjustified.

The lobster was ready after all, the man handed it over instanter, and with such a pleasant smile. Really a little bit of courtesy and goodwill went a long way in this world. A smile and a cheerful word from a common working-man and the face of the world was brightened. And it was so easy, a mere question of muscular control. (MP. 17)

Instead of the "countenance fallen and branded" that is Belacqua's mother's explanation of the dark spots on the moon, emblem of Cain's punishment at the hands of the incalculable factor that is God's grace, here is the face of the world brightened as a result of what Belacqua

thinks is "muscular control". Everything has indeed gone "swimmingly" for Belacqua up to now: no circumstances beyond his control have materialised. So far at least Belacqua is unscathed.

Belacqua is a creature of habit. His hunger for his lunch is "more of mind...than of body" (MP. 13) and he fears disturbances that might come from the external world over which he has no control. He is a creature of routine. He knows, presumably from experience, that if he is disturbed the food "will turn to bitterness on his palate or, worse again, taste of nothing" (MP. 10); the labyrinth of lanes to the grocery is "familiar" (MP. 13); the cheese is there "every day, in the same corner, waiting to be called for" by him (MP. 13); he goes to the public house "as usual" (MP. 16). The reassuring snippets of conventional wisdom that are scattered suspiciously frequently throughout Belacqua's interior monologues are further evidence that he is dominated by habit, the minister of dullness, the agent of security, sunk in the boredom of living: "if a thing was worth doing at all it was worth doing well, that was a true saying" (MP. 12); "they [the grocer's family] were very decent obliging people" (MP. 15); "we live and learn, that was a true saying" (MP. 17); "really a little bit of courtesy and goodwill went a long way in this world" (MP. 17); and, finally, his soon-to-be contradicted "Well...it's a quick death, God help us all" (MP. 21).

Belacqua's fears that his carefully-laid plans may be disrupted are fears that something unforeseen may happen. This kind of fear is, by Beckett's definition (P. 21), necessarily common to all creatures of habit.

It is the duty of habit to preserve its creature's immunity from all circumstances which do not fit in with, and which therefore threaten to annihilate, a particular habitual projection of the world. It is a function of Belacqua's habit that he has contingency plans up his sleeve in case he is baulked in his main objectives. If he is interrupted when toasting his bread he will, no doubt, be upset,

but he will not be at a loss: he knows that he might as well not eat at all and what, if he does eat, the food will taste like. For him to be accosted on his way to the grocer's would be a "disaster" but again Belacqua knows the outcome: he would "fling his lunch into the gutter and walk straight back home" and/or perhaps strike the meddlar (MP. 13). If the cheese is not up to par, he threatens to take his custom elsewhere. And even if the lobster is not ready in good time Belacqua will certainly cope: diving into the public house, he not only hopes for the best but also expects the worst.

These eventualities for which he makes allowance, hopefully (and, as it turns out) unnecessarily, are foreseeable potential obstacles. Presumably Belacqua has, at some point, had experience of having his ritual interrupted, of being accosted on the street, and of unreliable tradesmen. They all are "incalculable" factors only in that Belacqua cannot know, in advance, whether or not they will happen: he can, and does, calculate what to do if they do happen. They therefore form part of what Beckett calls the "haze of conception-preconception" (P. 11) with which habit shelters its creature from reality, and they are necessarily incapable of causing the death of Belacqua's current habit. They are, in other words, powerless to replace the boredom of living with the suffering of being (P. 9), powerless to restore the "maximum value" (P. 9) of Belacqua's being. The only hope that Belacqua may be made to suffer, may be victimised, branded, is the hope that can be provided by a circumstance that is incalculable in the sense of being entirely unforeseeable. We learn what this circumstance is to be (though not yet how it will affect Belacqua's habit) at the conclusion of Belacqua's intercourse with the fishmonger:

"Lepping" he said cheerfully, handing it [the lobster] over.

"Lepping?" said Belacqua. What on earth was that?

"Lepping fresh, sir" said the man, "fresh in this morning."

Now Belacqua, on the analogy of mackerel and other fish that he had heard described as lepping when they had been taken but an hour or two previously, supposed the man to mean that the lobster had very recently been killed. (MP. 17)

Belacqua continues on his way to the school, where he leaves the parcel containing the lobster in the hall while he has his lesson

with the Ottolenghi. He asks her about the moon enigma, and she promises to look it up for him:

The sweet creature! She would look it up in her big Dante when she got home. What a woman! (MP. 18)

His ecstasies are curious, since this is exactly what he expected of her. On the way to the pub, when he decided to ask her about the spots on the moon, he was confident that "if she could not tell him there and then she would make it up, only too gladly, against the next time" (MP. 16). He has "set her on a pedestal in his mind, apart from other women" (MP. 16) ostensibly because he considers her intelligent and well-informed, but there is at least a suggestion that these reasons are not unconnected with her predictability. He has not done an exercise for her, "but that did not matter" (MP. 16) and, although she had said they would read Il Cinque Maggio together during this day's lesson, he is sure she "would not mind" if he told her (in a "shining phrase" in Italian, framed on his way to see her) that he would prefer to postpone it. Her past tenses are "always sorrowful", and even the "person" of the Ottolenghi is "as might be expected" (MP. 18; italics added). Belacqua's delight in her company (as opposed to that of "meddlars", "tattlers", "incontinent bosthoons", etc.) shows that he is not averse to conversation, even gossip (of an appropriately esoteric kind: "They [Manzoni, Pellico, Napoleon] were old maids, suffragettes. He must ask his Signorina where he could have received that impression, that the nineteenth century in Italy was full of old hens trying to cluck like Pindar" MP. 16) on condition that he knows what to expect.

The Ottolenghi suggests that Belacqua might look into Dante's rare movements of compassion for the souls in Hell. In this connection Belacqua quotes a "superb pun" from the canto of the Sorcerers (Inferno, XX) whose punishment for having dared to look into the future involves frightful contortions of the body so that they face and must look backwards. Like Cain, the Sorcerers are victims of God's justice, as McCabe is the victim of human justice. Dante weeps for the Sorcerers, only to be sternly rebuked by Virgil who asserts that piety is incompatible with pity for those who have deserved God's punishment: "qui vive la pietà quando è ben morta"

(*Inferno*, XX, 28; MP. 18), 'here lives pietà when it is wholly dead'. 'Pietà' means both pity and piety, and both meanings are intended in Dante's pun, which shows that the two qualities are mutually exclusive.

The Ottolenghi says nothing when Belacqua quotes this phrase, but he persists in trying to elicit some response from her:

"Is it not a great phrase?" he gushed.

She said nothing.

"Now" he said like a fool "I wonder how you could translate that?"

Still she said nothing. Then:

"Do you think" she murmured "it is absolutely necessary to translate it?" (MP. 18)

Beckett's discussion, in "Dream of Fair to Middling Women", of the difficulties of characterisation, seems relevant to Belacqua's wish to translate Dante's pun. In "Dream" the narrator wishes his characters to be "liū-liū-minded", and by this he means that they should correspond neatly to a single musical note. He is almost panic-struck when he realises that all his characters, even Belacqua, refuse to be condensed into a liu, that all of them are like Nemo, who is not a note at all, but "the most regrettable simultaneity of notes" (D. 8). "Our line bulges", the narrator continues, every time that Nemo appears.

Dante's "superb pun" is certainly a very good instance - characterisation apart - of a line which "bulges" with a simultaneity of meanings. It is untranslatable into any language which does not share with Italian a single word which means both piety and pity. The best that can be done is to expand the epigrammatic phrase into an unwieldy sentence, but such an expansion necessarily destroys the complexity of the pun because, separating out the different levels of "symphonic" meaning, the translation turns the pun into something linear. Anything that is not, in Beckett's words, "a mere liu" (D.9), anything that does not have a single, clear meaning, will be disturbing to the creature of habit whose need, when confronted with confusion of any kind, is for the peace that will come only when that confusion is annulled.

Belacqua is unable to win the Ottolenghi over to the idea of

translating Dante's pun and, before we discover his reaction to this, the lesson is interrupted by "sounds as of conflict" coming from the hall, and then by the appearance of Mlle Glain, the French instructress, clutching her cat. The parcel containing Belacqua's lobster has, it turns out, narrowly escaped being torn open by Mlle Glain's cat. This is a circumstance that Belacqua has not counted on, and he suffers a moment's anxiety (MP. 19) before being comforted with the news that the cat had been caught just in time and that "heureusement", no harm was done. Mlle Glain leaves and Belacqua turns to the Ottolenghi:

"Where were we?" said Belacqua.

But Neapolitan patience has its limits.

"Where are we ever?" cried the Ottolenghi, "where we were, as we were." (MP. 20)

When he is on his way to his aunt's house after the lesson, Belacqua is subdued, and his thoughts turn to the Ottolenghi's hopeless exclamation and to Dante's pun:

Where we were, thought Belacqua, as we were. He walked on, gripping his parcel. Why not piety and pity both, even down below? Why not mercy and Godliness together? A little mercy in the stress of sacrifice, a little mercy to rejoice against judgment. He thought of Jonah and the gourd and the pity of a jealous God on Nineveh. And poor McCabe, he would get it in the neck at dawn. What was he doing now, how was he feeling? He would relish one more meal, one more night? (MP. 20)

These sentiments are worthy enough, but they are hollow and meaningless if Belacqua does not act on them. They are very far from according with his earlier pitiless behaviour with respect to his lunch and McCabe, and if he is to act on them, his habit of branding and of victimising will have to die.

His aunt meets him in her garden and takes him down to the kitchen in the basement where she undoes the parcel containing the lobster on the table. Belacqua's assumption that the lobster had recently been killed, the circumstance that ironically we learned of immediately after Belacqua's too-complacent declaration that the face of the world is brightened, will now be seen as the truly incalculable factor that disturbs Belacqua and that has the potential to bring about the death of his habit.

"Suddenly he saw the creature move, this neuter creature. Definitely it changed its position. His hand flew to his mouth. "Christ!" he said "it's alive"

The lobster is a "neuter creature" (in "Dream" Beckett refers to the "sexless Christ" D. 31) and is exposed "cruciform" on the table (MP. 21). Thus Belacqua's startled exclamation - "Christ!" - connects the lobster with Christ<sup>26</sup> on the Cross, suffering like Cain, Jonah, McCabe, and, by implication, Belacqua's lunch. That Belacqua should now be horrified that the lobster is alive contrasts strikingly with his insistence on, and delight in, "live" ingredients for his lunch. The difference between Belacqua's reactions in the two cases can be seen as related to the fact that, while he planned the fate of the victims of his lunch, he is entirely taken aback - like the parson in the joke in "Yellow" who also cries "Christ!" - by the unforeseen circumstance that the lobster he is about to eat for dinner is alive. If, in his lunch, he devised and devoured the symbol, he is now, as regards his dinner, confronted by the substance, of suffering.

Belacqua feels he will be sick as he watches the lobster make "a faint nervous act of life"; he whines "What'll we do?"; and when his aunt dons her apron and rolls up her sleeves, "all business", he protests: "But it's not dead... you can't boil it like that" (MP. 21). This is the crisis in the story. That part of Belacqua's being that is not dominated by his habit of branding and searing is, as he protests about the fate of the lobster, itself making a faint nervous act of life that challenges his habit. Belacqua has now to decide what part he is going to play in the fate of the lobster. If he acquiesces in boiling the lobster alive he will make a mockery of the sentiments expressed on the way to his aunt's house and will show that he is not prepared to qualitatively change his habitual

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26. When Mlle Glain asked about the parcel that her cat had nearly got at, "Belacqua spoke up composedly. 'Mine', he said, 'a fish'. He did not know the French for lobster. Fish would do very well. Fish had been good enough for Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. It was good enough for Mlle Glain." (MP. 19)



behaviour. Acquiescence, in other words, will show that his habit, the habit of victimising pitilessly, refuses to die in spite of the challenge provided by the incalculable factor of his ignorance about the lobster. This is in fact the case.

In the depths of the sea it had crept into the cruel pot. For hours, in the midst of its enemies, it had breathed secretly. It had survived the Frenchwoman's cat and his witless clutch. Now it was going alive into scalding water. It had to. Take into the air my quiet breath. (MP. 21)

The line from Keats, to whom, "half in love with easeful death" it seemed "rich to die/ To cease upon the midnight with no pain",<sup>27</sup> sets a very different tone than that which would have accompanied the death of Belacqua's habit: habit, Beckett says in Proust, disappears "with wailing and gnashing of teeth" (P.21). Belacqua looks at his aunt and watches her lift the lobster off the table.

It had about thirty seconds to live.

Well, thought Belacqua, it's a quick death, God help us all.

It is not. (MP. 21)

We are left to assume that Belacqua will "lash into" (MP. 21) the lobster for his dinner. The final "It is not" once again unmistakably sets the narrator apart from his protagonist and also, incidentally, shows another way in which the fate of the lobster is like that of Cain and Belacqua's lunch: God branded Cain "that an outcast might not die quickly", and Belacqua took his time scorching the fat white look off the face of his bread.

Belacqua's habit has not died, and if he has changed, he has changed only within limits permitted by his habit, i.e. quantitatively rather than qualitatively. He was alarmed at the intrusion of an element that the "curriculum" of his habit had not been able to foresee, and for a moment his need was the spontaneous need for change that it is habit's duty to prevent him from feeling. That furtive, momentary, spontaneous need is voiced when he protests to his aunt and is silenced almost immediately by his habit's own characteristic

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27. "Ode to a Nightingale". It is also conceivable that the reference to Keats' poem is used because Keats finally withdraws from the idea of death.

need for the comfort and peace of mind that annul the disturbance. The fact that lobsters are boiled alive has now, no doubt, been assimilated into Belacqua's habit: he has changed only in that his habit is enlarged. He will probably never again be startled by the fate of a lobster.

It is only in the period of transition following the death of one particular habit, and preceding the formation of a new habit, that the "boredom of living" can be replaced by the "suffering of being". In refusing to die even when confronted by an unforeseen circumstance, Belacqua's current habit is refusing to allow Belacqua to suffer. Unlike Cain and the others, Belacqua is not a victim. He brands but is not, at least not in this story, himself branded. The gulf between these two processes is as wide as that between Dives and Lazarus in the parable used by Beckett to illustrate the kind of relationship that he feels exists between habitual and spontaneous needs. It is Belacqua's habitual need to brand, to cause suffering, and it is his momentary spontaneous need to be branded, to suffer. Beckett talks of the "Dives-Lazarus symbiosis" (DD. 290). Belacqua's spontaneous need of Lazarus does make an appearance in "Dante and the Lobster" when he protests at the suffering of the lobster, and it is certainly latent within him at all times. There can, however, be no symbiosis of Dives and Lazarus "down below", in Belacqua's life and behaviour, if the habitual need does not at any time give way to the spontaneous.

In reality Belacqua's being is composed of both of the two needs. His habit, however, has in this story sheltered him tenaciously and successfully from the beauties and cruelties of reality. His habit has condemned Belacqua's tentative act of protest to impotence as surely as it has, by the same token, condemned the lobster to the scalding water. By doing so it has also ensured that the symbiosis, which, of course, continues to exist in reality, has no bearing on how Belacqua lives, on how he behaves: "down below" there is no "mercy to rejoice against judgment". Beatrice's claim that all creation "must be branded and in turn impose its brand", the framework within which

"Dante and the Lobster" is set, is a specific instance of the symbiosis of habit and spontaneity which I think informs all Beckett's work. Belacqua's refusal to be branded is his refusal to allow the Lazarus latent within him to usurp Dives for a moment, the refusal to change qualitatively.

When the suggestion was first raised in the story that it was possible that Belacqua might be a victim, the grocer responded to Belacqua's fury about his cheese not only by saying "sir" so inscrutably but also by flinging out his arms "in a wild crucified gesture of supplication" (MP. 14) instead of "simply washing his hands like Pilate" (MP. 14). The negative answer given by the story to the question Belacqua asked about whether or not he was 'marked' was thus foreshadowed by the fact that it is the grocer who was at this point identified with the victimised Christ (and thus with the "cruciform" lobster). For the grocer, instead, to have washed his hands like Pilate would have placed Belacqua in the position of the victim.<sup>28</sup>

Habit, we have found in the Belacqua stories, is characterised by the will, by the need only for pleasure and for peace, by the strength to resist death even when threatened by the unforeseen - at least until, as in "Yellow", its creature dies a physical death - and spontaneity by the absence of will, by the need for the terrors and beauties of reality, and by an inability to oust habit from its position of dominance - except for "Yellow" in which, however, since Belacqua himself dies, any value or significance in the victory of spontaneity, if such is the case, is lost. There is so little said, in More Pricks Than Kicks, on the subject of Belacqua's third person - the only explicit comments on this aspect of his character are in "Ding-Dong" and in the scattered references to his indolence in others of the stories - that <sup>it</sup> is impossible to

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28. At the end of "Yellow", when Belacqua does become the victim (if not of spontaneity, then of physical death), the surgeon is washing his hands (MP. 186)

glean anything further about the possible value of his Limbese state. In Murphy again the word Limbo is not used, although reference is made to Murphy's "Belacqua fantasy" (M. 57) and to his "Belacqua bliss" (M. 79), and it appears as though this third being has, in Murphy, been assimilated into the second, mental state: the Belacqua bliss is part of the second zone of Murphy's mind. In every respect other than in his need for the big world Murphy is, or rather is attempting to be, a creature of his little world which excludes the Apollo chasing Daphne person but includes both Narcissus flying from Echo and the anonymous Limbese.

In Murphy we are confronted with the conflicting claims of body and mind, of macrocosm and microcosm, of the outer world and the inner, and with Murphy's inability, in spite of his wishes, to cut himself completely off from the body. In discussing the role played by habit and spontaneity in this novel I will not only be examining the meaning of Murphy's desire to live in his little world but will also be exploring what is referred to loosely as Beckett's dualistic worldview and specifically as his latter-day Cartesianism, and analysing the relationship between certain fundamental contraries within the concrete fictional framework of Murphy to see whether or not this accords with the abstract notions on this subject expressed in his aesthetics.

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## CHAPTER IV

MURPHY

...the tide making the dun gulls in a panic  
 the sands quicken in your hot heart  
 hide yourself not in the Rock keep on the move  
 keep on the move

Samuel Beckett, from "Serena III",  
Poems in English, p. 34.

In Murphy several of the concerns that I have discussed in connection with "Dream" and More Pricks Than Kicks are centered around the theme of need. The mind/body problem, the connection between the body, women, and the physical senses, and the ambivalence of death, are intimately linked, in Murphy, with two kinds of need that intersect in Murphy himself: the need felt by all the main figures in the novel for Murphy, and Murphy's own need for objects external to himself. I will be discussing whether these two kinds of need can be seen as related to what Beckett wrote in his discursive writings on the subject of need, and, in particular, whether either of them can be identified with habitual need or either of them with spontaneous need.

In a sentence such as 'he needs her', 'he' is the subject, the one who needs, and 'her' is the the object, the one who is needed. In general every need has a subject and an object, and the subject is connected to the object by an imaginary line. Any attempt on the part of the subject to satisfy his need will show him moving along that line towards the object, and ideally the line should get shorter and shorter until finally subject is "identified" with object and need is satisfied (see p. 45f above). The first precondition for any satisfaction of need is that the subject should know where the object is, for otherwise the imaginary line will not lead towards the object. The second is that the subject be capable of moving along the line to the object.

The additional factor that must be kept in mind when we are discussing need in Beckett's work is the mobility both of the subject

and of the object, which means not only that the object will have altered position by the time that the subject reaches the end of the line that used to lead to the object, but also that the subject himself will have altered position, will have changed, in the interim since his need was originally formulated. This is the problem encountered by attempts to satisfy any kind of need, and as a result we can never in reality be anything but dissatisfied in spite of all our attempts at satisfaction - and in spite of the fact that we may be satisfied in a superficial way (or that we may think ourselves satisfied) when it is a question of habitual needs. Spontaneous need is, as I have shown, the need to need and has no interest in satisfaction. All needs are unsatisfiable, but where habitual need rejects the inevitability of dissatisfaction, spontaneous need accepts it.

In Murphy need is unsatisfied. Murphy himself is the object of need for all the main figures in the novel, including Murphy. The question where Murphy is, is linked with the question who Murphy is, and the general inability to answer this - it is unanswerable - means that the lines of need are all misdirected. This is clearest in the movements of Neary, Cooper, Wylie, Miss Counihan, and Celia towards Murphy, and this chapter will begin by analysing the failure to satisfy their needs for Murphy.

#### The Needs for Murphy from Outside Himself

Murphy then is actually being needed by five people outside himself. By Celia, because she loves him. By Neary, because he thinks of him as the Friend at last. By Miss Counihan, because she wants a surgeon. By Cooper, because he is being employed to that end. By Wylie, because he is reconciled to doing Miss Counihan the honour, in the not too distant future, of becoming her husband. Not only did she stand out in Dublin and Cork as quite exceptionally anthropoid, but she had private means. (M. 138)

Each of these five people is connected by a different line to Murphy, the object of all their needs, and in an attempt to satisfy need each one moves along his or her line. This movement is represented in the novel by the attempts made to get physically closer to Murphy. Celia's is a special case that will be discussed at the end of this section; the others all leave Ireland hoping to satisfy their needs for Murphy by finding him in London.

Their reasons for doing so are tied to Miss Counihan's conviction that Murphy has left Ireland to make his fortune and that, once he has set up a habitation suitable for her, he will come back to claim her. Neary, formerly a teacher of Murphy's in Cork, falls temporarily but desperately in love with Miss Counihan and suffers agonies when she refuses his attentions on Murphy's account. Only if conclusive evidence is produced of Murphy's death, infidelity, repudiation of herself, or economic failure, will Miss Counihan consider Neary's advances. Neary duly dispatches Cooper, his "âme damnée and man of all work" (M. 40), off to London to find Murphy. Cooper finds, then loses Murphy. Neary despairs, and Wylie, another former student of his, discovers him venting his frustrations in the General Post Office in Dublin. Wylie succeeds in persuading Neary to go to London to supervise Cooper's search. In London Neary dismisses Cooper who returns to Dublin to find Miss Counihan in Wylie's arms. Wylie proposes that the three of them, Cooper, Miss Counihan, and himself, should go to London together to make another attempt at finding Murphy.

Neary finds himself a room in Glasshouse Street off Piccadilly; Miss Counihan settles in Gower Street; Wylie goes to Earls Court; Cooper has, as far as we know, no fixed address. By the time, however, that they are all assembled in their various hide-outs in London on Sunday, October 13th, Murphy has left for the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat on the outskirts of London. They have thus moved towards a centre which has altered position by the time they approach it.

In Proust Beckett wrote of the "perpetuum mobile of our disillusions" (P. 3):

The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for today's. We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But what is attainment? The identification of

the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died - and perhaps many times - on the way... Moreover, when it is a case of human intercourse, we are faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely a function of the subject's, but independent and personal: two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronisation. (P. 3-7)

He concludes that, "whatever the object, our thirst for possession is, by definition, insatiable" (P. 7).

The failure of Neary et al to satisfy their needs for Murphy is related, as Beckett in Proust saw all such failures as related, to the flux of time which causes the subject and (if the object is another human being) the object to change. The perpetuum mobile of our disillusion and the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment are perhaps nowhere in Beckett's art more clearly expressed than in the search for Murphy.

Neary's is a very hectic history of disillusion. When first encountered he is in love with a Miss Dwyer, but no sooner has Miss Dwyer "made Neary as happy as a man could desire, than she become one with the ground against which she had figured so prettily" (M. 37). His need for Miss Dwyer is clearly a case of the habitual need of Dives: Neary describes it to Murphy (while Murphy was still in Cork) as "the love that lifts up its eyes...being in torment; that craves for the tip of her little finger, dipped in lacquer, to cool its tongue" (M. 8); Dives, in Luke's parable, "lift up his eyes, being in torments... and he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue" (Luke 16: 23-24)<sup>1</sup>. This habitual need can be, and is, satisfied but this superficial satisfaction is hollow and ultimately unsatisfactory since Neary's need for Miss Dwyer has been made defunct in the process. Neary writes "to Herr Kurt Koffka demanding an explanation. He had not yet received an answer" (M. 37).

Shortly afterwards Neary meets Miss Counihan and is once more in an agony of unrequited love. He needs, at this stage, to find Murphy because Murphy is his rival for Miss Counihan's affections. In London,

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1. Beckett used this parable in his review of Denis Devlin's poems to illustrate the symbiotic relationship between the needs of Dives and those of Lazarus (DD. 290).



however, the reason for his need for Murphy changes as he becomes disillusioned about Miss Counihan, and Murphy becomes "the Friend at last". This period of needing Murphy for himself (rather than as a means to some other end) also gives way soon enough when Neary meets Celia. His need now becomes a need for Celia and, as in the case of Miss Counihan, the need for Celia presupposes a need for Murphy to be found. So it is that, by the

time that Murphy is found, Neary has no longer any interest in him except insofar as he sees him as an obstacle to his current need. "The subject has died - and perhaps many times - on the way" (P. 3).

Cooper's is a rather different situation from Neary's. Having discovered Murphy in the Cockpit in Hyde Park on the afternoon of September 12th, Cooper follows him back to West Brompton, makes a note of the house number, goes into the local pub, and emerges "ripe for mischief" (M. 85) five hours later. "He thought of Murphy, his quarry, therefore his enemy" (M. 85). Entering the house he finds Murphy upside down with blood gushing from his nose, and with the rocking chair, to which he is tied, on top of him. Cooper assumes that a murder has been bungled and charges out of the house, making for the pubs of Wapping where he drinks for a week. Unlike Neary, Wylie, and Miss Counihan, Cooper does actually find Murphy. His need for Murphy has apparently been satisfied, yet he is certainly not overjoyed at his success, any more than Neary was with his success with Miss Dwyer. In Proust Beckett writes that if somehow the object is achieved by the subject, then:

the congruence is so perfect, the time-state of attainment eliminates so accurately the time-state of aspiration, that the actual seems the inevitable and... we are incapable of appreciating our joy by comparing it to our sorrow. (P. 4)

When his thirst and his money come to an end Cooper pauses on his way back to West Brompton to wire Neary that Murphy has been found. On arrival, however, he discovers the ruins of the condemned man being carted away. Murphy has moved. Cooper hurries back to his drink once more, pausing on the way to wire Neary that Murphy has been lost. Since he has lost Murphy and still needs him (being still employed to that end by Neary), Cooper is in the same dissatisfied position as he was at the outset.

Wylie regards Murphy as "an abomination", as "the creepy thing that creepeth of the Law", as "a vermin at all costs to be avoided" (M. 148). "Yet", as he says, "I pursue him" (M. 148). His reasons for doing so are, he says, akin to the reasons that prompt a beggar to mutilate himself and a beaver to bite off his own testicles: such actions are necessary if beggar and beaver are to live (M. 148). Similarly, Wylie's quest for Murphy is necessary as a means to what he considers desirable

ends. The desirable ends are, predominantly, his marriage to the monied and anthropoid Miss Counihan and, to a lesser extent, an affair with Celia. His need for Murphy is indirect in two ways. The first is that it consistently regards Murphy as a means. Neary, as we have seen, alternates between needing Murphy as a means and needing Murphy as an end. Wylie's attitude towards Murphy in this sense changes no more than his attitude in general: "In a word I stand where I have always stood...And hope always to stand...Half on the make and half on pleasure bent" (M. 148). Finding Murphy is a prerequisite for the satisfaction of his various profitable and pleasurable ends.

In the second way in which it is indirect, Wylie's need is like the needs that all the members of the delegation from Cork feel for Murphy. This is the lack of connection between these needs and Murphy himself. The needs of Cooper, Wylie, Neary, and Miss Counihan (and, in somewhat different ways which will be discussed in due course, the needs of Celia and Murphy himself also) are extensions solely of the way in which they each variously imagine Murphy. In this sense all their needs for Murphy are indirect since they are based on considerations that affect (and that are affected by) themselves only: Murphy himself counts for nothing.<sup>2</sup> As Francis Doherty has written, "those who think they know him [Murphy] best need him for their own reasons - none of which seem to be concerned with Murphy but with a Murphy-mirror of their own needs".<sup>3</sup>

Miss Counihan's need for Murphy is another case in point. She purportedly needs Murphy as a "surgeon". The use of this term in the context of her need for Murphy should be seen in the light of part of the

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2. The form of Marcel's love for Albertine, Beckett writes in Proust, "is pre-established by the arbitrary images of [voluntary] memory and imagination, an artificial fiction to which, and for his suffering, he forces the woman to conform. The person of Albertine counts for nothing. She is not a motive, but a notion, as far removed from reality as the portrait of Odette by Elstir, which is a portrait not of the beloved but of the love that has deformed her, is removed from the real Odette. (P. 37-38)

3. Francis Doherty, Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 28.

conversation Neary had with Wylie in Dublin:

They went a little way in silence. Then Neary said:

"I cannot think what women see in Murphy."

[...]

"Can you?" said Neary.

Wylie considered for a moment. Then he said:

"It is his--" stopping for want of the right word. There seemed to be, for once, a right word.

"His what?" said Neary.

They went a little farther in silence. Neary gave up listening for an answer and raised his face to the sky. The gentle rain was trying not to fall.

"His surgical quality" said Wylie.

It was not quite the right word. (M. 46)

Miss Counihan thus needs Murphy for a quality that is not properly his.<sup>4</sup> Her dynamism too is out of joint with Murphy's. Originally needing him as a possible husband, she later comes to need him as the sine qua non of her marrying anyone (and the anyone is first Neary and then Wylie), and this need persists for reasons unexplained even after its basis has disappeared, even after, in other words, she has plenty of evidence of Murphy's infidelity, economic failure, and even death.

Miss Counihan cherishes illusions that Murphy is trying to 'make good' in London for her sake. She does, nonetheless, have some attachment to Murphy for other than purely materialistic reasons, as evidenced by her approving description of what she sees as his talent for maintaining his mind and his body in harmonious unison (M. 149). But this, in however different a way, is just as mistaken a picture of Murphy as that which views him as an aspirant to financial distinction. Miss Counihan's dilemma is that she is too caught up in "the old endless chain of love, tolerance, indifference, aversion and disgust" (M. 174) ever to know Murphy or ever to approach him. She finds "cause to be pleased" about his death because of what it means to her, namely that he will not have the opportunity to explicitly reject her in favour of Celia or "some other slut" (M. 174). Her distance from him, finally, is testified to by her failure to recognise his body. "I don't", she

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4. It is unclear why "surgical" should be (however inaccurately) considered an applicable description of Murphy. Nothing in Murphy explains this, and other references to surgery in Beckett's early writings - e.g. to the surgeon Belacqua "cut" in "Yellow" (MP. 186); to Surgeon Bor in "A Case in a Thousand" (op. cit.) who operates on a boy who later dies; and to the "ablation of desire" in Proust (P. 7) - do not really seem to help since each provides completely different kinds of suggestions as to the meaning of the allusion.

cries, "believe it's my Murphy at all, it doesn't look at all like him, I don't believe --" (M. 182). Her reaction here is like that astonished disbelief of the Proustian narrator following Albertine's death (P. 44): she cannot synchronise her Murphy, i.e. her idea of Murphy, with the reality of Murphy. Her Murphy is a projection of her need, not any existing person, alive or dead.

It is Celia alone who is able to identify Murphy's body: "her eyes continued to move patiently, gravely and intently among the remains long after the others had ceased to look, long after Miss Counihan herself had despaired of establishing the closeness of her acquaintance" (M. 181).

Before, however, discussing Celia's position in the movements of need for Murphy from outside himself in the novel, it is not irrelevant to examine what ought to have been, from the point of view of Neary, Cooper, Wylie, and Miss Counihan, the climax, the moment when Murphy, the object for one reason or another of all their needs, is found. That the scene at the mortuary has the air, rather, of an anticlimax is the result not of the time-state of attainment perfectly coinciding with the time-state of aspiration (as was the case with Cooper's original discovery of Murphy) but of the habitual nature of all their needs for Murphy.

From the beginning, all their needs were habitual in that they were means to an end and thus thoroughly utilitarian. It is only when, for a while, Neary needs Murphy as an end (rather than a means) that anything approaching spontaneous need is experienced by any of them.<sup>5</sup> By the end, however, their needs are habitual not only in their utilitarianism but also in the sense that these needs have been overtaken by events and have lost even the technical validity they once had.

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5. Neary's tossings and turnings in bed (M. 137) after realising his need for Murphy, are interrupted by visits from Miss Counihan and Wylie and by the news that Murphy is as good as found. Nonetheless Neary spends a terrible night with constant premonitions of death (M. 153), and when Wylie calls for him next day, "Neary's hair was white as snow, but he felt better in himself" (M. 153).

When Cooper lets the others know he has found Celia, all agree that they are well on their way to finding Murphy, and next day all of them arrive at the house on Brewery Road where they remain until news arrives of Murphy's death. In each case, however, the reason for their needing Murphy at all has, although none of them is aware of it, completely disappeared and it is entirely to the force of habit that their persistence is due. Neary's original need to find Murphy before he would be permitted to woo Miss Counihan gave way to his need for Murphy himself but now, when he meets Celia, he ceases to need Murphy so that instead he may need Celia (M. 175). Unlike the earlier case with Miss Counihan, however, there is no need for Murphy to be found before Celia would be convinced of his having deserted her, and thus there is no reason why finding Murphy would in any way help Neary to satisfy his need for Celia. Neary, however, refuses to leave the house in case Murphy arrives when he's gone. Cooper was employed by Neary to find Murphy and is now forbidden (presumably by Neary) to leave the house on Brewery Road; his need is linked to Neary's and is to the same extent anachronistic. Miss Counihan had needed Murphy for evidence that she had no reason to reject other proposals of marriage. Even before coming to London she had what she at least considered ample evidence of his infidelity when Cooper reports seeing Celia enter the old house in West Brompton where Murphy was living - "for what could beauty's business be in Murphy's vicinity, if not with Murphy?" (M. 88) - and when she meets Celia the last shreds of doubt are removed, yet she, with the others, waits for him to appear in Brewery Road. Wylie, who originally needed Murphy for Neary's sake (when Neary wanted Miss Counihan) and later for his own (when he wanted Miss Counihan), is thus as little in need of Murphy as the others by the time they meet up with Celia. In each case the reason why they need Murphy has become non-existent, and in each case they continue to act, and think, as though their various needs retain validity.

The failure of all their needs for Murphy is connected not only with their own mobility (of which they are unaware: habit shelters its creature from awareness of the flux of reality) but also with Murphy's. It is not only they that have changed, it is not only the subject, in each case, that has died on the way. Their needs for Murphy are all instances of human intercourse when, according to Proust, the problem

of satisfying need is exacerbated by the mobility of an object who is independent of the subject, and Murphy has literally died on the way. "The object evolves", as Beckett writes in Proust, "and by the time the conclusion - if any - is reached, it is already out of date" (P. 65).

Celia's position among those outside Murphy who need him is unique. Her need is based on love, and we are asked to:

Note that of all these reasons [love, friendship, "surgery", employment, marriage] love alone did not splutter towards its end. Not because it was Love, but because there were no means at its disposal. When its end had been Murphy, transfigured and transformed, happily caught up in some salaried routine, means had not been lacking... (M. 138)

The means referred to is Celia's threat to leave Murphy to go back on the streets unless he finds work. Her reasons for insisting on this are, firstly, that she wishes to "make a man of Murphy" (M. 48) and secondly, that she is loath to resume her own work which must inevitably disrupt her life with Murphy: "both these lines led to Murphy (everything led to Murphy)" (M. 49). The first of these lines, her need for Murphy transfigured and transformed, is described as leading to "a person of fantasy" (M. 49), a description which points to the unreality, the habitual nature, of this vision. Celia's idea of Murphy here has unmistakable similarities to that of Miss Counihan who cherishes dreams of Murphy as an aspirant to fiscal distinction.

Celia, however, alone among those who need Murphy, understands something of him and thus needs him for what he is rather than only for what he is wrongly imagined to be. This is the second of the lines leading from her to Murphy: Celia's need for him as "a person of fact" (M. 49). The person of fact is the Murphy who loves her and who does not want her to resume her street-walking since he knows what that would mean - "no more music" (M. 55). Celia's need for this Murphy is not elaborated on, and it gradually gives way to a different need as Celia begins to understand another side of Murphy. She gradually comes to understand the appeal of what Murphy calls his life in his mind.

While he is out job-hunting, "goaded by the thought of losing

/her/ (M.55), Celia prefers not to go out walking, since she is recognised as a prostitute from her swagger, or to the nearby market,

where the frenzied justification of life as an end to means threw light on Murphy's prediction, that livelihood would destroy one or two or all of his life's goods. This view, which she had always felt absurd and wished to go on feeling so, lost something of its absurdity when she collated Murphy and the Caledonian Market. (M. 49)

Instead she spends most of her days sitting in the rocking chair in their room in Brewery Road. But she cannot sit long in this way before feeling the powerful impulse, that Murphy knows well, to be naked and bound in the chair. Sitting in his chair, feeling what he has felt, she comes close to an understanding of the mental Murphy: "in spite of herself she began to understand as soon as he gave up trying to explain" (M. 49). By the time Murphy does actually find a job Celia is not even interested:

his intimation, proudly casual, that a job was his or as good as his at last, excited her to the extent of an 'Oh'. Nothing more. Not even an 'Oh indeed'. (M. 96)

Her need for the fantasy and the fact of Murphy is unsatisfied because she has changed so that she no longer feels the need for him to find work. It is only when he tells her that he doesn't know when he'll be back that she becomes curious (M. 98), and then only because of her fear of losing him. And lose him she does.

Now that its end [i.e. the object of her need] was Murphy at any price, i.e. present in person, means were lacking, as Murphy had warned her they would be. (M. 138)

Murphy's warning, uttered to Celia immediately prior to his agreeing to look for a job, was as follows:

What have I now?... I distinguish. You, my body, and my mind<sup>6</sup>... In the mercantile gehenna... to which your words invite me, one of these will go, or two, or all. If you, then you only; if my body, then you also; if my mind, then all. (M.31)

Murphy leaves Celia at a point when it is clear that she is becoming like him in certain respects. Another indication of this is her reaction to the death of the "old boy". His padding to and fro in the

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6. This proposition that his life's goods are Celia, his body, and his mind, is described by the narrator as "monstrous" (M. 31)



room above her had become a part of her afternoons "which she had grown to treasure almost as much as Murphy his before she picked him up" (M. 96). She develops an intense curiosity about the room in which the old boy had committed suicide, starts pacing about in her room "just like the old boy" had done, and uses all the powers she can muster to persuade the landlady, Miss Carridge, to allow her to move upstairs into his room. The old boy bears the same kind of relation to Celia as the life-in-his-mind bears to Murphy. Once installed upstairs she is able to achieve the "pleasant" sensation of having no history: the use of the word "pleasant" recalls Murphy's life in his mind, which was "pleasant... so pleasant that pleasant was not the word" (M. 79). Murphy had been furious when interrupted by Celia's telephone call ("God blast you" M. 9); so too Celia now looks at Murphy in terms of a possible intruder into her private bliss: "Murphy did not come back to curtail it... Murphy did not come back to expel her" (M.104).<sup>7</sup> And for Celia, as for Murphy, these solipsistic trances are temporary: "the next day and the next it was all to do over again" (M.104). They do not lessen her pain at learning that Murphy has gone for good any more than they had lessened Murphy's need for Celia.

When Neary, Cooper, Wylie, and Miss Counihan arrive at Brewery Road, Celia does not even notice the commotion, so "dead... to the voices of the STREET" (sic; M. 156) has she become. This phrase too recalls Murphy who, when first encountered in his rocking chair, was trying to shut out "the echo of a street cry" (M. 5). She is barely aware of the presence of her visitors, misses much of what they say - "Celia would have recognised this phrase, if she had heard it" (M. 158) - and acts "as though her solitude [were] without spectators" (M. 158). By the time that news of Murphy's death reaches Brewery Road, her "affective mechanisms" seem to have become "arrested" (M. 174). When, at the mortuary, she asks for the remains to be turned over, she is uttering "her first words for fully sixty hours, her first request for longer than she could have remembered" (M. 181). She has ground herself

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7. I cannot agree with Hugh Kenner's assertion that "Celia's are the standard fictional motions and emotions", A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, Thames and Hudson, London, 1973, p. 62.

down almost to a halt: the only way in which she can cope with her need for Murphy simply to be present in person is to try to get herself to the point where she can "rest from need" altogether (M. 175).

Like Neary, Cooper, Wylie, and Miss Counihan, Celia began by attempting to approach Murphy. They crossed the Irish Sea to find him. She swaggered along the Cremorne Road past where he was standing at the mouth of Stadium Street, continued on her way beside the river, and "found herself dragged" (M. 14) back to him; later she is again the one who goes to him to end the "blockade" of their separation. At this stage the only difference between her and the others is that she is successful in finding him and in staying with him - a difference that may be related to the fact that one of the two lines of need leading from her, at this stage, to Murphy, leads to a person of fact. Gradually, however, Celia stops trying to get closer to him and takes, instead, a path parallel to what we will see as his path inwards into his mind. Her need for him at this stage, simply for his presence, is based on love, and it is unsatisfied. In Proust Beckett writes that "love...can only coexist with a state of dissatisfaction" (P. 39), and he quotes Proust: "One only loves that which is not possessed, one only loves that in which one pursues the inaccessible" (P. 35).

### Murphy's Two Needs

To find our approach to Murphy's needs we must go back to a sentence quoted earlier in this chapter: "Murphy then is actually being needed by five people outside himself" (M. 138; italics added).

For Murphy to be needed by five people "outside himself" suggests not only that the five are quite literally outside, different from, Murphy, but also that he is needed by five people as well as by himself.

The only thing that Murphy was seeking was what he had not ceased to seek from the moment of his being strangled into a state of respiration - the best of himself. (M. 52)

Murphy's need is for the best of himself. This recalls "the best of

our many selves and their concretions..." (P. 18) which, in Proust, Beckett describes as being stored in "that ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being to which habit does not possess the key" (P. 18). What this suggests is that Murphy is seeking the "Lazarus" (P. 20) within him that is the potential for spontaneous, rather than habitual, experience, the "pearl that may give the lie to our carapace of paste and pewter" (P. 19). It is, as we have seen in the case of Belacqua in "Dream", useless to attempt to realise this kind of experience, but Murphy, like Belacqua, specialises in attempts that are "grotesque, worse than grotesque" (D. 110) to 'troglodyse' himself. Celia is, in Murphy, likened to a 'pearl' (M. 157), but Murphy is convinced that "the best of himself" is located in what he calls his little world, and that it is totally unrelated to the big world that includes Celia.

Murphy sees his inner, little world of his mind as split off from the outer, big world that is everything not included in his mind. Since he locates the object of his need in his little world, he considers that the proper way to satisfy that need is to escape into his mind, shunning all contact with the outer world. As he sees it, his problem is that he finds it difficult to shut the big world out, and thus to satisfy his need for himself. Thus, although he feels that the satisfaction of his need can only come about through a movement inwards, he does not deny that, regrettably, he has needs directed outward to the big world. These latter needs are, he is convinced, trivial, contingent and in opposition to his need for himself.

Such are Murphy's needs as he imagines them. The most important single characteristic of Murphy is, however, that he is deluded about himself and, to the extent that he is deluded, that he is a creature of habit. Much of the following analysis will deal with the various ways in which Murphy is shown to be mistaken.

Since Murphy's own conceptions have to be grasped as clearly as possible before they can be shown to be misconceptions, I will first examine more closely the division as Murphy sees it, noting, where relevant, his own internal inconsistencies. His inward-turning and outward-turning needs will then be seen to be ultimately interconnected.

It would be tidier to conclude the discussion of the needs for Murphy in the novel with a complete examination of the his inward-turning needs alone, before proceeding to analyse his own outward-turning needs. This is, however, impossible. Despite what Murphy thinks, his need for what he calls his little world cannot really be separated from his need for what he calls the big world: they are interdependent, and the development of the one cannot be properly understood except in the light of the development of the other. Their interdependence will be seen as central to the understanding not only of Murphy himself, but, since he is the core around which the whole novel turns, also of the novel as a whole.

### Murphy's Need for the Little World

Murphy opens with Murphy sitting naked in his rocking chair in the mew in West Brompton.

Seven<sup>8</sup> scarves held him in position. Two fastened his shins to the rockers, one his thighs to the seat, two his breast and belly to the back, one his wrists to the strut behind. Only the most local movements were possible. Sweat poured off him, tightened the thongs. The breath was not perceptible. The eyes, cold and unwavering as a gull's, stared up at an iridescence splashed over the cornice-moulding. (M. 5)

He sits in the chair in such a manner because to do so appeases his body, thus allowing him to come alive in his mind, and "life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word" (M. 6). Only the most local movements are possible; but such are possible: his body is still functioning - he is sweating, breathing (if imperceptibly), staring at the light, and aware of the sounds of the street.

Somewhere a cuckoo-clock, having struck between twenty and thirty, became the echo of a street-cry, which now entering the mew gave Quid pro quo! Quid pro quo! directly. (M. 5)

He cannot stop his body functioning, but he can shut out the sights and sounds of the big world, and it is in order to do this that he must work his chair up to its maximum rock before he can relax.

Slowly the world died down, the big world where Quid pro quo was cried as wares and the light never waned the same way twice; in favour of the little, as described in section six, where he could love himself. (M. 8)

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8. As Hugh Kenner (A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 58) has noted, only six scarves are in fact mentioned in the description

Murphy divides his cosmos thus into the little world of his mind and the big world to which the iridescence on the cornice-moulding and the street cries belong, "but not he, as he fondly hoped" (M. 5). That the narrator should undercut Murphy's confident dualism here is indicative of the treatment dualism is accorded throughout the novel, and is a caveat against assuming that Murphy's views are shared by the narrator or by Beckett.

Chapter Six opens with a quotation from Spinoza's Ethics,<sup>9</sup> in which Beckett has substituted "Murphy" for Spinoza's "Deus, sive Natura", God or Nature: "Amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat", the intellectual love with which Murphy loves himself.

It is worth stressing the influence of Spinoza if only because of the fact that the implications of this allusion have been neglected<sup>10</sup> in other discussions of the novel. Generally, in fact, references to monistic philosophers - Spinoza, Leibniz, Democritus, etc. - in Beckett's works have been treated with nothing like the lavish attention focused on references to dualistic philosophers.

Spinoza, a critic of the Cartesian (dualist) school of thought,<sup>11</sup> considers that the universe is a single system (this system he calls "Deus, sive Natura") which operates entirely in accordance with its own

8. (cont.) that follows this assertion. The reasons for this are unclear, as are the reasons for various other oddities scattered throughout Beckett's work, e.g. that we are explicitly told that Belacqua, in "Dante and the Lobster" (MP. 10) does not know or care what "niggling curriculum" may have been drawn up for him after the Italian lesson, in spite of the fact that he picks up the lobster in order to bring it to his aunt's house for dinner; that the anagram for the holy family in Watt (W. 26) is inaccurate, including only one 'e', although two are required (for Jesus and for Joseph); that editions of his novels differ, often quite significantly, from one another, in certain details (see, for example, p. 189, n. 36 and p. 238, n. 23 below); etc.

9. Baruch de Spinoza's Ethics and On The Correction of the Understanding (translated from the Latin by A. Boyle, introduction by T.S. Gregory), "Ethics", Part V, Proposition 35, J.M. Dent, Everyman's Library, London 1970.

10. John Fletcher (in The Novels of Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 50n.) notes the source of the quotation but makes no comment; elsewhere (in Samuel Beckett's Art, Chatto and Windus, London, 1967, p. 135) he does comment briefly; Raymond Federman (in Journey to Chaos, op. cit., p. 81) reprints the quotation without noting its source or discussing its significance; Ruby Cohn (in "Philosophical Fragments in the Works of Samuel Beckett", op. cit.) makes no mention of Spinoza whatever. In all these works many pages are devoted to Cartesianism and Occasionalism.

11. He prefaces Part V of his Ethics with a detailed criticism of the Cartesian view of mind and body as distinct entities and of the "pineal

laws. Divine,<sup>12</sup> supernatural, or miraculous intervention in this system is ruled out. The contrast with the post-Cartesian Occasionalists, who believed that it is divine intervention that connects mind and body, is clear. According to Spinoza, man is a unity of mind and body; mind and body are to be understood as two modes, or aspects, in which man conceives himself, not as two separate entities.<sup>13</sup>

While I do not at all wish to deny or minimise the importance of the direct and indirect allusions that Beckett makes to the dualists - the peculiar role of which I will attempt to define - I would like to make the point that, as Spinoza is also alluded to, it would be well to keep the monistic world-view in mind. The fact that elements of both dualism and monism are to be found seems to indicate that neither, or at least neither on its own, should be regarded as a "key" to the understanding of Beckett's novel: "Il n'a pas de clé, il n'a pas de problème. Si le sujet de mes romans pouvait s'exprimer en termes philosophiques, je n'aurais pas eu de raison de les écrire"<sup>14</sup> and "the key word in my plays is 'perhaps'.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning of Chapter Six the narrator once again undercuts Murphy's notions by enclosing the expression 'Murphy's mind' in quotation marks and by commenting that:

Happily we need not concern ourselves with this apparatus as it really was - that would be an extravagance and an impertinence - but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be. (M. 76)

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11. (cont.) gland" theory of their interaction.

12. There can be no divine intervention, in Spinoza's view, since God is not a being outside time and space, outside the universe, but rather is the universe in the sense that all things are in God. Spinoza is one of those philosophers who have treated the theological vocabulary, not as simply wrong, but as expressing truths in a misleading way, and who have therefore tried to decode, rather than refute, religion. See the introduction by T.S. Gregory to Spinoza's Ethics and On The Correction of the Understanding, op. cit., p. v.

13. See Spinoza's Ethics (ibid.), Part II, Proposition 13, Note: "We understand not only that the human mind is united to the body, but also what must be understood by the union of mind and body"; and in Part II, Proposition 21, Note: "The idea of the body and the body itself, that is the mind and the body, are one and the same individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, and now under the attribute of extension".

14. From the interview with Gabriel d'Aubarede, "En Attendant...Beckett", op. cit., p. 7

15. From the interview with Tom F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", op. cit., p. 506.

This not only underlines the distance between Murphy and the narrator but also dissociates Murphy's conception of his mind from what his mind really is, and thus suggests that what we will learn about that apparatus will be Murphy's own habitual view of it.

As Murphy sees it, his mind is a "large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without", and composed of three zones, the light, the half-light, and the dark. In the first zone he has his revenge on the experiences he has suffered in the big world; in the second he finds peace in imagining various blissful states (among them Belacqua's bliss) for himself; and in the third he is carried away by the sensation of being "a missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion" (M. 79). He feels that his need for himself, the best of himself, is directed inward toward the havens provided by these three zones: "The need was now to be in the light, now in the half-light, now in the dark. That was all" (M. 79). And if he finds himself spending more and more time in the dark, it is because this is the zone that most satisfies what we may term his escapism - it is only here that all ties with the big world are severed - and his hedonism - it is here that his experience is the pleasantest.

That Murphy's conception is inspired, at least in part, by the Cartesian and post-Cartesian proponents of dualism is indisputable. Descartes considered that the body was quite distinct from the mind and, therefore, that man consists of two mutually exclusive natures. He explained the interaction between the mental and the physical natures as resulting from the action of the "vital will", which he saw as located in the pineal gland, or conarium.<sup>16</sup> The later Cartesians, Geulincx and Malebranche, differed<sup>d</sup> from Descartes in considering the interaction as due to divine intervention, and in this respect Murphy is closer to their Occasionalism than he is to Cartesianism proper, for:

Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common... Murphy was content to accept this partial congruence of the world of his mind with the world of his body as due to some... process of supernatural determination. The problem was of little interest... (M. 77)

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16. Neary had, in Cork, told Murphy that "I should say your conarium has shrunk to nothing" (M. 8)

There are, however, certain features of this view of Murphy's that contradict his own feeling that he is fundamentally divided. It is curious, for example, that Murphy should see his mind as hermetically closed to the world without, curious since this idea is more akin to the monism of Leibniz (who, however, would never have suggested that the mind alone could form a monad)<sup>17</sup> than to any form of dualism. It is also noteworthy that Murphy's vision of his mind should rely on resources drawn from the universe that he thinks is an "utter stranger" to it (M. 65). He describes his mind as "bodytight" (M. 77). He can only come "alive in mind" as he lapses in body (M. 78). "Motion in this [inner] world depended on rest in the world outside" (M. 78); italics added). The example given to illustrate this last involves a man in bed trying to sleep (representing the desire to shut the big world out) and a rat (representing the big world which can not be shut out) who is behind the wall at the man's head, wanting to move: "The man hears the rat fidget and cannot sleep, the rat hears the man fidget and dares not move" (M. 78). The interdependence - however painful - of the two worlds is made clear in this example. In spite of what Murphy thinks, in spite of what he would like to believe, his mind is not independent of his body.

### Murphy's Need for the Big World

We are first made aware of Murphy's feeling for the big world when the narcissistic trance in which he is discovered at the beginning of the novel is interrupted by the railing of the telephone in the room - Celia.

He laid the receiver hastily in his lap. The part of him that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shrivelled up at the thought of her. The voice lamented faintly against his flesh. He bore it for a little, then took up the receiver and said: 'Are you never coming back?' (M. 9)

She replies that she has Suk's nativity and that she will bring it round to him later that evening. Murphy protests, then gives up: "The

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17. See The Monadology of Leibniz, translated by G.R. Montgomery, Los Angeles, 1930, Section 7 and Section 14: "the Cartesians believe that only spirits are monads.... Therefore they, like the unlearned, have confused a long swoon with death, strictly speaking, and yielded to the Scholastic prejudice that there are entirely separated souls".



self that he tried to love was tired" (M. 10).

As far as the satisfaction of Murphy's need for the best of himself is concerned, Murphy's feeling is that it is only his weakness that prevents success. The self that he tries to love gets tired out too easily, he thinks, and the temptations of the big world overcome his resistance too often, for the life in his mind to have any chance of satisfying his need. He is quite sure that he will succeed when he manages to shut the big world out completely enough and for long enough.

When Celia arrives at West Brompton Murphy, still pinned to his chair, is having a heart attack. Prior to this she had known nothing of his recreation in the chair since he "had not felt the need to indulge [in it] while she was with him" (M. 24); nor had she known about the fragile state of his heart since "it had not troubled him while she was with him" (M. 24), for theirs, when they are together, is a "striking case of love requited" (M. 15).

Every moment that Celia spent away from Murphy seemed an eternity devoid of significance, and Murphy for his part expressed the same thought if possible more strongly in the words: "What is my life now but Celia?" (M. 15)

Celia has brought the nativity which she has procured at Murphy's request. The intimate connection, for Murphy, between Celia and the stars, is implicit throughout the novel and explicit in several instances. When Murphy and Celia first meet on Midsummer's night, Murphy is studying the star chart for June. Celia's name, which means 'heavenly' ("Hell. Heaven. Helen. Celia." M. 122) and her penchant for gazing at the sky (M. 32, 158, and 191) further link her to Suk's "Thema Coeli" (M. 26; italics added). Celia is a prostitute ("a weekend lecher... jingled his change, his very small change" M. 189), and the nativity is referred to as "the sixpence worth of sky" (M. 126). Not least important, the musical imagery is shared: Celia's nights with Murphy are characterised by "serenade, nocturne, and albada" (M. 54); he knows that if she goes back to work there will be "no more music" (M. 55); when he leaves her he kisses her "in Lydian mode" (M. 99); Suk recommends that Murphy should "resort to Harmony" (M. 26); and a difficulty with the nativity is described as "a certain disharmony" (M. 55).

Celia and the stars are part of Murphy's big world, where the light never wanes the same way twice (M. 8). His interest in Celia requires little in the way of explanation: she is a "pearl" (M. 158) whom even the unlikely character of Cooper can only describe as "the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen" (M. 85). Her importance to Murphy can be gauged by the fact that he goes so far as to look for a job rather than jeopardise the nightly "music":

This phrase is chosen with care, lest the filthy censors should lack an occasion to commit their filthy synecdoche. (M. 55)

The part of himself that Murphy hates and that craves for Celia is clearly the physical part.

His interest in the stars is more curious, as is his reliance on astrology. Astrology is completely foreign to Cartesian rationalism: Descartes himself vilified astrologers, not relishing in the least the limits they set to individual possibilities.<sup>18</sup> It seems, therefore, that Murphy embraces Cartesianism only in his dealings with the little world, and in his anxiety to establish a separation between that and the big world, and that he does not see its relevance to life in the big world.

Suk's nativity is in many ways used as a humorous device in the novel both in its own elaboration - "Mars having just set in the East denotes a great desire to engage in some pursuit, yet not. There has been persons of this description known to have expressed a wish to be in two places at a time" (M. 26) and "Lucky Years. 1936 and 1990. Success-

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18. In a letter dated January 29, 1640 Descartes wrote of a man who had his own death, and those of his two companions, foretold by an astrologer. When the man died as foretold, his two companions were so shocked that one died and the other seemed likely to die soon afterwards. "What a fine science", wrote Descartes, "that makes people die who might otherwise not have been even sick" (*Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tanney, Léopold Cerf, Paris, 1897-1910, 12 vols; vol. III, 4). In 1649, moreover, Descartes in another letter requested that the date of his birth be removed from his portrait, for his "aversion to astrology, chiromancy, and other such stupidities" was such that he feared to seem to be party to the errors of horoscope-makers by furnishing the date of his birth (*ibid.*, vol. V, 336; quoted in Lawrence E. Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, *op. cit.*, p. 12). The first of Beckett's notes to "Whoroscope" (*Poems in English*, p. 13) reads: "He [Descartes] kept his own birthday to himself so that no astrologer could cast his nativity".

ful and prosperous, though not without calamities and setbacks" (M. 27) - and in subsequent references to it, particularly by Celia who, on both occasions when Murphy has been raging at her, quotes from it, saying, "avoid exhaustion by speech" (M. 29) and ("in weary ellipsis of Suk") "avoid exhaustion" (M. 97). This humorous use of the nativity, coupled with the fact that it is at one point sceptically referred to as "a fake jossy's sixpenny writ" (M. 22; italics added)<sup>19</sup> and at another as a "ludicrous broadsheet" (M. 66), makes it difficult to judge quite how far we are expected to believe that Murphy himself takes it seriously. Celia doesn't know how serious about it he is (M. 31), but she tends to think he is just pretending to believe in it so as to be able to put off looking for work. While he remains a creature of the big world, however, Murphy does do all he can to follow Suk's provisions, and he is even described as trembling at the thought of how his lack of gems lengthens the odds against him (M. 55) and as worrying about the remoteness of his ideally lucky day (M. 55). It may be that Murphy considers that, since it is in any case ludicrous for him to seek employment, the only possible guide for him in the matter of looking for work is a manifestly absurd "corpus of incentives" (M. 19). His attitudes to the nativity do, however, as we will see, undergo several changes as he successively tries to find work, finds work, and tries to retreat from the big world in the Mercyseat.

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19. At first glance the nativity seems as legitimate as any horoscope. The only obvious 'mistake' in it is the reference to Mars setting in the east, but though the positions of the planets and stars mentioned by Suk do allow those versed in astrology to draw up a complete horoscope for Murphy, one has to conclude that it is a very carefully considered fabrication since two contradictory dates of his birth, both of which are unlikely, can be calculated from the given information: the one (since Neptune was, before 1935, last in Taurus in 1889) making Murphy 46, the other (since Uranus was, before 1935, last in Aquarius in 1918) making him 17 in 1935, the year in which the novel takes place. Beckett clearly knows a fair amount about the techniques used by astrologers and, for that matter, about other occult traditions mentioned in Murphy: the classical Python (referred to in connection with Mr. Kelly, M. 20), a Greek oracle, the only remaining traces of which in contemporary Western occultism are found in mediumistic communications, which makes Rosie Dew literally a "residue" (see James Hastings et al, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Edinburgh, 13 vols, 1908-1928; vol. 7); and the boasted successes of mediums (mentioned M. 61) in the 1920's, which included the appearance of anemones and ectoplasm and the ability to get illiterates to write and speak languages they had never been exposed to (see Nándor Fodor, The Encyclopedia of Psychic Science, University Books, New York, 1966, p. 317). The implications of this seem similar to those of Beckett's knowledge about various other religions and philosophies, none of which can justifiably or usefully be considered as expressing Beckett's own beliefs.

Celia and the stars are only a part of his big world. For the period covered by the novel they are, however, the most important part, and such other ways in which the big world manifests its existence to him - through the chandlers who refuse to hire him, the waitress in the cafeteria, Rosie Dew and Nelly, etc. - merely reinforce his ambivalent attitude to all that is external to what he feels is the best of his many selves. Miss Counihan, Neary, Cooper, and Wylie belong, largely, to an earlier period, but they too are figures on his outer landscape. He had "commerce" (if of an admittedly "precordial" nature M. 8) with Miss Counihan not unlike his current commerce with Celia, at least in its early stages: he apparently asked Miss Counihan too to marry him, and his problems with her also seem to have hinged on his lack of financial resources. He studied under Neary in Cork, and he has at least made the acquaintance of Cooper (who knows Murphy well enough to have confidence in his ability to find him in London) and of Wylie (whom, we are told, he addressed once). It seems likely that the reason why Murphy left Ireland was to escape such ties with the big world. That they all remain figures on his outer landscape even in London, where he encounters none of them, is shown by his attempt, when at the end of the book he is thinking of returning to Celia and the big world, to "get a picture" of them as well as of the chandlers, etc. and of Celia herself (M. 171).

#### Habit and Spontaneity and Murphy's Two Needs

Murphy sees his need for his little world as distinct from his need for his big world.

We can examine either of these needs on its own to judge the extent to which it is habitual and the extent to which it is spontaneous, and if we do so we find no reason for concluding that any easy identification is possible between either of his needs and either habit and spontaneity.

The validity of his need for his little world is, as we have seen in a few instances already (there are more that will be mentioned in due course), undercut by the narrator who makes it clear that he considers Murphy mistaken in thinking he belongs only in his little world, and in thinking that his little world is distinct from the big.

Delusions of any kind are necessarily characteristic of the creature of habit who is, by definition, sheltered from reality. Other indications of the habitual nature of his need for his little world include the way in which he contrives, in his rocking chair, to enter that world and the way in which he tries to love himself (M.10); and his boredom when, in the Mercyseat, he thinks he is about to succeed in entering it for good and all - "The end degrades the way into a means, a sceneless tedium" (M. 130). The "boredom of living" in Proust (P. 8) is identified with habit, not with spontaneity.

There are, however, also reasons for thinking that Murphy does, at least on occasion, experience some kind of spontaneity in his mental world. His experience in the "dark", in the third zone of his mind (where, we are told, he has taken to spending more and more time, M. 80), is described as the experience of "will-lessness" (M. 80). Since the will is a function of habit that dies when habit dies, there is here a fairly strong suggestion that Murphy is not a creature of habit in the third zone. It might be objected that this particular description is part of Chapter Six which is explicitly not concerned with Murphy's mind as it really is, and that the supposed "will-lessness" may be no more than wishful thinking on Murphy's part. This objection is valid, but it does not apply to at least one other instance when Murphy is described, this time presumably by the narrator himself, in terms that allow us to doubt that his mental life is entirely habitual. After his chess game with Mr. Endon, Murphy passes through several experiences, one of which is "that colourlessness which is such a rare postnatal treat":

His other senses also found themselves at peace, an unexpected pleasure. Not the numb peace of their own suspension, but the positive peace that comes when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real. Time did not cease, that would be asking too much, but the wheel of rounds and pauses did... (M. 168)

This experience too seems not to have been willed: "not the numb peace of their own suspension". And if it<sup>t</sup> does not seem easily identifiable either with the - necessarily painful - death of habit or with the experience of involuntary memory (during which Time is dead, P. 57), it may still be identifiable with what, in Proust, is described as a tense and provisional lucidity that may be exempt from pain when habit is "sleeping" instead of dead or dying (P. 9). In any case there is

certainly something spontaneous about this rare postnatal treat of being unaware of the big world of "stenches, asperities, ear-splitters and eye-closers" (M. 168).

The same ambivalence is characteristic of Murphy's need for his big world: although it seems, on initial examination, entirely habitual, there are instances when we are given reason to think it is not, or not entirely or necessarily, habitual. He goes out daily on the jobpath with Suk in his pocket, abandons hope for the day regularly after lunch, sets off to arrive home at exactly the same time every day, says the same sentence ("Imagine Miss Carridge in a gown like this" M. 54) every evening to Celia while she helps him out of his suit, allows her to feed him, and then, every night "from June to October" (except for the "blockade" when Celia leaves him) it is "serenade, nocturne, and al bada" (M. 54). This regularity, though not the kind of activity specifically mentioned in Proust as an example of habitual activity, is clearly not spontaneous since it makes for comfort and familiarity and, in Proust, it is when habit is "opposed by a phenomenon that it cannot reduce to the condition of a comfortable and familiar concept" (P. 10) that we are exposed to reality. Another indication of the habitual nature of his need for the big world is the length of time which he spends in that world - Midsummer's night until some time in August, and then September 12th until October 13th - far in excess of (as well as of a totally different nature from) the "brief, and dangerously painful" experience of spontaneity that is all Beckett considers possible in Proust (P. 16).

There are also times when the big world can itself generate phenomena that disturb Belacqua's habit instead of reinforcing it. One example of this is his encounter with the chandlers on the first occasion when he actually applies for a job: immediately after this interview he looks for somewhere to sit down, leans weakly against the railings of the Royal Free Hospital, decides that he must lie down instead of just sitting down, and that above all he must "cease to take notice and enter the landscapes where there were no chandlers and no exclusive residential cancers, but only himself improved out of all knowledge" (M. 57). His instinct here, when his big world is disturbing, is to leave it and to enter his little world. Similarly, at the end

of his first night of duty at the Mercyseat, when he finds the little world, in the person of Mr. Endon, disturbing, his instinct is to leave it and return to Celia and the big world. Though both are largely habitual, there are also elements of spontaneity in his needs for both his worlds.

Instead of merely examining each case separately, we will also be viewing his two needs together not only because the one is an escape from the other under certain circumstances, but also because both are, for the larger part of the time, habitual and, equally, both are at times spontaneous. Approaching Murphy through the concepts of habit and spontaneity allows us to cut across the division posited by Murphy himself and to show that the two needs he likes to think of as mutually exclusive are two aspects (neither of which is entirely successful in sheltering him from reality) of his dualistic habit.

In what follows, an analysis of the development of Murphy's needs, it will be seen that his need for the big world is not distinct from his need for the little world, and that it is as mistaken for him to think that his need for the best of himself can be satisfied by a retreat from the big world as it was for the delegation from Cork to think their needs for Murphy would be satisfied by finding him in London.

#### The Development of Murphy's Needs

A feature of Miss Counihan's attitude to Neary had been "the regularity of its alternation" (M. 41). Similarly Murphy alternates his need for the big world with his need for the little.

In February Murphy was in Cork. From what little we know about his activities there it seems that he was living in the big world, having "commerce" with Miss Counihan and studying under Neary. On Maundy Thursday he is discovered by some unnamed acquaintance in London, "supine on the grass in the Cockpit in Hyde Park, alone and plunged in a torpor from which all efforts to rouse him...proved unsuccessful" (M. 38): this is

the torpor of Murphy's communion with his inner world. On Midsummer's night, when next we hear of him, he is clearly back in his big world studying the stars when Celia approaches, and he remains a creature of the big world until she leaves him because of his refusal to look for work. On September 12th, the day at which the novel picks up the tale, Murphy is again discovered (this time by Cooper) in the Cockpit (M. 84) and tracked to the mew in West Brompton where he retires to the rocking chair, that aid to life in his mind, in the manner described in the opening paragraph of the book. Later the same day, the self that he tries to love being tired, Murphy allows the big world of Celia and the nativity to claim him once more, and the "blockade" comes to an end.

The West Brompton mew having been condemned, Murphy and Celia find a new room in Brewery Road where they enter upon what Celia calls "the new life" (M. 97). Celia, as we have seen, stays at home most of the time while Murphy pretends to look for work. He prefers loitering around Brewery Road to wandering around the City, there being no practical difference (his prospects for employment are the same in both places, "in all places" M. 57) while "from the sentimental point of view the difference was most marked. Brewery Road was her forecourt, in certain moods almost her ruelle" (M. 51).

Money, however, is running out and Celia issues her ultimatum. So Murphy actually goes so far as to present himself to a chandler in Gray's Inn Road as a candidate for the position of "smart boy". He is rejected quite unequivocally: "'E ain't smart", said the chandler, "not by a long chork 'e ain't" (M. 56). Murphy's reaction to this rebuff marks another turning point in his alternating attitudes, as he veers away from the big world and towards the little once again.

Up to this point he has been content just to have Celia: he has never needed his rocking chair while she has been around. Now, however, he "would willingly have waived his expectation of Antepurgatory for five minutes in his chair" (M. 56). His need now is to escape into his mind. Since he considers his need for his little world completely incompatible with his need for his big world, we should now witness a total severance of Murphy's ties with the big world. Murphy pays lip-service to this idea but his behaviour contradicts it and shows, on the contrary, that



his needs for his two worlds can co-exist, and that he can veer between the two without any of the suffering that would have to separate them if they were two separate "habits instead of two aspects of one habit."<sup>20</sup>

Failing to find a place suitable for a session of self-love, Murphy decides that the only solution to the problem caused by the chandlers is for him to have his lunch instead and, so far from solipsism is he, proceeds to display more gusto in his relations with the big world than at any other point in the novel. John Fletcher has written that Murphy "is fundamentally indifferent to the whole system of pensums and prizes".<sup>21</sup> The fact, however, that Murphy manages to defraud a vested interest "to the honourable extent of paying for one cup of tea and consuming 1.83 cups approximately" (M. 60) by no means reveals indifference. Murphy is not indifferent to the big world of pensums and prizes, he is here part of it. That which cannot be included in his mental regions belongs necessarily to the physical. It is not possible to equate the delight Murphy derives from his escapade in the canteen with any facet of what he sees as his mental world. In the first of the zones of his mind, "the kick that the physical Murphy received, the mental Murphy gave" (M. 78); in the canteen it is the physical Murphy that kicks back at the physical world. Here Murphy is "spitting at the breakers of the world" (M. 79) with his outer self, not with his inner self. His escapade in the canteen belongs, therefore, in the big world.<sup>22</sup> Murphy feels "so much better" (M. 60) for having cheated the "colossal league of plutomantic caterers" (who have at their disposal

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20. Similarly, at the beginning of "Dream", Belacqua veered from his Apollo to his Narcissus and finally to his Limbese aspect without any pain.

21. John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 53.

22. It may be argued that Murphy's attempts to defeat the forces of the big world are always either minuscule (as in this instance) or ultimately defeated (as when the dog eats his biscuits, the job in the asylum fails to live up to his hopes, the gas-fire explodes, his ashes are not disposed of as he had wished, etc.). The irony here may be that Murphy is so accustomed to failure that his trifling success with the tea seems a great victory, but the fact remains that though he went to have lunch in order to assuage his pain at the way the chandlers treated him and as the best solution to his desperate need for life in his mind, he has taken delight in the big world.

"all the most deadly weapons of the post-war recovery" M. 59) that he can once more consider his employment prospects ("Someone in Oxford Street might offer him a position of the highest trust" M. 60) and make such plans as "what cutting reply he would make to the magnate" (M. 61).

It is as he is deciding on the best route to Oxford Street that Austin Ticklepenny appears on the scene, traps Murphy's legs under the table, complains about his job as orderly in a mental hospital, breaks down, and finally ceases his "wooing under the table" (M. 62):

Murphy could not take advantage of this to go, being stunned by the sudden clash between two hitherto distinct motifs in Suk's delineations, that of lunatic in paragraph two and that of custodian in paragraph seven. (M. 62)

An arrangement satisfactory to both Murphy and Ticklepenny is then made, whereby Murphy will take over the duties at the hospital so repugnant to Ticklepenny. Murphy has a job! Feeling that his future is thus assured, he proceeds to the Cockpit for a well-earned rest, his need for which has been "steadily increasing" while he is in the canteen, working out the way in which he can operate successfully in the big world of Suk, Celia, and livelihood.

After a further encounter, this time with Miss Rosie Dew and her dog Nelly, who eats Murphy's biscuits, Murphy composes himself on the grass in the Cockpit for the "torpor" which he has been "craving for the past five hours" (M. 74), i.e. ever since his rejection by the chandler. It seems clear, if he can take delight in the big world while craving for the little, that Murphy is wrong in thinking his need for the little world incompatible with his need for the big.

Soon Murphy slips away, "from the pensums and prizes, from Celia, chandlers, public highways, etc, from Celia, buses, public gardens, etc, to where there were no pensums and no prizes, but only Murphy himself, improved out of all knowledge" (M. 74).

This experience does not signal any interruption of his habit: he drifts into it after having "disconnected his mind from the gross importunities of sensation and reflection" and after having composed himself for it. Belacqua in "Dream" "lapse/s/ downwards through darkness"

without being will-less (D. 110), and his "gloom" on such occasions is habitual. Murphy's last thought before he "lapse[s] into consciousness" is that "nothing will stop me" (M. 74): the consciousness he craves to lapse into is by no means unforeseen in the curriculum of his habit.

He emerges some considerable time later fully prepared to face the big world again, and hastens back to Celia, "more than usually impatient for the music to begin" (M. 75). Nonetheless, the fact that Murphy did feel the need for the life in his mind foreshadows the weakening of his ties with the big world. The break with Celia comes first, and is followed by an alteration in his attitude to the stars.

### The Break with Celia

The reasons for the discord in their hitherto harmonious relationship are divided fairly equally between Celia and Murphy. In the discussion of Celia's needs it has been noted that, while Murphy was out, she had been becoming increasingly like him in certain respects - sitting in the rocking chair, feeling the desire to be naked and bound, understanding the absurdity of the Caledonian Market, etc. These, however, are respects that characterise the mental side of Murphy only. In her descent into her own solipsistic torpor, Celia has come to cherish her afternoons, of which the old boy's footsteps are "part and parcel" (M. 94), almost as much as Murphy used to cherish his in his chair. But where Murphy (until the experience in the Cockpit discussed above) needed his rocking chair and his narcissistic afternoons only when Celia is not living with him, Celia needs to hear the footsteps padding around upstairs even when she is living with Murphy. Celia thus comes at one point to feel at least as strong a need as Murphy for the inner life; she is dying to the world outside herself, and Murphy is part of that world. After the old boy's death she seems conscious of Murphy's presence "only in fits and starts and then with a kind of impersonal rapture that he did not relish in the least" (M. 96). He forces her to look at him: "She looked through him. Or back off him" (M. 96). He complains angrily at her indifferent reaction to his news about the job, and she doesn't even try to follow what he is saying (M. 97).

On his side, Murphy's equation of Celia with the pensums and prizes

he escaped by lapsing "into consciousness" in the Cockpit has apparently done its mischief. He tries to comfort her for the old boy's death but realises soon enough that, "so far from being adapted to Celia" this comfort "was not addressed to her" (M. 96). The same applies to a bad joke he tells her: "It amused Murphy, that was all that mattered" (M. 98). When he sits down in front of her in his rocking chair, it is "in order to torment [her] at his ease" (M. 98). He still loves her, but only enough "to enjoy cutting the tripe out of her occasionally" (M. 98). His need for her is still as pressing as ever: "I need you" he says, "you only want me, you have the whip, you win" (M. 97). That he is still closely tied to the big world when he leaves is indicated by his kissing her farewell "in Lydian mode" (M. 99), by his feeling in his pocket to make sure he has Suk, and by the fact that he does not take his chair with him.

The reasons why he does not return to Celia (he returns once to Brewery Road, while she is out, just to pick up his chair) are tied to the developments in the Mercyseat, where his relationship with the stars - that other main feature of his big world - changes.

#### The Break with the Stars

Murphy sets great store by his stars. He carries the nativity with him at all times, memorises its precepts, follows its instructions to the best of his ability, and trembles at the thought of those provisions that he cannot implement. At the outset he sees the system of the heavenly bodies as "the only system outside his own in which [he] feels the least confidence" (M. 19). He is attracted to the job at the MM because it seems to satisfy two of Suk's prognostications, the union of which "made the nativity appear as finely correlated in all its parts as the system from which it purported to come" (M. 66). He takes Suk with him to the hospital where, issued a regulation shirt and suit, he nonetheless refuses to leave off the lemon bow ("Lucky Colours. Lemon. To avert Calamity the Native should have a dash in apparel..." M. 27).

At the hospital Bim Clinch lists Murphy's duties and assigns him to Skinner's House, male side, first floor, where he will be on day duty for the first week<sup>e</sup> and on night duty the next. Murphy has a choice.

between sharing a room with Ticklepenny and having a tiny garret to himself. He chooses the garret without hesitation as soon as he sees it, the reason being that:

Fewer years ago than he cared to remember... Murphy had occupied a garret in Hanover, not for long, but for long enough to experience all its advantages. Since then he had sought high and low for another... In vain... But the garret that he now saw was... not half but twice as good as the one in Hanover, because half as large. (M. 113)

Leibniz had, as is mentioned explicitly in the French edition of Murphy,<sup>23</sup> a garret in Hanover. In its implications this allusion is similar to that bastardised quotation from Spinoza which opens Chapter Six, for Leibniz too is a monist. His place in the novel will be examined in the context of the padded cells in the Mercyseat, which are "windowless, like a monad" (M. 125).

The garret has a small skylight, "ideal for closing against the sun by day and opening by night to the stars" (M.113). The only fault Murphy finds with the room is that it has no source of heat, and he bullies Ticklepenny first with words and then with silence into agreeing to providing it. It is his silence which succeeds: "Suk's indication of silence as one of Murphy's highest attributes could not have been more strikingly justified" (M. 114).

The little world, however, is preparing a comeback. One indication of this is the reference to Skinner's House as the "cockpit of the MMM" (M.115). The Cockpit in Hyde Park has, as we have seen, often been the site chosen by Murphy for his sessions of self-love. The most apparent indication, however, is the way in which Murphy comes to regard the Mercyseat. The chapter devoted to Murphy's mind concerned itself with how that organ "felt and pictured itself to be", not with what it "really was" (M. 76). In the same way Murphy now sees the Mercyseat in his own terms rather than as what it really is. In Chapter Six the narrator sets himself apart from Murphy's notions; here:too:

The issue, therefore, as lovingly simplified and perverted by Murphy, lay between nothing less fundamental than the big world and the little world, decided by the patients in favour of the latter, revived by the

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23. Murphy, Editions de Minuit, 1947, p. 120. See also Ludovic Janvier, Pour Samuel Beckett, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1966, p. 27.

psychiatrists on behalf of the former, in his own case unresolved. In fact, it was unresolved, only in fact. His vote was cast. "I am not of the big world, I am of the little world" was an old refrain with Murphy, and a conviction, two convictions, the negative first. How should he tolerate, let alone cultivate, the occasions of fiasco, having once beheld the beatific idols of his cave. (M. 123-24)

The comment that this issue has been both simplified and perverted by Murphy reinforces the distance between him and the narrator. This is not to say that the narrator does in fact know what Murphy or the MMM are in reality, but the narrator does seem to be able to avoid those pitfalls of error and delusion that beset Murphy, and to the extent that he does set himself apart by pointing out Murphy's mistakes, he is closer to the truth than Murphy is.

That, in the above-quoted passage, as against "the occasions of fiasco" Murphy should claim familiarity with "the beatific idols of his cave", an allusion to the shadows on Plato's cave wall, is indicative of the unreality of Murphy's conceptions. According to Plato's Allegory of the Cave in The Republic, the distorted shadows of real things are thrown by firelight on to the cave wall.<sup>24</sup> Men chained to the cave mistake these shadows for reality. This comparison between Murphy and Plato's deluded cave-dwellers is followed immediately by a quotation from the Occasionalist philosopher Arnold Geulincx: "In the beautiful Belgo-Latin of Arnold Geulincx: Ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis" (M. 124). Murphy's Occasionalism is indeed, as Samuel I. Mintz<sup>25</sup> has shown, everywhere implicit in the novel, but it is one thing to say this and quite another to talk about Beckett's Occasionalism or Cartesianism as many commentators have done.<sup>26</sup>

With the patients Murphy feels himself for the first time in the presence of a race of people who are, he thinks, as convinced as he is that "self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world" is "the only felicity" (M.117): He imagines that they are living in the inner regions of the mind that he only seldom succeeds in visiting,

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24. The Republic of Plato (translated and with a brief commentary by F.M. Cornford, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1950) Book VII.

25. "Beckett's Murphy: A 'Cartesian' Novel", Perspective IX, no. 3 (Autumn 1959), p. 156.

26. See Introduction, pp.22-24 above for a list of some of those commentators who consider Beckett a Cartesian dualist.

and is duly revolted by the psychiatrists' attempts to return the patients to the "colossal fiasco" (M. 123) of the big world.

Such are his first impressions of the hospital. They are borne out by the experiences of his first week on the wards because he expends considerable effort and ingenuity ("It was strenuous work, but very pleasant" M. 122) in substantiating them, "distorting all that threatened to belie them" (M. 122).

He is particularly attracted to his "tab", a psychotic who has insisted that if he commits suicide it will be by apnoea (i.e. by simply ceasing to breathe)<sup>27</sup>. This is Mr. Endon, whose name is Greek for 'within'. The delusion involved in Murphy's attachment to him is aptly summed up in the narrator's comment that Murphy feels drawn to Mr. Endon as Narcissus to his fountain (M. 128).

The first sign of a change in the status of the big world of the stars comes during Murphy's first night in the garret, when he opens the skylight "to see what stars he commanded" (M. 121). Beckett's choice of the word 'commanded' here is not accidental: the process of subjugating the stars has begun. Shortly hereafter comes an elaboration:

The more his [Murphy's] own system closed around him, the less he could tolerate its being subordinated to any other. Between him and his stars no doubt there was a correspondence, but not in Suk's sense. They were his stars, he was the prior system. (M. 126)

The guide to action in the big world that Suk's nativity had provided has been annulled by a change in roles. Now the stars merely mirror the behaviour of the dominant system which is Murphy:

He had been projected, larval and dark, on the sky of that regrettable hour [of his birth] as on a screen, magnified and clarified into his own meaning. But it was his meaning. (M. 126)

His current attitude to the stars is likened to the attitude of "an out-and-out preterist" (M. 127), which suggests the negation of whatever influence prophecies based on them might have had on his future actions. The only interest he will maintain in the precepts of Suk's nativity is the interest stimulated by attempts to see if these precepts do actually

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27. In Cork Murphy had been "saving up for a Drinker artificial respiration machine to get into when he was fed up breathing" (M. 38).

conform to the idea he has of himself:

Free therefore to inspect for the first time in situ that "great magical ability of the eye to which the lunatic would easy succumb" [a phrase from Suk], Murphy was gratified to find how well it consisted of what he knew already of his idiosyncrasy. (M. 127)

The system which had been the only one outside his own in which he felt the least confidence now seems but "the superfluous cartoon of his own" (M. 130).

There is a striking similarity between his attempts to make the reality of the Mercyseat conform to his prejudices and this sole remaining interest in the stars. As he is gratified to find every hour at the hospital substantiating (under considerable pressure) his idea of it, so too here he is gratified to find that Suk agrees with his own idea of himself. This is further evidence that it is not only in his conception of the little world that he is deluded and a creature of habit, but that his picture of the big world also has to be forced into consistency.

Needing his rocking chair, he decides to collect it from Brewery Road, an action that is tantamount to leaving Celia "for good and all" (M. 99), but which Murphy does not conceive in these terms since in the Mercyseat he does not think of her any more (M. 130).<sup>28</sup> The reasons for his needing the rocking chair are certainly related to his need to escape the big world, but Celia does not at this stage enter into the issue.

When he comes off duty in the evenings, "He did not see the stars any more" (M. 130), "Nor did he think of Celia any more" (M. 130), "Nor did he succeed in coming alive in his mind any more" (M. 130). In short, while he is alienated from the big world of the stars and Celia, he is also alienated from the little. His feeling, therefore, that his own system (his little world) is closing around him is mistaken. His explanation for his failure to come alive in his mind differs from the narrator's:

He blamed this on his body, fussy with its fatigue after so much duty, but it was rather due to the vicarious autology that he had been enjoying since morning, in little Mr. Endon and all the other

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28. It is only when he is actually in the house on Brewery Road that he thinks of her at all, and he is mainly relieved to find her out since he does not want her to feel, at least he does not want to be present



proxies. That was why he felt happy in the wards and sorry when the time came to leave them. He could not have it both ways, not even the illusion of it. (M. 130)

His need for the little world has been appeased by proxy (as also, it will shortly be seen, has his need for the big world) in the wards: this is why he can only sleep when he gets back to the garret.

As his first night of duty approaches he starts to worry about the fact that he does not have his rocking chair. At night, he feels, Mr. Endon and the others will be sleeping:

Then there would be no fatigue, for watching could not fatigue him. But he would find himself in the morning, with all the hours of light before him, hungry in mind, docile in body, craving for the chair. (M. 131)

Accordingly on his Saturday afternoon off he picks up his chair from Brewery Road. That evening, when he gets back to his garret, he sits in it and once again slips away into his little world. The description in this case is brief and we cannot be sure if it is habitual or spontaneous, but similarities with his experience during the afternoon after his encounter with the chandlers may be suggestive that here too he remains a creature of habit. "Gently does these things, sit down before you lie down" (M. 131) echoes the earlier "Walk before you run, sit down before you lie down" (M. 57); in both cases he composes himself to enter his little world, in the first case by lying down on the grass, in the second by sitting in his chair; "when he came to, or rather from, how he had no idea" (M. 131) is a repetition of words used in the other context (M. 74); and in both cases when he becomes once more aware of his surroundings, he sees something (the sheep in one case, Ticklepenny in the other) that suggests "how he might have been roused" (M. 74, 132). There is no reason to view his experience in the Cockpit as anything other than habitual; in his chair, too, there is nothing to indicate that he is experiencing spontaneity.

Ticklepenny tells Murphy that he looks like one of the patients, Clarke<sup>29</sup> (who had been in a catatonic stupor for three weeks, and was wont to repeat for hours the phrase, "Mr. Endon is very superior" M. 133), and

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28. (cont.) when she feels "how by insisting on trying to change him she had lost him" M. 131.

29. The name may not be a fortuitous choice. The allusions to Leibniz in the chapter make it at least possible that Beckett deliberately chose the name of the philosopher's most famous correspondent, Samuel Clarke. See The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence, edited and with an introduction and notes by H.G. Alexander, Manchester University Press, 1956.

is worried when Murphy does not even disdain to hide his gratification at the comparison.

### The Persistence of Murphy's Need for the Big World

Murphy is still, however, not nearly as cut off from the big world as he thinks he would like to be.

One of the factors which have encouraged him to suppose that the patients are "immured in mind" (M. 125) is the existence in the hospital of padded cells, or pads:

The pads surpassed by far all he had ever been able to imagine in the way of indoor bowers of bliss... The compartment was windowless, like a monad, except for the shuttered judas at the door... Within the narrow limits of domestic architecture he had never been able to imagine a more creditable representation of what he kept on calling, indefatigably, the little world. (M. 125)

The connection Murphy wants to make between the pads and his little world is undercut, firstly, by the interposition of the narrator's "indefatigably" and secondly, by the comparison between the pads and Leibniz' monad.<sup>30</sup> As we have seen, Murphy conceives of his little world as one part of his split self, i.e. in dualistic terms. For his little world to be compared, as here, to a monad, is to offset the Cartesian influence. Leibniz made it clear in his Monadology that he regarded the human body as forming a true unity with the mind. The monad mirrors the real world and is in the real world because of its association with its organic body.

It is important to understand the difference between dualism and monism in the simplest terms if complete confusion is to be avoided. Jean-Jacques Mayoux has written that,

It is by now familiarly admitted... that Beckett is a Cartesian, even if for greater personal intimacy Descartes turns into Geulincx, or if Leibniz provides, very usefully, the windowless monad... He would bully their philosophy a little, if needs be, to make it stress the separateness of man, the fact that since his ancestors have turned to a mental life even his body has become a stranger. 31

30. In Section 7 of his Monadology (op. cit.) Leibniz writes: "The monads have no windows through which anything could come in or go out."

31. "Samuel Beckett and the Mass Media", op. cit., p. 83.

The first point to be made here is that Mayoux is clearly talking only about dualism, despite the mention of Leibniz: under no circumstances is it possible to bully Leibniz long enough or hard enough to make him stress the separateness of man. The second point is that we see no evidence to show that Beckett is a Cartesian, any more than that he is a follower of Leibniz. Murphy certainly is a dualist; Beckett, through the narrator, mocks the delusion that causes Murphy to try to separate the mind from the body, not only by setting himself apart from Murphy's dualist notions and by providing counterbalancing notions from monist philosophers, but also by showing throughout the novel that the two worlds are interdependent.

The interdependence of the two worlds, and Murphy's dependence on the big world, is most clearly demonstrated when, during his first round of the wards at night, he is deprived of any contact with the big world.

By day there was Bom and other staff, there were the doctors and visitors, to stimulate his sense of kindred with the patients. There were the patients themselves, circulating through the wards and in the gardens. He could mix with them, touch them, speak to them, watch them, imagine himself one of them. But in the night of Skinner's there were none of these adminicles, no loathing to love from, no kick from the world that was not his, no illusion of caress from the world that might be. It was as though the micro-cosmopolitans had locked him out. (M. 163)

Murphy is in the (for him) strange position of missing that very evidence of life in the big world that he was wont to disparage in no uncertain terms. He misses the presence, not only of activity in the wards and gardens, but also, significantly (since he sees the little world/big world split as a function of the mind/body split) of his own sensory and bodily contacts with the patients. So much is he in need of some physical sensation that he would heartily welcome "the cackle of a nightingale" (M. 163) so that he could loathe it and try to escape it by retreating into his spirit's "nightingaleless night" (M. 164). The importance of the iridescence over the cornice moulding and of the street cries which Murphy had been aware of in the first chapter of the novel is now clear. These were not merely "sights and sounds that he did not like" detaining him in the big world; they were essential prerequisites for his life in his mind.

Murphy is not indifferent to the big world of the body, of the stars, of Celia, of pensums and prizes. He alternates between loving it and loathing it, but always, whether from love or from hate, he needs it. He feels lost now, in the wards, when there is nothing to help him get his bearings, no sign from the big world to estrange him from it, no sign from the little to attract him. Far from needing only the little world, he falters when that is all he has, when he is deprived of contact with the big world.

In the course of carrying out his duties in the wards by day Murphy has had contact with his inner world by proxy. What is also apparent, now that we have seen his desolation in the wards at night, is that, while he has rejected Celia<sup>32</sup> and Suk, the mainstays of his outer world, he had found "proxies" for them too in the doctors, the staff, the visitors, and in physical contact with the patients. Deprived even of a proxy big world he cannot commune with the little even by proxy.

Earlier the narrator has commented that, although Murphy would not admit it, he needs a brotherhood (M. 122). Such a need necessarily joins Murphy's other centrifugal, outward-directed needs for the big world. He found himself, for the first time, approaching a satisfaction of this need in his sense of kindred with the patients. After his first ward round at night, however, he feels the gulf between himself and the patients very keenly: "In short there was nothing but he, the unintelligible gulf and they. That was all, ALL, ALL" (M. 164).

I have shown how, when the big world causes him pain, Murphy's instinct is to enter his little world. At this point it is his little world that is causing him pain, the reason being that it is part of his habit to think he belongs in it, and it is shutting him out. His instinct at this point is to briefly re-enter the big world of physical sensations so as to be repelled by the big world. This, he

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32. Although at the outset the main force drawing him to the big world, Celia has, after her identification with pensums and prizes, chandlers, etc. become a force repelling him from the big world.

feels, would provide him with the required impetus towards the little world: "the cackle of a nightingale would have been most welcome to explode his spirit towards its nightingaleless night" (M. 164). No sound reaches him, however, from the wards, he cannot touch, speak to, or watch the patients moving about the hospital, and the season for nightingales seems over. His inability to re-enter the big world enough to loathe it is threatening his habit of switching between his worlds whenever either becomes disturbing. If the big world remains inaccessible and the "microcosmopolitans" continue to shut him out, his dualistic habit will be forced to die.

His habit is, for the time being at least, saved when Murphy finds one microcosmopolitan who is not only awake, but also, apparently, waiting for him. Murphy convinces himself that this means there is hope that his need for his little world may yet be satisfied.

#### The Chess Game

When, at the beginning of his second round, he finds that Mr. Endon has set up the chess board, he duly persuades himself that the "biddable little gaga" (M. 164) regards Murphy as his friend. This is the start of Murphy's last desperate fling of delusion, a delusion mocked once again by the narrator:

Murphy resumed his round, gratified in no small measure. Mr. Endon had recognised the feel of his friend's eye upon him and made his preparations accordingly. Friend's eye? Say rather, Murphy's eye. Mr. Endon had felt Murphy's eye upon him. Mr. Endon would have been less than Mr. Endon if he had known what it was to have a friend; and Murphy more than Murphy if he had not hoped against his better judgment that his feeling for Mr. Endon was in some small degree reciprocated. Whereas the sad truth was, that while Mr. Endon for Murphy was no less than bliss, Murphy for Mr. Endon was no more than chess. Murphy's eye? Say rather, the chessy eye. Mr. Endon had vibrated to the chessy eye upon him and made his preparations accordingly. (M. 164)

Murphy plays White, since Mr. Endon always plays Black.<sup>33</sup> White makes a standard opening, P-K4. Black's first move (Kt-KR3) is unconven-

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33. The first footnote to the game explains that Mr. Endon would, if presented with White, "fade, without the least trace of annoyance, away into a light stupor" (M. 167); the reason for this is that White always makes the opening move of any chess game, and Mr. Endon initiates nothing - he merely "vibrates" in response to stimuli.

tional, and as his game progresses it becomes obvious that he is concerned only with arranging his pieces in symmetrical patterns, quite oblivious to White's moves. Murphy attempts at first to reproduce a mirror image of these patterns on his side of the board. Because, however, of his opening move ("The primary cause of all White's subsequent difficulties" M. 167) it is impossible for him to succeed. When Black moves his second knight to K4, White cannot follow since his pawn is in that position, and when (move 8) Black completes his first pattern (which consists in returning all his pieces to their original position), White is left with his pawn still at K4. The rules of the game do not allow him to move his pawn backwards to a position where he too would be back at the beginning.

Black's next sortie presents more serious problems. He begins with P-K3. White, still unable to follow, has to make do with moving P-KKt3. "Ill-judged", comments the footnote (M. 167). When Black subsequently moves his knight to KKt3, White has to vacate this square before he can move his knight into it. The result is that he can copy Black's moves only after a time-lag of one move, and the board becomes decreasingly symmetrical (as a whole, that is) as complexity mounts. His two successes in imitating Black's moves directly (moves 19 and 22) ironically have the effect of exacerbating the difference between the two sides of the board, since in copying Black's most recent move, White loses the continuity which is forming a new pattern of black pieces.

Murphy wants to do exactly what Mr. Endon is doing on the board because he would like to share in the order, or symmetry, that Mr. Endon is creating and re-creating, because he would like to enter Mr. Endon's world to prove to himself that he is as removed from the messiness of the big world as (he thinks) Mr. Endon is. That Murphy is thwarted in this desire by his opening move is, in the context of needs that this chapter has been exploring, indicative of his failure to escape from his body, from the big world, of his failure to reverse "the opening move" of his life, namely the fact of his having been born into two interdependent worlds. Mr. Endon, on the other hand, seems able to maintain a complete indifference to the physical world: "It was a fragment of Mr. Endon's good fortune not to be at the mercy of the hand, whether another's or his own" (M. 169-70).

Another reason for Murphy's desire to imitate Mr. Endon's moves is that he is seeking corroboration of his belief that they are kindred spirits. After the first failures of this tactic, he tries something else, and for one brief moment it must seem to him that he has been right: he makes a move on his own initiative and finds that Black does follow - "8. [White] Kt-QKt1 [Black] Kt-QKt1". Since Kt-QKt1, the replacement of the Queen's knight to its original position, is obviously the only move that Black needs to make in order to perfect his pattern, it did not require very much in the way of understanding for Murphy to make this move before Mr. Endon. I would suggest that Murphy does this in order to preserve, a little longer, his illusion that his moves do affect Mr. Endon's and his illusion that he can enter into Mr. Endon's state of detachment.<sup>34</sup>

Murphy soon becomes desperate for evidence that there is some contact between them, and tries everything in his power to force Black to react. He attempts (moves 27-30) to lure Mr. Endon into taking his (Murphy's) Queen and other pieces ("High praise is due to White for the pertinacity with which he struggles to lose a piece" M. 167); he moves his King forward into vulnerable positions, hoping to tempt Black into checking him (moves 32-35);<sup>35</sup> he even threatens one of Black's pieces (move 38: "No words can express the torment of mind that goaded White to this abject offensive" M. 168) in an attempt to upset what is rapidly becoming another pattern. But Mr. Endon will not be perturbed.

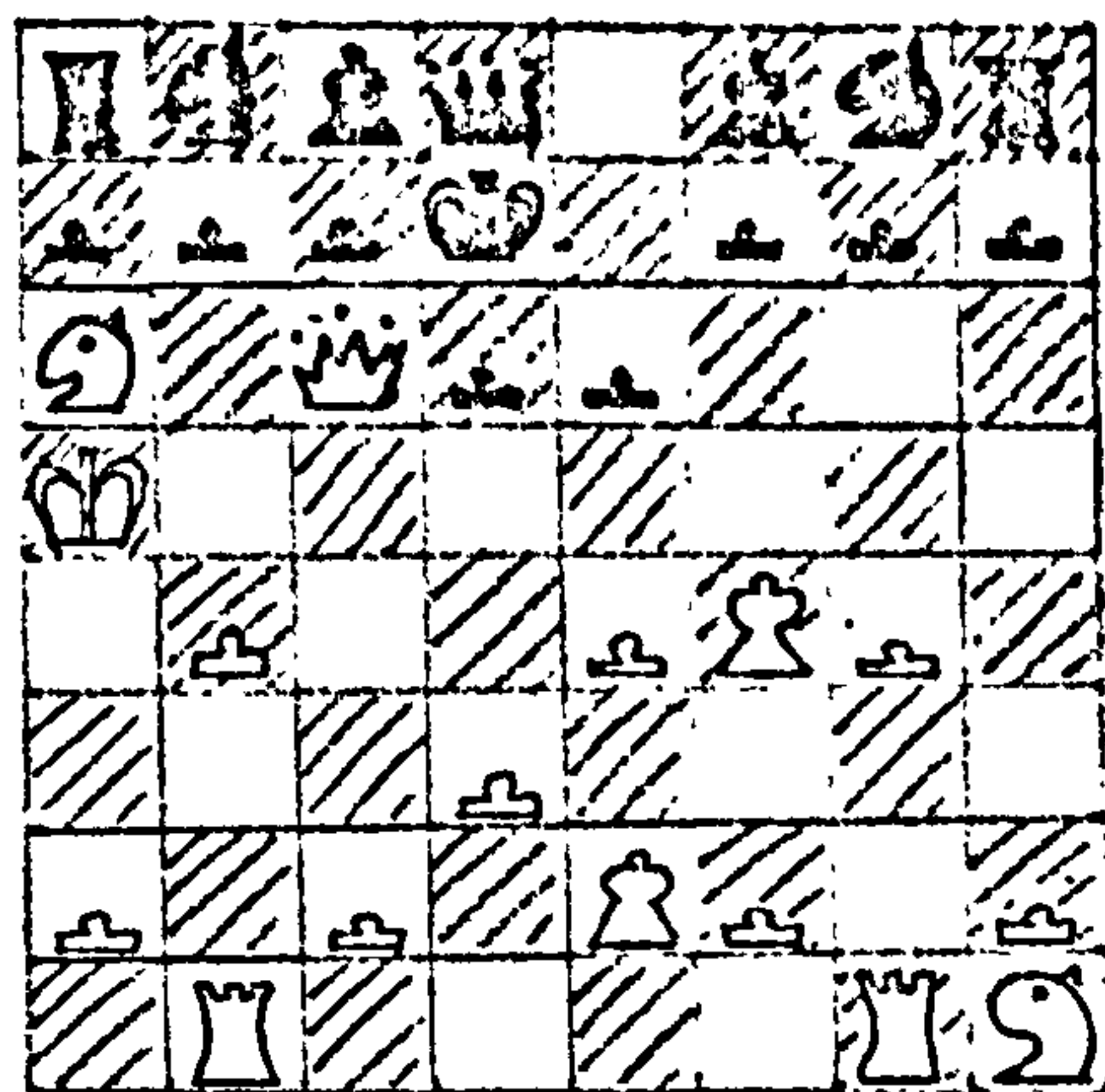
A last effort at copying Black (move 31) has the pathetic result of putting White in a position even more different from Black's than hitherto, since Black has in the meantime (so far behind is White by this time) moved away from the square corresponding to the one White is moving to.

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34. Hugh Kenner (A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 71) has the following to say: "Occasionally he [Murphy] anticipates Black's non-chessic moves, imitating them beforehand. He understands the non-logic, as though manifesting initiation into the norms of oblivion he will soon undergo." This eighth move, however, is the only one of the forty-three which Murphy anticipates correctly, and the understanding involved is minimal even here. Moreover, "non-logic" is not one of Mr. Endon's specialties: if anything he is alarmingly consistent.

35. Black does check White at one point but he does not say "Check", so Murphy does not have to react. Murphy does react because doing so again sustains the illusion of contact between the two players.

At the end Murphy is reduced to the chessboard equivalent of a jabbering idiot, making completely senseless moves bearing no relation either to Mr. Endon's game or to pattern-making of his own. By move 42 Mr. Endon is just about to complete another pattern. Murphy, however, has had enough, for Black's 42nd move, K-Q2, is a move into check.<sup>36</sup> (It is the White Queen at QB6 that is covering the King.) Moreover, Mr. Endon has apparently no intention of moving out of check: his next move, Q-Q1 does not affect the checked King, and, had Murphy not surrendered, Mr. Endon then would have returned "his Shah to its square" (M. 169), i.e. to K1, a square which is still on the diagonal covered by the White Queen.



Final Position (after Black's 43rd move)

Black King at Q2 is still in check, covered by White Queen at QB6

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36. The original edition of the novel published by George Routledge and Sons (London, 1938, p. 244) and the Grove Press edition (New York, 1957, p. 244) have K-K2 instead of K-Q2 as the 42nd move; the Jupiter Books (John Calder, London, 1963, p. 167) and the Picador (Pan Books Limited, in association with Calder and Boyars, London, 1973, p. 137) editions have K-Q2. If the King is, when the game ends, at K2 then he is not in check, and in this case Murphy can be interpreted as ending the game in order to prevent Mr. Endon from moving into check, which Mr. Endon would have done when he completed his pattern by returning his King to its square (K1): "his hand", we learn after the game, "had been stayed from restoring his Shah to its square" M. 169. There is no explanation available for the difference in texts, but although in the case of K-Q2 Mr. Endon has already moved into check and in the case of K-K2 he merely will do so, the point we are making about his disregard either of the position of Murphy's Queen or of the rule of chess forbidding moving into check remains valid.



There are only two possible reasons why Mr. Endon would move into check, and neither could be gratifying to Murphy. The first, highly unlikely (in view of the rigour with which the rules of chess have been adhered to throughout) possibility is that Mr. Endon is choosing to ignore the rule according to which one may not move one's King into check. If this is the case, then Mr. Endon has stopped playing chess, and since Murphy to Mr. Endon was no more than chess, Murphy is nothing to Mr. Endon if there is no chess.

The more plausible explanation is that Mr. Endon is not aware of the position of the White pieces on the board. Murphy does not exist for Mr. Endon except insofar as a move by White is the signal prompting Black to move.

For Murphy, after the 43rd move, to continue his "solicitation" (M. 168) of Mr. Endon would be as "frivolous and vexatious" (M. 138) as are Miss Rosie Dew's solicitations of the spirits of the dead and as are her solicitations of the sheep: in all cases the attempt is to establish communication with a being with whom neither Murphy nor Rosie Dew shares a common language. In Proust Beckett wrote of friendship, comparing it with love:

But if love, for Proust, is a function of man's sadness, friendship is a function of his cowardice; and, if neither can be realized because of the impenetrability (isolation) of all that is not 'cosa mentale', at least the failure to possess may have the nobility of that which is tragic, whereas the attempt to communicate where no communication is possible is merely a simian vulgarity, or horribly comic, like the madness that holds a conversation with the furniture. Friendship, according to Proust, is the negation of that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned. Friendship implies an almost piteous acceptance of face values. Friendship is a social expedient, like upholstery or the distribution of garbage buckets. It has no spiritual significance. (P. 46)

In trying to convince himself that Mr. Endon is his "friend", Murphy shows that he is still very much a creature of habit.

Of the gulf separating Murphy from Mr. Endon in the chess game, Hugh Kenner has written that:

A less sensitive opponent than Murphy would run wild among these black pieces like a ravening wolf, with deplorable results for Mr.

Endon's equanimity (how could he play out his pattern if pieces got lost?). An opponent more fully attuned to Mr. Endon's state would attempt a symmetrical ritual likewise, in utter indifference to Mr. Endon. 37

It is, however, doubtful whether anything Murphy could have done would have succeeded in upsetting Mr. Endon. If given White instead of Black, he will sink into a stupor. Mr. Endon plays, after the chess game is over, with the light-switches and indicators in the corridors - a game "determined by an amental pattern"<sup>38</sup> as precise as any that governed his chess" (M. 169) - and it is of no more consequence to him that Murphy's hand should stop him from doing so than it had been that Murphy's surrender prevented him from completing another pattern (M. 169). Given the chance, Mr. Endon will make patterns; deprived of the chance there is no reason to conclude that he loses his equanimity. There is, moreover, a qualitative difference between Murphy and Mr. Endon, while Kenner - "more fully attuned" - seems to consider the difference to be merely quantitative. Kenner's failure to notice that Mr. Endon moves (or intends to move) into check may in part account for his failure to acknowledge that the gulf between Black and White is unbridgeable.

#### Aftermath

Following Mr. Endon's 43rd move Murphy stares at the board for a long time before laying his King on its side. Thereafter he continues his scrutiny. Then he shifts to an intense concentration on Mr. Endon's arms and legs, "scarlet, black and glitter" (M. 168). Shortly this is seen only as a "vivid blur" (M. 168) as the detail escapes him. Here he is confronted with "Neary's big blooming buzzing confusion or ground, mercifully free of figure" (M. 168), with a total vision of the big world undisturbed by any specific tangible object. He wearies of this, drops his head on his arms, and attempts to escape from the physical realm. The "terrible noise" (M. 168) that the chessmen make as they fall seems to provide him with an opportunity to loathe the big world of sights and sounds and thus to enter his little world (M. 164). Soon

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37. Hugh Kenner, A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 68.

38. That Mr. Endon's games should be described as governed by amental patterns underlines the delusion involved in Murphy's considering the patients, and Mr. Endon in particular, "immured in mind" (M. 125), and as creatures of the little world.

Murphy begins to see nothing and to feel nothing and, in the absence of percipi,<sup>39</sup> to be nothing. This "positive peace", however, fades too:

Then this also vanished, or perhaps simply came asunder, in the familiar variety of stenches, asperities, ear-splitters and eye-closers... (M. 168)

and Murphy finds that Mr. Endon has gone.

Federman, in his study of Beckett's early fiction, considers that, after the chessgame, "For a brief moment Murphy finds himself cut off from reality and time, isolated beyond the boundaries of his physical self",<sup>40</sup> and claims that "Beckett chooses to obliterate the body and all its demands".<sup>41</sup> There is, however, at least an element of doubt as to whether or not Murphy is cut off from either reality or time. As we have seen, there are certain indications that his experience at this point is spontaneous (and hence the experience of reality) since the peace he feels is not the numb peace that comes when his senses suspend themselves but rather the positive peace of nothingness. Even if, as we have discussed in connection with "Dream", peace seems foreign to spontaneity and rather a characteristic of habit, it is clear that Beckett is, here at least, using the word in two senses, and a "positive" (as opposed to a "numb") peace may be applicable to spontaneity, particularly as the experience is "unexpected" (M. 168), and thus apparently unlike his earlier attempts to contrive a similarly colourless post-natal treat. The evidence for concluding that Murphy is cut off from Time seems somewhat more convincing, but here too there is a certain ambiguity: "Time did not cease, that would be asking too much, but the wheel of rounds and pauses did" (M. 168). (Time and the wheel of rounds and pauses continues of course for everyone not experiencing what Murphy is experiencing: his communion with "the accidentless One-and-Only" takes place between 4 a.m. and 5 a.m. on Monday, October 21st, 1935.) In Proust Time dies when the miracle of involuntary memory takes place; this does not seem to be the case here; but the fact that "the wheel and round of pauses", if not Time itself, ceases does seem to indicate that Murphy is in some way spontaneous.

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39. A reference to Berkeley's "esse est percipi", from the third of "Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous", in The Empiricists, Doubleday and Company, Garden City, 1961, pp. 280-305.

40. Raymond Federman, Journey to Chaos, op. cit., p. 71.

41. Ibid., p. 76.

The nothingness Murphy wallows in is described as "the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real". This is a reference to Democritus the Abderite's contention that "what is not" and "what is" are equally real (i.e. that empty space is as real as matter, according to some interpretations), and that they are aspects of a universe in perpetual motion.<sup>42</sup> In the chapter devoted to Murphy's mind (Chapter Six), Murphy admits that "there was the mental fact and the physical fact, equally real if not equally pleasant" (M. 76), but he dualistically insists that the mental fact is cut off from the physical fact in spite of all indications to the contrary, and is not at all interested in exploring the implications of any evidence that there is interaction between the two. The reference, after the chessgame, to Democritus, an atomistic philosopher, and to the "accidentless One-and-Only", a monistic notion, may have various implications here, depending on whether or not, and if so the extent to which (i.e. is his habit "sleeping" and thus allowing of a "fugitive" experience of spontaneity? cf. P. 9) we view Murphy as spontaneous at this point, but in all cases it must, like earlier references to Leibniz and Spinoza, undermine the dualistic view of himself that he has held for so long. Beckett does not choose to obliterate the body and its demands: he presents a character who would like to be able to do so and mocks him for cherishing such a hope.

When Murphy becomes aware, once more, of the familiar stench, etc. of his immediate surroundings, he discovers that Mr. Endon is missing from the pad. Mr. Endon has been wandering about the corridors "pressing here a light-switch and there an indicator" (M. 169) and has settled finally to (unwittingly) tormenting the hypomanic by "ringing the changes on the various ways in which the indicator could be pressed and the light turned on and off" (M. 169). Murphy leads Mr. Endon back to his pad, tucks him into bed, kneels down beside the bed, and inspects his charge's eyes.

Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon

In the cornea of Mr. Endon's remarkable eyes, Murphy sees, "horribly reduced, obscured, and distorted, his own image" (M. 170).

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42. See R.E. Allen (ed.) Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle, The Free Press, New York, 1967, pp. 16-17; 54-56.

That he should thus see himself "stigmatised in those eyes that did not see him" (M. 170) recalls strikingly that Murphy was originally drawn to Mr. Endon "as Narcissus to his fountain" (M. 128), and suggests that the self he sees reflected is the self that he loves.

In a spot "sheltered from the fierce sun"<sup>43</sup> Ovid's Narcissus falls in love with his reflection in a clear pool: "he fell in love with an insubstantial hope, mistaking a mere shadow for a real body". The object of his own approval, he is "at once seeking and sought", and prays that he could "separate" himself from his body.

The similarity between the nature of Narcissus' self-love and Murphy's is clear. Both are based on a fundamental delusion: Narcissus loves an insubstantial shadow of his body; Murphy loves a part of himself that he thinks is separate from his body. Murphy is, like Narcissus, both seeking and sought - in his search for self. The difference, however, between the two lies in the fact that Narcissus sees a fair likeness of himself whereas, in Mr. Endon's eyes, Murphy sees a "horribly reduced, obscured and distorted" image of himself. The self that Murphy loves is less than, and more indistinct and unpleasant than the reality. The image that he sees contradicts his feeling that when he escapes into his mind he becomes "improved out of all knowledge" (M. 74) and his feeling that it is then that "the best of his many selves" emerges.

Seeing himself thus, Murphy speaks words which have been "demanding to be spoken":

'the last at last seen of him  
himself unseen by him  
and of himself'

A rest.

'The last Mr Murphy saw of Mr Endon was Mr Murphy unseen by Mr. Endon. This was also the last Murphy saw of Murphy.

A rest.

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

A long rest.

'Mr Murphy is a speck in Mr Endon's unseen.'

That was the whole extent of the little afflatulence. (M. 171)

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43. All the quotations in this paragraph are from The Metamorphoses of Ovid, translated and with an introduction by Mary M. Innes, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1955, pp. 90-95. Murphy, in the opening paragraph of Murphy, is sitting in a corner of his room that is curtained off from the sun (M. 5).

This passage confirms the impression given by the chess game, that Mr. Endon is totally oblivious to Murphy (and, indeed, to everything but himself). It goes further, however, in that it shows that Murphy is now aware of this. Murphy can no longer delude himself that his feeling for Mr. Endon is in any way reciprocated.

Realising he is infinitely far from Mr. Endon, realising he does not understand Mr. Endon, wanting to be near him, understand him, knowing this is impossible, Murphy's problem now is that he doesn't know which - if any - direction he should be heading in. In fact, Murphy never knew which direction he should be heading in, but he was under the impression that he did know. He is now deprived of the illusion that he has been proceeding correctly by trying to escape into his mind.

Murphy leaves the pad and the building "without reluctance and without relief" (M. 171). It is as irrelevant to him now where he is as it would have been, on the jobpath, had Celia not provided him with a reason for loitering around her "ruelle" rather than anywhere else. He has no reason for supposing any longer that he will satisfy his needs in one place more than in another; he has no reason, indeed, for supposing that his needs are anywhere satisfiable.

It is at this point that Murphy is set apart from the other "puppets"<sup>44</sup> in the novel who fail to satisfy their needs for Murphy. He is at least aware now of the falsity of what he wanted to believe. The others do not share this awareness. It is unbearable.

#### Murphy Alone

The little world has rejected Murphy, and the warmth<sup>45</sup> so essential to his mental life is missing in the cold, damp, early morning air that

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44. "All the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except Murphy, who is not a puppet" (M. 86). Murphy is both like the others, in being a puppet, and unlike them, in not being a puppet.

45. That Murphy's mental life should have depended on so physical a condition as warmth further stresses the interdependence of mental and physical.

surrounds him as he trails slowly across the grass of the hospital grounds. He strips naked and lies down in the long grass and tries to get a picture of Celia in his mind, and fails. He fails too with others who have populated the novel, "Wylie, Neary, Cooper, Miss Dew, Miss Carridge, Nelly, the sheep, the chandlers, even Bom and Co, even Bim, even Ticklepenny and Miss Counihan, even Mr. Quigley" (M. 172). He tries with those who do not appear in the novel, with his mother, his father, "the men, women, children and animals that belong to even worse stories than this" (M. 172): "In vain in all cases. He could not get a picture in his mind of any creature he had met, animal or human" (M. 172).

The notable exceptions here are Mr. Endon and the other patients in the Mercyseat,<sup>46</sup> who have no place in the list of creatures because Murphy is trying to establish contact with the big world. His voluntary memory, however, fails him and instead of the desired pictures of Celia et al, he is bombarded with fragments that mean nothing to him:

Scraps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes, lines and colours evoking nothing, rose and climbed out of sight before him, as though reeled upward off a spool level with his throat. (M. 172)

When Murphy finished his first round of the ward earlier that night, he wanted some sign from the big world that would facilitate his entry into the little. Now, lying on the grass outside the hospital, he seems to be trying to enter the big world for its own sake. Disturbed by the awareness of the futility of trying to be a part of Mr. Endon's world, Murphy's habit is once more switching on its other aspect, and he is once again in danger of suffering the death of his habit when his big world too fails as a source of comfort and meaningless scraps unreel before his eyes. "It was his experience that this should be stopped, whenever possible, before the deeper coils were reached" (M. 172), and he rushes indoors to his rocking chair. He is once more moving towards his little world, and if this also fails him then his habit will die. In his rocking chair, however, he starts to feel better and it seems that his habit has survived.

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<sup>46</sup> There is no reason for supposing that Murphy has ever met the old boy or Celia's uncle, Mr. Kelly, which should explain the omission of their names from the otherwise comprehensive list of principals. Mr. Quigley is Murphy's uncle (M. 16), a "well-to-do ne'er-do-well" who pays Murphy's rent.

It may be suggested that his habit does die at some point and that his feeling better in his chair is the result of a re-formation of his habit after a period of transition. This seems unlikely since he is in every way the same at this point in his chair as he was when the novel opened, which suggests that no transition has taken place.

At one of the rock's dead points he saw, for a second, far beneath the dip and the radiator, gleam and grin; at the other the skylight, open to no stars. Slowly he felt better, astir in his mind, in the freedom of that light and dark that did not clash, nor alternate, nor fade nor lighten except to their communion. The rock got faster and faster, shorter and shorter, the gleam was gone, the grin was gone, the starlessness was gone, soon his body would be quiet. Most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock got faster and faster and then stopped. Soon his body would be quiet, soon he would be free. (M. 172-173)

This description is identical to that which forms the final paragraph of Chapter One (M. 10), with the sole exception that there it is the iridescence and the street cry (rather than the radiator and the starlessness) that are Murphy's last links with the big world.<sup>47</sup>

There is, of course, one other difference between the two sessions: in their outcomes. The earlier session results in Murphy's suffering a heart attack: his body obviously does not become "quiet". On this last occasion, on the other hand, "The gas went on in the wc, excellent gas, superfine chaos. Soon his body was quiet" (M. 173). At some point during the morning, Murphy is killed by an explosion of the gas which had been flowing into his room through the heater that is connected to a jet in the w.c. downstairs. If his habit ever dies, maybe it is here, in the explosion of chaos that is accidental and entirely unforeseen.

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47. In the first chapter he had wondered "dimly, very dimly" (M. 5) what the sights and sounds were that were detaining him against his will in a world to which he thought he did not belong. At the end, on the other hand, Murphy is entertaining thoughts of returning to the big world of Celia and Suk, a return which he "dimly, very dimly" (M. 172) plans to effect once his spell in the rocking chair has revived him. There is nothing in this to indicate any difference between Murphy at the beginning and Murphy at the end since he has, as a creature of habit, found the big world at times appealing and at other times repellent.



The only thing that Murphy was seeking was what he had not ceased to seek from the moment of his being strangled into a state of respiration - the best of himself. (M. 52)

Prompted by the feeling that he receives only kicks in the world outside himself (a feeling that ignores that he also receives caresses, notably from Celia), Murphy chooses to consider that he can find the best of himself in his mind, which he imagines to be self-sufficient and impermeable to such kicks. He therefore feels that ~~he~~<sup>his</sup> need for the best of himself will be satisfied if he can but succeed in living in his little world. As this discussion has shown, however, he needs the world outside himself just as much as he needs the world within, and these needs are interrelated.

In Murphy all lines lead to Murphy and all fail to find him. Neary, Cooper, Wylie, Miss Counihan, and Celia need Murphy for various reasons, all more or less unconnected with Murphy as he really is. Their needs, directed at Murphy, are part of what might, when Murphy is seen as the central figure in the novel, be called a centripetal movement of need that fails to find the centre. The other part of this movement is what Murphy sees as his need for himself, the inward turning into his mind. This also fails. But Murphy's need for himself is in fact also demonstrated by a centrifugal movement away from himself towards the big world of his body and his external environment. In spite of what he thinks he is the same person whether loving Celia or leaving her, whether loving Celia or loving himself, whether considering the stars the prior system or himself the prior system. Murphy, alone among the "puppets" in the novel, comes to realise the inaccessibility of the object of his need and to suffer the spontaneous experience of reality, the incoercible absence of relationship between subject and object. Although he shies away from this experience and rushes to his chair where he starts to feel better, he finally dies, and whether or not his habit dies beforehand, it must certainly die with him.

"Do not despair, one of the thieves was saved; do not presume, one of the thieves was damned". This sentence has two parts which in meaning are opposed, but which in form are identical. A discussion of the shape must establish, but must not dwell solely on, the division between the two parts. It must come to terms with the formal inter-relationship between the parts and must keep in mind that these are

two parts of the whole that is one sentence. Beckett's interest in dualism in Murphy is an interest in the shape of dualism in the context of the whole that is the novel. Murphy's habitual view of himself as divided is placed within the context of a novel that undermines that habitual view by showing the interconnections between mind and body, inner and outer, microcosm and macrocosm, the little world and the big world. These interconnections are inexplicable - Beckett himself in his discursive writings uses various words for them: symbiosis, conjunction, alternation. They are, however, important, and to ignore them, as Murphy does, is to ignore their inexplicability and to remain a creature of habit. To posit only the division between any two contraries is as false as to posit only the connections.

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## CHAPTER V

WATT

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

Watt, p. 247

For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it  
 as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak  
 of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be  
 sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and as the only way one  
 can speak of man, even our anthropologists have realized that,  
 is to speak of him as though he were a termite.

Watt, p. 74

All the figures in Watt habitually use all their faculties, both  
 mental and physical, to shut out reality. The microcosm sought by  
 Murphy was at least the real microcosm of the mind - his illusion con-  
 sisted in his mistaken belief that the reality of the mind could be  
 cut off from the reality of the body - whereas the microcosm sought  
 by Mr. Hackett, Watt, Mr. Knott, Sam, etc. is a microcosm entirely cut  
 off from the real world, and accordingly even more drastically illusory  
 than Murphy's. Where Murphy tried to annul the vexations of the "big  
 world where Quid pro quo was cried as wares and the light never waned  
 the same way twice" (M. 8), by shutting himself off from sights and  
 from sounds, the figures that populate Watt rely as heavily on their  
 senses as on their intellect for protection against all that is unfam-  
 ilar and uncomfortable in reality as a whole. Their habits are, in  
 short, "facultative": their ability to see, to hear, etc. and to think  
 rationally protects them from the suffering of being that must accompany  
 a vision of reality. The fact that the word 'faculty' can be used not

only to refer to what in Watt are habit's chief defences against suffering but also in connection with suffering itself ("the faculty of suffering" P. 40), the fact that the faculty of sight, for example, can furnish both a distorted, illusory view of the world and a vision of reality, is an indication that habit and spontaneity cannot be divorced.

Dividing reality into what he calls the big world and what he calls the little, Murphy also divides his habit. Thinking that his two worlds are incompatible he convinces himself that he has two incompatible needs. Neither of these is the spontaneous need of Lazarus (whose raising seems to Murphy "perhaps the one occasion on which the Messiah had overstepped the mark" M. 125): his dissatisfaction is not, until after the chess game, the spontaneous "unbefriedigt jeden Augenblick" (unsatisfied at every moment" DD. 290) dissatisfaction of Lazarus. Rather, Murphy is dissatisfied because, in spite of all his efforts, he cannot shed his need for the big world. When, as in Watt, reality is not divided into a mental reality and a physical, a pleasant and an unpleasant, a higher and a lower, an inner and an outer, an essential and a temporal, then one habitual need is sufficient. The figures in Watt can and do solve their habitual problems. Murphy is concerned with the inevitable dissatisfaction that comes of having a dualistic habit. Murphy's problem is solved in Watt. In Watt we see the possibility and the inadequacy of clapping solutions on to secondary problems; all the problems that are articulated in this book are solved by the "go-getters" that populate it, solved in the sense that they cease to be problems. That these are all secondary problems is shown when they are compared with the primary and insoluble problem of reality, which enters the picture on several occasions to charm and torture unbearably, if momentarily. These occasions are the crises, the moments when illusion is confronted by reality, when it is possible for habit to die, for the creature to suffer, and for habit to be re-organised. That this does not happen, that habit triumphs in all of its skirmishes with spontaneity, will be shown in what follows.

Mr. Hackett and his World

Mr. Hackett's success in attaining his goal of sitting down on "his" seat is success in his habitual world of mental and physical faculties.

It is not, of course, his seat at all, but the important thing is that he thinks of it as his. Turning the corner he sees that it is occupied. His dilemma now is whether to go on towards his goal or to return home. "Space was open on his right hand and on his left hand, but he knew that he would never take advantage of this" (W. 5) - the reason being that he is interested only in the straight line leading from himself to the seat that he wants. Holding on to a rail for balance, he strikes his stick against the ground: "the feel, in his palm, of the thudding rubber, appeased him slightly" (W.5; italics added). He turns back towards home but has gone no further than a few steps before changing his mind and hastening towards the seat after all"

...the lady held the gentleman by the ears, and the gentleman's hand was on the lady's thigh, and the lady's tongue was in the gentleman's mouth. (W. 6)

Just as, in the opening paragraph of Murphy, the word "lived" is avoided yet evoked ("Here for what might have been six months he had eaten, drunk, slept, and put his clothes on and off..." M. 5), so here, in the opening to Watt, there is a refusal to use the word "lovers" and a total concentration on what is visible, sensible, in the scene that Mr. Hackett is surveying. The use of this knockabout kind of "evocation of the unsaid by the said" (to use a phrase Beckett used in "Denis Devlin" DD. 295)<sup>1</sup> is common enough in Murphy even in connection, as here, with a love relationship (e.g. Miss Counihan's enjoyment, on Wylie's knees, of the "slow motion osmosis of love's spittle" M. 83). It is never, however, used in connection with Murphy's life in his mind: his mental, as opposed to physical, aspirations are accorded a mock-serious lyrical, even flighty, treatment throughout (and especially in Chapter Six). In Watt, where there is no distinction between mental and physical, this brutal concentration on verifiable fact is applied indiscriminately and generally.

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1. The phrase is used when comparing Devlin's poem "The Statue and the Perturbed Burghers" to a late poem by Hölderlin, "Ihr lieblichen Bilder im Tale..." DD. 295.

Watt begins and ends in the sensible world.

The couple leaves and Mr. Hackett sits down to watch the trams and the colours of the evening in the sky and in the canal. The seat is "still warm" (W. 7): "He roasteth roast and is satisfied. Yea, he warmeth himself and saith, Aha, I am warm".<sup>2</sup> Watt begins with Dives, with an attempt to satisfy the kind of need "that in its haste to be abolished cannot pause to be stated" (DD. 289), an attempt that succeeds. It is into a world so far presented as accessible to Mr. Hackett's mental and physical faculties that Beckett now introduces Lazarus.

Goff and Tetty Nixon are passing and they stop to wish Mr. Hackett the time of evening. Just after they have finished talking about the birth of their son Larry<sup>3</sup> who will be "forty years old next March, D.V." ("That is the kind of thing that Dee always Vees, said Mr. Hackett" W. 10), a tram stops on the other side of the street and subsequently moves off, disclosing a motionless figure on the pavement opposite. Goff Nixon crosses the street and remonstrates with this mysterious personage. Tetty and Mr. Hackett see Goff's eager gestures, hear his voice, see no movement, hear no words from the other figure.

Mr. Hackett did not know when he had been more intrigued, nay, he did not know when he had been so intrigued. He did not know either what it was that so intrigued him. What is it that so intrigues me, he said, whom even the extraordinary, even the supernatural, intrigue so seldom, and so little. Here is nothing in the least unusual, that I can see, and yet I burn with curiosity, and with wonder. The sensation is not disagreeable, I must say, and yet I do not think I could bear it for more than twenty minutes, or half an hour. (W. 15)

What has happened is simply that he has come up against something that his habitual approach to problem-solving cannot explain. He can see nothing unusual; here there is nothing supernatural or even extraordinary. Yet the intensity of the vision's effect on Mr. Hackett is such that he can compare it with no previous experience. He is burning with curiosity. In Proust curiosity is shown to be one of the henchmen of habit:

Curiosity is a non-conditioned reflex, in its most primitive manifestations a reaction before a danger-stimulus... Curiosity is the hair of our habit tending to stand on end... Curiosity is the safeguard, not the death, of the cat... (P, 18)

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2. In "Denis Devlin" the need of Dives is described as "the need of the go-getters, the gerrymandlers, Davus and the morbid dread of sphinxes, solution clapped on to problem like a snuffer on a candle, the great crossword public on all its planes: 'He roasteth roast and is satisfied. Yea, he warmeth himself and saith, Aha, I am warm'", (DD, 290)

3. "Larry, short for Lazarus" (M. 102)

Mr. Hackett has seen something real, something particular and unique, isolated and inexplicable. For Beckett, as for Proust, it is the duty of habit to act as a screen to spare its creature the spectacle of reality. Mr. Hackett's habit has been caught napping but now uses curiosity, that formidable member of its arsenal, to safeguard its interests.

Mr. Hackett finds it imperative to find out what it was that so intrigued him, and he becomes impatient and even angry with Mr. Nixon's professed "utter ignorance" (W. 19) about Watt. Even after Mr. Nixon has made a special effort to satisfy Mr. Hackett, murmuring something in his ear, and even after Mr. Nixon has told him about Watt's peculiar drinking habits, Mr. Hackett can only respond wearily "Well... I am obliged to you, I suppose" (W.21). He does not know why it matters to him that he should find out about Watt, but that it does matter to him is clear: "My dear fellow, said Mr. Nixon, why this sudden interest?" (W. 16). He cannot explain, he does not know, why he was so intrigued. Eventually he gives up:

The creature of habit turns aside from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his intellectual prejudices.  
(P. 11-12)

Mr. Hackett turns back to the world where he can find satisfaction: he scratches his hunch against the backboard of his seat several times in succession and looks out towards the horizon that he came out to see.

The most obvious difference between this mysterious incident and the earlier conquest of the seat is that he gets what he wants in the seat whereas he remains unsatisfied and finally has to give up trying to explain the mystery. This difference is connected with what can be known of the object in each case, and knowledge, in Watt, is composed of the information provided by one's mental and physical (particularly visual) faculties. Mr. Hackett's attitude is that any object that can be examined visually, aurally, etc., and thought about on the basis of what has been seen, heard, etc., should be accessible to him. His faculties are his means of achieving what he wants and of averting what he does not want. Thus when the policeman he summoned to oust the lovers from the seat replies "briefly" and no doubt unpleasantly to his excuses, Mr. Hackett retaliates, saying: "If you imagine that I have not your

number... you are mistaken. I may be infirm, but my sight is excellent" (W. 7; italics added).

This attitude is shared by the others in this opening section of the novel. The policeman can only act if he can see indecent behaviour (W. 6). Goff and Tetty espy Mr. Hackett on the seat, and she looks attentively at him. It being too dark to see, Goff has recourse to a petrol-lighter enabling him to read Grehan's poem and solving that difficulty. A woman passing by is described not as being pregnant but in terms of what is visible: "Her belly could dimly be seen, sticking out, like a balloon" (W. 10; italics added). They hear the tram-conductor's voice. When the tram moves off, Goff recognises Watt at once and goes over to him. The light is poor: Tetty cannot tell if it is a man or a woman, and Mr. Hackett cannot tell if it is not a parcel or a roll of tarpaulin. They see and hear Goff, "But Watt moved no more, as far as they could see, than if he had been of stone, and if he spoke he spoke so low that they did not hear him" (W. 14-15; italics added). Mr. Hackett watches, intrigued, and the lady is "also an interested spectator". In the discussion about Watt that follows Goff's return, there is further emphasis on the sensible. The connection between mental and physical faculties is made clearest in Mr. Nixon's comment to Mr. Hackett: "The curious thing is, my dear fellow, I tell you quite frankly, that when I see him, or think of him, I think of you, and that when I see you, or think of you, I think of him" (W. 17). Tetty remarks that Watt does not move (W. 15), comments that he looks "like a sewer-pipe" (W. 16), and asks, "Did you see his accoutrement?... What had he on his head?" (W. 19). Hackett says that Goff cannot be in ignorance of Watt's "Nationality, family, birthplace, confession, occupation, means of existence, distinctive signs" (W. 19; italics added), and Goff finally and grudgingly informs Hackett that Watt "has a big red nose" (W. 20) - thus filling in an answer opposite only the last of Hackett's categories.

But certain things you must know, said Mr. Hackett.

For example, said Mr. Nixon.

How you met him, said Mr. Hackett. In what circumstances he touched you. Where he is to be seen. (W. 20-21)

Again Goff can give a satisfactory answer only to the question concerning the visible. He does not remember meeting Watt. He knows that Watt



wanted 5/- to buy a boot (he knows this because he remembers seeing that one of Watt's feet was bare), but knows nothing of how Watt was going to set about buying one boot only. "As to where he is to be seen, he is to be seen in the streets, walking about" (W. 21).

The mental faculties of the three are heavily taxed in attempts to understand why Watt got off the tram at that particular stop rather than at the station. On the basis solely of the information that Watt is starting out on a journey, Mr. Hackett performs not inconsiderable feats of intellectual acrobatics to "explain" Watt's behaviour: "Very ingenious", says Mr. Nixon (W. 19).

Mr. Hackett's experience of his world is - like that of the other figures in its landscape - eminently sensible. He survives in that world by using his mental and physical faculties: he thinks he has that world's "number", just as he has the policeman's.

The kind of information that Mr. Hackett has about the seat is of the same order as the kind of information he has about Watt (of the same order, indeed, as all information): it is information derived from his thought processes, sight, hearing, etc. The difference between the two attempts at satisfying need lies in the fact that in the first case this type of information is useful, whereas in the second case it is not. Information of whatever kind or in however great a quantity is always totally inadequate to explain reality. Information is necessarily about possessions (nationality, birthplace, etc.),<sup>4</sup> about what is constant, about relationships (he is from...; he was born on...; etc.), and not at all about the perpetually changing and indefinable reality which is not a possession. Mr. Hackett's problem, as far as understanding Watt is concerned, is not the problem of one who does not have enough information: even had he been able to elicit answers from Mr. Nixon to all his questions, to fill in all the empty boxes on his imaginary bureaucratic form, Mr. Hackett would still have found out nothing that would help him understand. Mr. Hackett knew all

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4. Olga Bernal (Langage et Fiction dans le Roman de Beckett, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1969, chapter 2, "La Propriété et l'être") has a good discussion of the relationship between possessions and identity.

that is knowable - which is to say nothing that can be articulated - about Watt in the unbearable moment when he saw him directly, un-screened by habit. His refusal to face this knowledge, this reality, his refusal to let his habit of acquiring sensible information die and be re-born in a humbler form, admitting that he does not, in fact, have the world's number at all, is the first of many such refusals in Watt.

Mr. Hackett is familiar with, and he lives by, the laws of the sensible world projected by his habit. Within this world his attitudes and sensations are well-ordered, predictable and comfortable: this world is accessible to his need to clap solutions on to problems. When Lazarus is introduced into this cosy environment, Mr. Hackett continues to apply these same laws, but here they refuse to stick: his experience of the reality on the other side of the road refuses to be explained. His mind cannot find its habitual satisfaction in a world that he sees briefly in a way that jars with his projected world. With the introduction of Lazarus in this opening section of Watt, "mind and world" seem; to use a phrase Beckett used in a different context, to "come apart in irreparable dissociation".<sup>5</sup> When, as at the outset, mind and world are both seen to operate smoothly on the sensible plane, all dilemmas are of the utmost simplicity and it is plain to see what direction has to be taken to attain any goal. When, however, world is even once, even fleetingly, perceived to include even one minuscule element that is not sensible, then such a world is irreparably dissociated from the mind that is not adapted to it. The mind will have to change, become other than it is, if a new association is to be created. Such a change would involve the temporary but total triumph of spontaneity, succeeded by a new habit. The association between what is accessible and what is inaccessible to human understanding exists, Beckett makes it clear, in the world, and for new links to be forged between mind and world it is necessary for mind to re-adapt. Mr. Hackett is incapable of this - he turns away from the troublesome event and back to the horizons of the possible. Some damage has been done, nonetheless - habit is shaken, if triumphant - and for the further adventures of Dives and Lazarus we must, as Beckett does, leave

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5. "The Essential and the Incidental" (a review of Sean O'Casey's Windfalls)  
op. cit.

Mr. Hackett on his seat and follow Watt to Mr. Knott's house and beyond. The outcome of the struggle is, for the period of Watt's existence covered in the book, not in doubt (he chooses, significantly, to get down from the tram at a "merely facultative stop"! W. 17; italics added).<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless in Watt (as in all Beckett's work) reality, spontaneity, the possibility that habit may yet die, does persist in impinging on habit throughout.

### Watt and Mr. Hackett

There are numerous points of resemblance between Watt and Mr. Hackett. Mr. Nixon's remark, quoted above, about thinking of Mr. Hackett when he sees Watt or thinks about Watt (and vice versa), the porter's curse to Watt "The devil raise a hump on you" (W. 22) and the reference to Mr. Hackett as "hunchy Hackett" (W. 7), etc., have often been commented on. I would suggest that the connection is closer than these direct references indicate, but <sup>I</sup> would in no way wish to imply that Mr. Hackett is Watt under a different name. Mr. Hackett and Watt are not to be identified any more than Moran and Molloy are to be identified. The similarities are striking and important but we are on shaky ground if we try to make them add up to anything more than similarities. Nor would I wish to imply that Watt is a later "incarnation" of a figure who is initially called Mr. Hackett (or Murphy, or Belacqua). This view, which could certainly be supported with reference to Beckett's discussion, in Proust, of the succession of lives that make up human existence, and which is certainly appealing since it seems to explain some of what is otherwise inexplicable in Beckett, does nonetheless involve a serious difficulty. I have found no evidence in Beckett's art (as opposed to Proust) to support the idea of a succession of lives; Belacqua's and Murphy's habits of living survive until their physical death. The assumption that Hackett's habit dies and is re-born in a new form called Watt begs the crucial question of whether or not, in Beckett (as distinct from Proust), an old habit

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6. Hugh Kenner suggests that in using a word like 'facultative' Beckett is relying on French for his idiom (A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 85) and he is certainly right in that 'facultative' is not used in English of a bus-stop or tram-stop, whereas in France "arrêt facultatif" is the ordinary sign for request stops. 'Facultative' is,

does die and is replaced by a new one. As we have seen, Belacqua, Murphy and Mr. Hackett all shy away from the reality which impresses itself so forcefully (and variously) upon them; they prefer to cling to the old, worn, comfortable habits of their existence at least until their physical death. To suggest that Watt is a later "incarnation" of these earlier people is to suggest that the transitional period leading to a new "pact" between mind and world takes place at some point in time that the novels do not concern themselves with. Since the only basis on which we can say anything about the novels is that provided in the novels, it is impossible to argue justifiably about a question which is not raised or even suggested in them.

Another reason why there seems no reason to consider that Mr. Hackett's habit dies and is re-formed as Watt is that Watt's habit is like Mr. Hackett's in all essential respects. The similarities between them are important because Mr. Hackett is the main figure of the opening pages of the novel, Watt of the novel as a whole, and because we must guard against the error of thinking that "the opening... has no connection with the novel proper".<sup>7</sup> The incidentals of appearance and of Goff Nixon's association of the two men are only guideposts to a basic similarity: Mr. Hackett shares with Watt a sensible view of the world he finds himself in. This can be established with reference to a few incidents which occur as soon as the novel turns its attention to Watt, but it is evidenced on every page in which Watt subsequently figures.

Watt is in the railway station. He bumps into a porter and suffers the ensuing insults with a smile:

Watt had watched people smile and thought he understood how it was done... But there was something wanting to Watt's smile, some little thing was lacking, and people who saw it for the first time, and most people who saw it saw it for the first time, were sometimes in doubt as to what expression exactly was intended. (W. 23)

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6. (cont.) however, a perfectly good English word which conveys, here, not only the kind of habit which shields Watt and the other relics in Watt, but also the fact that this kind of habit is not the only kind that may dominate human beings - it is certainly very different from Murphy's habit - since facultative means "optional" as well as "of or proceeding from a faculty".

7. Francis Doherty, Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 34. Raymond Federman (in Journey to Chaos, op. cit., p. 97) considers that Mr. Hackett's world is "incompatible" with Watt's.

Watt learnt to smile not intuitively or naturally but by watching others, whom he thinks he knows how to imitate. That there is something wrong with his smile indicates the inadequacy of the facultative approach. Watt gets into the train and sits down. Only when he becomes "conscious of eyes upon him" (W. 25) does he look up and see the large man sitting opposite.

My name is Spiro, said the gentleman.

Here then was a sensible man at last. He began with the essential and then, working on, would deal with the less important matters, one after the other, in an orderly way. (W. 25; italics added)

The approach here is of the same kind as Mr. Hackett's, and the only difference is a slight difference of emphasis. Mr. Hackett begins, whenever it is possible, with the evidence of his sight particularly and his senses in general, and uses his thought processes to draw conclusions from this evidence. Watt is using his sight sparingly at this stage - he bumps into the porter, doesn't notice the man in his compartment. Where Mr. Hackett mistakes the names of his companions (Mr. Nesbit, Mrs. Nisbet W. 15, 33), Watt at this point considers names of importance. This different emphasis is related to the different ways in which the two men react to a situation in which they are threatened. The encounters between Hackett and the policeman on the one hand and between Watt and the porter illuminate this. Hackett reacts to the policeman's anger with vocal self-defence followed by anger of his own; Watt does not feel at liberty to pick up his belongings until the porter has finished abusing him, he says not a word, smiles, and waits for the incident to end. Watt is not as sure as Hackett of his ability to retaliate in kind to a hostile world. So too when his hat is knocked off his head by Lady McCann's projectile, "Watt, faithful to his rule, took no more notice of this aggression than if it had been an accident" (W. 30). This passive acceptance of what the world offers him is connected with his somewhat heavier reliance on mental processes. Where Hackett feels most at home in the external, Watt is somewhat more comfortable with the internal at this stage. This difference between the two is not so marked as to outweigh the similarity. Watt's attitude in the following passage might almost as easily have been written of Mr. Hackett:

On the platform the porter continued to wheel cans, up and down. At one end of the platform there was one group of cans, and at the other end there was another. The porter chose with care a can in one group

and wheeled it to the other. Then he chose with care a can in the other and wheeled it to the one. He is sorting the cans, said Watt. Or perhaps it is a punishment for disobedience or some neglect of duty. (W. 24) 8

Watt is as anxious as Mr. Hackett to dream up explanations, and both men are completely different from Murphy, who had no interest at all in explanations and for whom the way in which the inexplicable could be exploited was the only thing that mattered.

Sitting in the train Watt has an experience not unlike Hackett's experience on seeing Watt over the road. Watt hears voices in his ear: "With these, if he was not familiar, he was not unfamiliar either. So he was not alarmed, unduly" (W. 27). Watt can take this kind of experience in his stride - it has happened before and he is not disturbed in the way that Hackett was disturbed by the totally unprecedented effect that Watt's appearance had on him. Watt's mental processes, which are finely attuned to his habitual need to empty all mysteries of their threats, immediately set about listing the possible sounds and combinations of sounds that these voices can make - "sometimes they sang only, and sometimes they cried only..." (W. 27). His curiosity is not aroused; he does not wonder at the voices, he simply reduces them to the easily understandable. Shortly afterwards, when he is lying in the ditch on the way to Mr. Knott's house, he hears more voices singing two verses of a threne and he again remains unruffled: "Of these two verses Watt thought that he preferred the former" (W. 34). If the event can be divided into components, Watt divides it: the parts are related to each other and are therefore accessible to his habitual way of solving problems, and the whole, which is unrelated to anything and potentially disturbing, is ignored. Another type of service that his mental processes can render is shown in the way they annul the strange circumstances in which

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8. It is the duty of habit, in Beckett as in Proust, to act as a screen to shut out reality. "Suffering", Beckett says in Proust, (P. 16) "represents the omission of that duty, whether through negligence or inefficiency, and boredom its adequate performance" (*italics added*). As we will see, Watt's habit is guilty of "neglect of duty" and of inefficiency on several occasions in what follows, and in each case the suffering is incapable of changing Watt because he quickly turns from the insoluble problem and concentrates instead on a task as manageable, as tedious, and as meaningless as the porter's.

he enters Mr. Knott's house:

Watt was surprised to find the back door, so lately locked, now open. Two explanations of this occurred to him... Of these two explanations Watt thought he preferred the former, as being the more beautiful. (W. 35)

If, as here, the event itself cannot be divided, Watt fabricates explanations for it, divides them, and chooses between them. Whether an explanation is true or not is irrelevant: his only requirement is that it should be aesthetically pleasing. In all cases his mind succeeds in emasculating events which are potentially dangerous to his preconceptions.

Where Hackett turned away from the realisation that his relationship with his world had been threatened, for Watt there is so far no threat: he has not yet been challenged. It is this challenge to his habit that he is to find in Mr. Knott's house.

#### Spontaneity and the New Day

Sitting in the kitchen of Mr. Knott's house, Watt is so busy playing a little game with the light and the ashes that he neither sees nor hears the door open and Arsene come in:

Here then was something again that Watt would never know, for want of paying due attention to what was going on about him. Not that it was a knowledge that could be of any help to Watt, or any hurt, or cause him any pleasure, or cause him any pain, for it was not. (W. 36)

Habit, Beckett writes in Proust (P. 18), does not possess the key to that "ultimate and inaccessible dungeon of our being" where is stored the "pearl" of reality registered by our "extreme inattention". Habit not only does not possess the key but does not need to, because the dungeon of Lazarus "contains none of the hideous and useful paraphernalia of war": it can neither help nor hinder our habitual way of coping with existence.

Arsene goes, returns shortly afterwards dressed for the road, and makes a "short statement" (W. 37) lasting about twenty-five pages. Later we learn that Watt has not listened very carefully to this

statement:

He wondered what Arsene had meant, nay, he wondered what Arsene had said, on the evening of his departure. For his declaration had entered Watt's ears only by fits, and his understanding, like all that enters the ears by fits, hardly at all. He had realised, to be sure, that Arsene was speaking, and in a sense to him, but something had prevented him, perhaps his fatigue, from paying attention to what was being said and from enquiring into what was being meant. (W. 77)

Again, knowledge of what Arsene said can neither help nor hurt Watt - the information is not useful to Watt - but while the existence of such knowledge is not going to make any great difference to his situation, its non-existence later proves exceedingly troublesome: "Not that Watt desired information, for he did not. But he desired words to be applied to his situation" (W. 77-78).

We do not, cannot, know what is registered by Watt's inattention but anything that is thus registered and that therefore is inaccessible to habit and to habitual, voluntary memory, is a potential source of danger to habit since it is assimilated into the "dungeon" of our being that can make spontaneous experience possible.

Perhaps it is his "fatigue" (W. 77) when he arrives at Mr. Knott's house (in Proust Marcel was always most prone to being disturbed when he was tired, particularly after a journey, or ill) or perhaps it is some kind of negligence of his habit (whose duty it is to pay attention to potential sources of disturbance in order to buckle them into familiar forms), but whatever the reason, it seems that Watt is, during the course of the first night he spends at Mr. Knott's house, for the first time in the novel threatened by the kind of experience that can challenge his habit when, watched by Arsene, he waits for the "new day" to break:

...that would come, Watt knew that would come, with patience it would come, little by little, whether he liked it or not, over the yard wall, and through the window, first the grey, then the brighter colours one by one, until getting on to 9 a.m. all the gold and white and blue would fill the kitchen, all the unsoiled light of the new day, of the new day at last, the day without precedent at last. (W. 63)

The new day without precedent at last is to be the day when Watt will see reality directly, unscreened by his habit. It is to be "without precedent" because it will, as Beckett says in Proust, "be perceived as



particular and unique and not merely the member of a family" and because it will appear "independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance" (P. 11). The light of this new day is to be "unsoiled", purged: Arsene in his statement makes the connection between the new day and purgatory clear:

The man arrives!...and he sits in the red gloom, picking his nose, waiting for the dawn to break. The dawn! The sun! The light! Haw!... How I feel it all again, after so long, here, and here, and in my hands and in my eyes, like a face raised, a face offered, all trust and innocence and candour, all the old soil and fear and weakness offered, to be sponged away and forgiven!... All led to this, to this gloaming where a middle-aged man sits masturbating his snout, waiting for the first dawn to break. (W. 37-38)

Watt's new day is to be the rebellion within him of Lazarus against Dives, of spontaneity against habit that would mean the entrance into what, in "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", Beckett calls "life on earth, that is Purgatory" (DBV. 22). The very fact that Watt can envisage the coming of a new day totally unconnected with all that has gone before shows that there is within him a dungeon inaccessible to his habit, a dungeon in which is stored the potentiality for change. The spontaneous need of Lazarus in Watt is the need for this unprecedented, unsoiled new day, the need for a perception untainted by prejudice. "Unfortunately", as Beckett writes in Proust, "Habit has laid its veto on this form of perception" (P. 11). The need of Dives in Watt is the need to rob every new thing of its newness and its mystery, the need to impose relationships where none exist in reality, the need to turn a new day into just another day in a long familiar series. There are therefore two quests: the quest for the new day, and the quest for yet another day, the quest for change, and the quest for nothing to change, the quest of Lazarus and the quest of Dives. Only if the former, the quest of Lazarus, succeeds is it possible for the alternation of opposites to begin and for Watt to enter purgatory. This does not happen. Watt clings tenaciously to his old habit of living. He spends many days in Mr. Knott's house, but each day is to him like every other one, and none could be described as unprecedented or new. That Watt will continue to be dominated by his facultative habit is clear in all that follows this momentary rebellion against the boredom of living, and is prefigured in what Arsene says about the outcome of his own momentary exposure to reality.

Arsene explains the circumstances in which this happened:

I was sitting on the step, in the yard, looking at the light, on the wall. I was in the sun, and the wall was in the sun. I was the sun, need I add, and the wall, and the step, and the yard, and the time of year, and the time of day, to mention only these. (W. 40)

For the creature of habit the world is a projection of the creature's consciousness, of his habit, and it has no existence for him except insofar as it participates in his habitual view of the world. Arsene is the sun, etc. in the sense that it exists for him only as part of his own habitual landscape, and he is the time of day, etc. in the sense that his notions of time are similarly illusory, existing only in his habitual "time-scape". He continues:

Hymeneal still it lay, the thing so soon to be changed, between me and all the forgotten horrors of joy. (W. 41)

This sentence expresses exactly what, using different words, Beckett in Proust describes as the relative positions of habit and spontaneity. Arsene's "forgotten horrors of joy" are like the "cruelties and enchantments of reality" (P. 11) that can threaten and occasionally subjugate habit and that are, for so long as habit retains its dominance, forgotten: the "vases" in which Beckett describes those essential characteristics of our experiences as being imprisoned for so long as we remain creatures of habit are inaccessible to our habitual memory and "the purity of their climatic content is guaranteed by forgetfulness" (P. 55), "/their/ integral purity /is/ retained because it has been forgotten" (P. 54). What prevents us from remembering, from becoming aware of those aspects of our experience that habit excludes, is the fact that habit acts as a screen (P. 10) between us and our experiences. Our experiences thus remain "hymeneal", to use Arsene's word, in the sense that they are untouched by habit and retain their purity. When our habit fails as a screen, we are exposed to reality, and our habit will either die (qualitative change) or accommodate this disturbance (quantitative change). Arsene too speaks of change:

The change. In what did it consist? It is hard to say. Something slipped. There I was, warm and bright, smoking my tobacco-pipe, watching the warm bright wall, when suddenly somewhere some little thing slipped, some tiny little thing. Gliss-iss-iss-STOP!... It was a slip like that I felt, that Tuesday afternoon, millions of little things moving all together out of their old place, into a new one nearby, and furtively, as though it were forbidden. (W. 41)

The only way that reality can ever make itself known to the creature of habit is furtively: the reality registered by our extreme inattention is, Beckett says in Proust, "accumulated slyly and painfully and patiently under the nose of our vulgarity" (P. 31), and spontaneous experience is forbidden by habit, which "has laid its veto on this form of perception" (P. 11). Arsene's experience is, for an instant, real, spontaneous. It is no longer screened, "hymeneal". But: "gliss-iss-iss-STOP" - Arsene stops the process that could have led to the death of his habit. Arsene neither sees the thing happen, nor hears it, but he perceives it "with a perception so sensuous that in comparison the impressions of a man buried alive in Lisbon on Lisbon's great day seem a frigid and artificial construction of the understanding" (W. 42). This is precisely the kind of perception which an orderly, facultative habit cannot allow if it is to survive. In his "distress" (W. 42), Arsene says, "I had the baseness to call to my aid recent costiveness and want of stomach" (W. 42), and the old thing that is Arsene's habit comes back again to where it always was:

But in what did the change consist? What was changed, and how? What was changed, if my information is correct, was the sentiment that a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place. What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, I for, I haf taken it away. This I am happy to inform you is the reversed metamorphosis. The Laurel into Daphne. The old thing where it always was, back again. (W. 42-43)

Much has been made, in commentaries on Watt, of this ladder - especially of its supposed connection with Wittgenstein's ladder of logic.<sup>9</sup> We now know from John Fletcher<sup>10</sup> that Beckett had not read Wittgenstein when he was writing Watt and that the reference is to a Welsh joke, presumably the Welsh joke consisting of the absurdity of telling someone not to do something that he cannot possibly do. A ladder is a structure of rungs or bars fixed between supports for ascent or descent ("so

9. See especially Jacqueline Hofer, "Watt", op. cit., and Richard N. Coe, Beckett, Oliver and Boyd, London, 1968, pp. 39-53.

10. The Novels of Samuel Beckett, op. cit., p. 87.

descend, so mount, rung by rung", Arsene says on the next page of the novel). Its rungs are related to one another - its domain is, like the domain of the rational numbers, orderly and accessible.<sup>11</sup> A ladder, like a grid, is an image for a habit that creates illusions that there is nothing except our conscious and unconscious projection of an accessible world, that there are no irrational numbers, that there is nothing "off the ladder". Arsene's momentary awareness of reality has caused him to realise that his habitual projection of a world of only rational numbers is illusory. His habit does not, however, permit him to stay off the ladder. The abrupt change that takes place is off the ladder, not in the habit-dominated Arsene. He is, briefly, aware that this change does take place because for a moment his awareness extends beyond its habitual boundaries, and he knows that a change has taken place somewhere. "What was changed was the sentiment that a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place" (W. 42; italics added). Arsene himself has not changed, has not admitted change, and the old thing is back where it always was.<sup>12</sup> He has sought, and found, shelter in the fixity of costiveness from the terrifying flux of reality. The new day never comes to Arsene - which explains (Haw!) why he scoffs (W. 37) when he sees Watt awaiting the dawn - and it will not come to Watt.

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11. As Hugh Kenner says (in Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study, op. cit. pp. 106-107), any member of the domain of rational numbers can be precisely located with respect to its neighbours: "Each has its name, its address, its normal occupation". It is emphatically not, however (as Professor Kenner claims) only Pozzo and Moran who inhabit this domain. All of Beckett's relics - all human beings - live on this "plane of the feasible" (as Beckett calls it in "Tal Coat, DGD I, 103).

12. It might be suggested that Arsene suffers the death of one habit and that his "costiveness" aids the formation of a new habit after a period of transition. This does not, however, seem to be the case since the reference to the old thing back where it always was indicates that something remained constant throughout the experience, and this is not the case when habit dies. When habit is "sleeping" rather than dead or dying, when its "vigilance" is temporarily suspended (P. 23), we may suffer and we may be aware of reality without undergoing a period of transition or the death of our habit. This is the case in Proust when Beckett describes Marcel's horror in the room in Balbec which is an "inferno of unfamiliar objects" (P. 24) as an instance of "the pact renewed", i.e. of habit surviving in spite of an unforeseen and disturbing experience; it is the case in "Dante and the Lobster"; and it is the case here with Arsene.

Watt on the Ground Floor of Mr. Knott's House

"Six, five, four hours still, of the old dark, the old burden" (W. 38). The first of the four sections of Watt ends with Watt awaiting the breaking of the new dawn. When the second section opens he is busy carrying out his duties on the ground floor of Mr. Knott's house, and it is clear that his habit has amassed its forces to avert the disaster of stepping off the ladder and submitting to the "incoercible absence of relation" (as Beckett calls it in his dialogue on Bram van Velde, DGD III, p. 125). Watt's senses are very much on the alert:

Watt's attention was extreme, in the beginning, to all that went on about him. Not a sound was made, within earshot, that he did not capture and, when necessary, interrogate, and he opened wide his eyes to all that passed, near and at a distance, to all that came and went and paused and stirred, and to all that brightened and darkened and grew and dwindled, and he grasped, in many cases, the nature of the object affected, and even the immediate cause of its being so. To the thousand smells also, which time leaves behind, Watt paid the closest attention. And he provided himself with a portable spittoon.

This constant tension of some of his most noble faculties tired Watt greatly. And the results, on the whole, were meagre. But he had no choice, at first. (W. 82-83; italics added)

Yet in spite of the fact that his faculties are 'en garde' he is troubled on eight occasions by incidents that it takes considerable effort and ingenuity to reduce to the status of the familiar and the comfortable. These eight incidents are the challenges, or obstacles, that reality puts in his path. How he copes with these will determine the outcome of the first stage of his stay in Mr. Knott's house. He will, as we will see, survive these ordeals unscathed and just rather tired. The eight incidents that trouble him on the ground floor of Mr. Knott's house are:

1. The Galls, father and son
2. The failure of words
3. The dog and the food
4. The bell
5. The picture in Erskine's room
6. The duration of Watt's stay in Mr. Knott's house
7. Mr. Knott
8. The telephone call.

They are alike in that they interrupt, for a time, Watt's habitual complacency. In this they resemble both the incident that so frustrated Mr. Hackett and the subsequent penetrations of Watt's illusory world.

#### The Galls, father and son

The incident of the Galls, father and son, is, we are told, the "first and type of many" taking place in the course of Watt's stay in Mr. Knott's house (W. 72).

Watt answers the door "as his habit was" (W. 67) and lets in a man and his son who claim to be piano-tuners. He brings them to the music-room in the house, leaves them there, returns shortly afterwards with refreshments, and hears them exchange the following words:

Nine dampers remain, said the younger, and an equal number of hammers.

Not corresponding, I hope, said the elder.

In one case, said the younger.

The elder had nothing to say to this.

The strings are in flitters, said the younger.

The elder had nothing to say to this either.

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

The piano-tuner also, said the elder.

The pianist also, said the younger. (W. 69)<sup>13</sup>

The Watt who is bothered by this incident (which ends with the above quotation) is the sensible Watt, who has lived "miserably it is true, among false values all his adult life" (W. 70).

Whatever it was Watt saw, with the first look, that was enough for Watt, that had always been enough for Watt, more than enough for Watt. And he had experienced literally nothing, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen, of which in retrospect he was not content to say, That is what happened then. (W. 70)

13. We are told in the next paragraph that of the "incidents of note proposed to Watt during his stay in Mr. Knott's house... a certain number will be recorded in this place" (W. 69). There are eight such incidents while Watt is on the ground floor, and one while he is on the first floor: nine hammers of reality and nine habitual dampers. Only in one case do they "correspond", i.e. only in one case (the problem of dissatisfaction on the first floor) does habit actually meet the problem on its own terms instead of turning it into something more easily accessible.

The broken strings and the impending doom of piano, piano-tuner, and pianist annul the "premonitions of harmony" that Arsene had described as "irrefragible" when the new day is longed for (W. 39).

The scene in the music room with the two Galls is of a kind that Watt has never met up with before. Here for the first time is an event that refuses to bow to his habitual methods of subduing reality, an event of which he cannot say, "Yes, I remember, that is what happened then" (W. 71). However,

What distressed Watt in this incident of the Galls, father and son, and in subsequent similar incidents, was not so much that he did not know what had happened, for he did not much care what had happened, as that nothing had happened, that a thing that was nothing had happened, with the utmost formal distinctness, and that it continued to happen... at the most unexpected moments, and the most inopportune. Yes, Watt could not accept... that nothing had happened, with all the clarity and solidity of something. (W. 73)

It disturbs Watt that a thing that is nothing could happen because a thing that is nothing can be neither divided nor explained, and is therefore not accessible to what we have seen are his habitual methods of coping with the unexpected: a thing which habit cannot cope with is, in terms of habit, literally nothing.

If he had been able to accept it, then perhaps it would not have revisited him, and this would have been a great saving of vexation, to put it mildly. But he could not accept it, could not bear it. (W. 73).

Watt is, however, by no means at the end of his habitual resources. If he can cope only with a thing that is something, he will turn the unbearable nothing into something in order to make it bearable. This operation "requires a certain skill" (W. 74), and the results of Watt's efforts are varied:

...if Watt was sometimes unsuccessful, and sometimes successful, as in the affair of the Galls father and son, in foisting a meaning there where no meaning appeared, he was most often neither the one nor the other. (W. 74)

He considers himself successful when he can evolve a hypothesis about an incident that will disperse its mysteries. "There was nothing, in this operation, at variance with Watt's habits of mind. For to explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt" (W. 74-75; italics added). He considers himself successful, in other words, when he is able to eliminate the threat to his habitually "sensible" approach to life.<sup>14</sup> He considers

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14. He sees and hears the Galls (as Hackett saw Watt over the road), but his "sensible" habit is unable to cope with what it perceives because, like Hackett, he has seen something spontaneously before habit had time to interfere its prism between his eye and its object (Cf. Proust, 15).

himself unsuccessful when he fails to elicit something from nothing. Of these occasions we can know nothing since they have resisted all his efforts "so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them, when they recurred" (W. 76). For the most part he is neither successful nor unsuccessful. This means that the hypothesis he evolves is useful for a time but that it then has to be replaced by another, and another.

Whatever the result, his efforts are all prompted by the habitual need of Dives for immunity from reality and from suffering: they are all directed towards making all things, all events, fit his prejudices. His concern is not with what a thing "really" means but with what it can be "induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity" (W. 72). The challenge that reality, the unmediated experience of reality, poses to his cherished illusions is met and, in most cases, overcome if not once and for all, then successively. The only hope, therefore, for a new day, an unprecedented day that would find Watt changed, stripped of his illusions, prepared to accept the real meaning of an event, prepared to accept that it should mean nothing at all, prepared to accept that it is uncoercibly unrelated, unique and isolated, is the hope provided by the occasions on which Watt is unsuccessful in his efforts to saddle an event with a false meaning. Only on these occasions is it even conceivable that the challenge will prove too much for Watt, that his old "habits of mind" will break down, finally seen to be defunct.

### The Failure of Words

Of these occasions when Watt is unsuccessful, nothing can be known since nothing can be thought of them, said of them. Thus his success in explaining any event is linked very intimately with his ability to apply words to that event: as he desires meanings to be foisted on to the meaningless, so too,

...he desired words to be applied to his situation, to Mr. Knott, to the house, to the grounds, to his duties, to the stairs, to his bedroom, to the kitchen, and in a general way to the conditions of being in which he found himself. (W. 78)

But words refuse to stick to what they should (and once did) refer to.



This challenge is not easily overcome. The word "pot" refuses to apply to a pot any longer. The pot remains a pot, Watt is sure, for everyone else, but for him it is no longer a "pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted" (W. 78). He makes the further distressing discovery that "of himself too he could no longer affirm anything that did not seem as false as if he had affirmed it of a stone" (W. 79). His need here is for "semantic succour" (W. 79), for the "comfort" of a "pillow of old words" (W. 115), for the tranquillity (W. 78), the relief (W. 80), the safety that follows when a disturbance is wrapped up in words (W. 80) and made innocuous (W. 81). He longs to be able to name things "with their time-honoured names" so that he can forget them (W. 81; italics added). Instead he finds himself "greatly troubled... more troubled perhaps than he had ever been by anything, and Watt had been frequently and exceedingly troubled, in his time" (W. 79).

The similarity between this failure of words and the failure to saddle the meaningless with meaning is clear. In both cases Watt's need is to render innocuous a thing that will, however, not succumb to this process. The two seem, indeed, to be aspects of one problem ("one is sometimes tempted to wonder, with reference to two or even three incidents related by Watt as separate and distinct, if they are not in reality the same incident, variously interpreted" W. 75): Watt cannot explain a disturbance because words refuse to stick to things, and words no longer stick to things because things are inexplicable. His habit is faltering under the new conditions in which it finds itself in Mr. Knott's house.

The similarity between his reaction to a thing that is nothing and to a thing that refuses to be named goes further than has been indicated. Both "revisit" him and cause him "vexation" because he can't sum them up and forget them, but both also gradually lose some of their ability to torture him. The narrator, Sam, thinks it probable that these events that Watt can neither think of nor speak of, but only suffer when they recur, are recurring no more by the time that Watt is telling his story

to Sam (W 76). Thus towards the end of his stay in Mr. Knott's house, Watt "learned to accept that nothing had happened, that a nothing had happened, learned to bear it and even, in a shy way, to like it. But then it was too late" (W. 77). So too he gets used to the fact that things refuse to be named: "there were times when he felt a feeling closely resembling the feeling of satisfaction at his being so abandoned" (W. 82), and these times, though exceedingly rare in the early stages of his stay in Mr. Knott's house, become more frequent as the stay draws to a close. At first Watt had longed for, needed, a voice, Erskine's voice, to speak of his situation "with the old words, the old credentials" (W. 81). When, later, Erskine comes running to Watt and asks some absurd question, Watt is "not slow to appreciate" the fact that even the most absurd question does constitute an acknowledgement of Watt, yet "he would have appreciated it more if it had come earlier, before he had grown used to his loss of species" (W. 82).

Why, when he learns to accept nothingness, it is "too late", will be discussed later on. For the moment it is necessary only to note that he does grow used to the loss of species: in Beckett's work the ability to get used, habituated, accustomed to any event or circumstance is indicative of a mind lulled into a false sense of oneness with the world, into an illusion of fixity.

#### The Dog and the Food

It is one of Watt's duties to dish up lunch and dinner for Mr. Knott each day. On those days when Mr. Knott does not eat all, or any, of either or both of these meals, Watt has explicit instructions to give the remains "to the dog". Since there is no dog in the house, the problem that must have faced the person who set up the arrangement originally is how to bring a dog to the food on the doorstep on those occasions when the food is left over.

Watt sets about listing four possible solutions that might have prevailed, and the objections (fourteen in all) to these hypothetical solutions. He then considers all the aspects of the solution that did

prevail;<sup>15</sup> a solution which consists in the availability at any one time of a famished dog and its needy owner (who will be presented with the handsome sum of 50 p.a., some cast-off clothes, etc.). In order for dog and man to be "for ever" (W. 96) available, it is necessary for both to be part of a series or family, so that when dog or man dies, another member of the series is available to take over. The name of the "fortunate" family of dog owners is Lynch. In Watt's enthusiasm to get to the point where he can explain to himself all that he wants to know about the arrangement, he dwells at length (W. 98-109) on the genealogy of this clan, custodians of the colony of dogs to which Watt attaches considerable importance (W. 114) and in which he is "greatly interested, and even fascinated" (W. 114). This, however, is a challenge that he is able to meet. Here, as in the incident of the Galls father and son, he is successful (in his terms) in eliminating the threat:

But it did not last long, this concern of Watt's, not very long, as such concerns go. And yet it was a major concern, of that period, while it lasted. But once Watt had grasped, in its complexity, the mechanism of this arrangement, how the food came to be left, and the dog to be available, and the two to be united, then it interested him no more, and he enjoyed a comparative peace of mind, in this connection. (W. 114-115)

He does not go so far as to suppose that he has actually "penetrated the forces at play", but he has managed to turn "little by little, a disturbance into words", he has managed to make "a pillow of old words for his head" (W. 115). For one who is so much in need of relief, tranquillity, safety, comfort, rest, the achievement of even a "comparative peace of mind" is welcome.

### The Bell

The next of the incidents that perplex Watt is the sound of a bell, "ting!", that he hears at night, prompting Erskine, in the room next to

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15. Several of Watt's fourteen objections to the hypothetical solutions - objections which, we are told, are "perhaps" the reason why these solutions did not prevail (W. 95) - apply just as much to the solution that did prevail. This makes a complete mockery of Watt's attempt to make rational sense of the problem since the problem is hereby revealed as "absurd", irrational, off the ladder. This may be the reason why he finds this whole question of the dog and the food so disturbing. As John J. Mood has written, "Watt is [Beckett's] most devastating depiction of the cul-de-sac of modern rationalistic thinking" (John J. Mood, "The Personal System - Samuel Beckett's Watt", PMLA, 86: 255-265, 1971, p. 255).

Watt's, to get out of bed and go downstairs.

The question of who pressed the bell that sounded in Erskine's room, in the night, was a great source of worry to Watt, for a time, and kept him awake at night on the qui vive. (W. 120)

This "mystery" (W. 120) is, in a way, typical of all those incidents that disturb Watt's habits of mind, since "the sound of the bell came always on the stillness" (W.120) - and stillness can be seen as a metaphor for Watt's habitual condition that on various occasions is disturbed.

It occurs to him that maybe Erskine himself is pushing the bell. After dwelling on the possible reasons why Erskine would do so, Watt decides finally that, if his mind is to be "pacified" (W. 121), he will have to inspect Erskine's room for a bell:

Then he would be able to put the matter from him and forget it, as one puts from one and forgets the peel of an orange, or of a banana.  
(W. 121) 16

In order to get into the room, however, he has first to get hold of the key, and this proves a difficult problem, since Erskine keeps the key in a "secret" pocket "sewn on to the front of [his] underhose" (W. 125). But somehow - "Ruse a by" (W. 126) - Watt does succeed in getting into the room, where he discovers that there is a bell but that it is broken. This discovery leaves the original mystery surrounding the source of the "ting" intact. Watt has constructed a mechanism which directs him away from the mystery to the secondary question of the existence of a bell in Erskine's room, and he is satisfied when only the secondary question is resolved. He still does not know who, if anyone, is responsible for the sound he hears at night, but he is not interested in such knowledge. The bell is never mentioned subsequently.

#### The Picture in Erskine's Room

Watt turns from the bell to the only other "object of note" in Erskine's room. This is a picture hanging from a nail on the wall and

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16. So the number of banana skins that Krapp, in Krapp's Last Tape (Faber and Faber, London, 1959), discards may be a measure of his success in solving problems and forgetting them, of his success in satisfying his habitual needs.

showing, on a white surface, a black circle broken at its lowest point and, outside this circle, a blue dot. Watt muses on the relationships possible between circle and dot and is even moved to tears at the thought of "a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time" (W. 127). He then wonders how it would look if hung upside down or on one side, tries it in these positions, and decides they are not as pleasing as when the circle is broken at its nadir.

Watt did not of course wonder all these things at the time, but some he wondered at the time, and the others subsequently... over and over again. And many other things in this connexion also, of which some at the time, and the others subsequently, Watt wondered subsequently also, time without number. (W. 128)

Part of the interest of the discussion of the picture is that it is so relevant to critical commentaries in Beckett's own work. Watt is compelled, knowing "nothing about painting" (W. 127), to ask "what the artist had intended to represent" (W. 127): we are compelled to ask the same question about Watt itself. The image of a circle and a centre in search of a centre and a circle respectively moves Watt to tears, presumably because it in some way painfully reflects for him his own sense of his situation - or of man's situation. His 'human' interpretation of the painting is: "It is by the nadir that we come,... and it is by the nadir that we go, whatever that means" (W. 128). Earlier, when Watt was first described as bothered by the meaninglessness of events, the narrator commented: "One wonders sometimes where Watt thought he was. In a culture-park?" (W. 73). The painting presents man's demand for meaning through an image which has no (or at least no explicable) meaning, but which nevertheless seems significant and which is disturbing to the extent that it cannot be explained and forgotten. Watt suffers "prolonged and irksome meditations" (W. 128) on the status of the picture in Mr. Knott's house. The question he formulates, which is "of great importance" in his opinion, is whether the picture is "a fixed and stable member of the edifice, like Mr. Knott's bed, for example" or "simply a manner of paradigm, here today and gone tomorrow, a term in a series, like the series of Mr. Knott's dogs, or the series of Mr. Knott's men" (W. 129). Similarly we, commenting on Beckett's work, try to reduce its disturbing, inexplicable, impact by situating it with respect to his other novels and plays and with respect to other writers and theories of literature, so that it no longer seems isolated and unique, but a member of a family.

Watt decides that the picture is one of a series, and is "satisfied" (W. 129) with this supposition.

Later, when Watt becomes the first-floor servant and Erskine departs, Watt takes over Erskine's room. "The painting,<sup>17</sup> or coloured reproduction, yielded nothing further. On the contrary, as time passed, its significance diminished" (W. 208).

#### The Duration of Watt's Stay in Mr. Knott's House

The question that preoccupies Watt "most of all" (W. 130) towards the end of his stay on the ground floor is the question of how long his stay there is to be, and how long his stay on the first floor is to be. He decides that one year on each floor is the most likely period of service, and assembles reasons in support of this "monstrous assumption" (W. 130). Even he cannot "hide from himself for long the absurdity of these constructions" (W. 131). They are absurd, we are told, because they assume that every servant will stay in the house for the same length of time, exactly half of which period will be spent on each of the two floors. As usual Watt turns away from absurdity: he turns away from the troublesome question of the real duration of his stay and ponders instead on all the possible temporal and causal connections linking members of the series of Mr. Knott's men. Rather than confront the temporal (or extratemporal) reality of his stay he asks only what connection can be seen between one period of time and another: the peculiarities of an event or circumstance are ignored in this insistence on establishing similarities. So he conceives the idea of a series, a comfortable idea, and is free then to question the kind of similarities that obtain among the members of the series, confident that any of the answers that he will find will not challenge his initial assumption that there are connections.

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17. We have been told that Watt's supposition that the painting, like the dog, is one of a series is "strikingly confirmed before long" (W. 129). "The" painting that is in Watt's room (Erskine's former room) when he becomes the senior servant is therefore presumably not the same picture as that which intrigues him initially. For Watt, however, the difference is as unimportant as the difference between the two dogs, Kate and Cis, who are differentiated only by name. The creature of habit turns away from anything particular and unique and insists on viewing it as related to other objects.

Watt never finds out how long he spends on the ground floor or on the first floor. And it doesn't matter to him whether his stay lasts one year or ten years because in either case, in any case, he sees his stay as one of a series of stays.

He consistently ignores the real problems, the problems that shriek for solution and that are insoluble - why meanings escape him, why words refuse to stick, why a dog has to finish Mr. Knott's food, why he hears a bell at night, why he is in Mr. Knott's house. By refusing to face up to the real problems he is refusing to face up to their insolubility, their inexplicability. The questions he asks are invariably about the inner logical consistency of a proposition, never about how a proposition relates or does not relate outwards to reality. He is generally interested only in the "intervals" (W. 134) between the parts of any series, in what connects these parts. When, on one occasion, he goes beyond this, and the question is raised, "why Tom Tom? and Dick Dick? and Harry Harry? (W. 133, i.e. why is Tom Tom, etc.), Watt sees "no objection" to answering "Because Dick Dick and Harry Harry... and Tom Tom" (W. 132), but he has no need of a conception that answers such questions:

And the reason why Watt for the moment had no need of this conception was perhaps this, that when one's arms are full of waxen lilies, then one does not stoop to pick, or smell, or chuck, or otherwise acknowledge, a daisy, or a primrose, or a cowslip, or a buttercup, or a violet, or a dandelion, or a daisy, or a primrose, or any other flower of the field, or any other weed, but treads them down, and when the weight is past, and past the bowed head buried blinded in the white sweetness, then little by little under the load of petals the bruised stems straighten, those that is that have been fortunate enough to escape rupture. (W. 134)

Of his conceptions, his lilies, Watt asks no more than that they look like lilies, and not at all whether they are real or not. He has no need of real flowers and weeds as long as his arms are full of the waxen flowers. The false sweetness of his waxen possessions, moreover, blinds him to the reality that surrounds him and causes him to mutilate that reality. Beckett is here using the image of waxen flowers for the falsely unchanging world projected by habit, and is opposing it to the real world that is inexplicable and that cannot be possessed but which must not be ignored. In Watt, as elsewhere, he is showing the consequences of blindness to reality and is hoping that we will empty out arms of waxen lilies and let the confusion of reality in: that is our only chance of renovation.

By turning the unwieldiness of nothing into a manageable something and by reducing the unique to a member of a series, Watt has made it impossible for anything so far to force him to change, to admit change. It now remains for him to construct a mechanism whereby the various series that he has fabricated can be tied together. The idea of a series of dogs, of men, of pictures, enabled him to ignore the troublesome question why a dog, a man, a picture, but has allowed a new question to arise, namely, why a series of dogs, men, pictures? He accordingly sets about eliminating these 'whys' by connecting one series with another, and with the next, until the circle is closed and any question about one series can be answered with reference to another series, and no loose end is left pointing outwards to a world that his mind cannot enclose.

Thinking then, in search of rest, of the possible relations between such series as these, the series of dogs, the series of men, the series of pictures, to mention only these series, Watt remembered a distant summer night, in a no less distant land, and Watt young and well and lying all alone stone sober in the ditch, wondering if it was the time and the place and the loved one already, and the three frogs croaking Krak!, Krek!, and Krik!, at one, nine, seventeen, twenty five etc., and at one, six, eleven, sixteen etc., and at one, four, seven, ten etc., respectively, and how he heard...  
(W. 135)

The Krak's, the Krek's, and the Krik's are each a series, and in the two pages that follow we are shown how they can be combined to form a circular structure that should be entirely satisfying. This structure is composed of sound (the Krak's, Krek's, and Krik's) and of the intervals between sounds. There are altogether 363 of these sounds and silences. After 360 of them the circle is complete, and with the final Krak! Krek! Krik! the cycle begins all over again. This all-encompassing and self-perpetuating construct is a series of the three series that Watt has fabricated. It is, moreover, capable of including any other series - the circle will merely increase in size proportionally.

In "Never the time and the place" Robert Browning laments "Never the time and the place/ And the loved one all together" and dreams of leaving "storms and strangers" behind while he and his loved one sleep a "close, safe, warm sleep". In perfecting a mechanism whereby all the series that he has fabricated can be pigeon-holed neatly and comfortably forgotten, Watt has built himself a refuge like that which Browning dreamed of, in which he can temporarily indulge fearlessly



in a "close, safe, warm sleep".

Krak!

Krek!

Krik!

The fishwoman pleased Watt greatly. (W. 137)

The description of Watt's relations with the fishwoman, Mrs. Gorman, provides an illustration of the satisfaction that the united Krak! Krek! Krik! has abstractly depicted. "And Watt pleased the fishwoman. This was a merciful coincidence, that they pleased each other" (W. 137). When they are together he is "forgetful of his troubles" (W. 138) and she is "at peace too, for a time" (W. 139). When she comes, she comes on Thursdays, and "so Thursday was the day Watt preferred, to all other days" (W. 138). The mention, in this context of Watt's gratification, of Thursday, recalls an earlier omission:

On Monday, Tuesday, and Friday [Mr. Knott] rose at eleven and retired at seven, and on Wednesday and Saturday he rose at nine and retired at eight, and on Sunday he did not rise at all, nor at all retire. (W. 83)

The satisfaction that Watt finds with Mrs. Gorman on Thursdays is connected with the complete absence of interest in, or of information on, Mr. Knott's doings on that day, with the absence, for all practical purposes, of Mr. Knott from Watt's world.

In his poem Browning asks, "Do I hold the Past/ Thus firm and fast/ Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?" Watt's circular structure can tie up loose ends of series but it cannot provide him with protection - as habit can never provide protection - from future events that are not serial, that are unlike any previous occurrence, unprecedented, and that cannot be made to seem serial. What Browning calls the "enemy sly and serpentine" (that he is anxious to shun: "uncoil thee from the waking man!")<sup>18</sup> and what Beckett calls reality and Lazarus cannot be shut out definitively. Reality is changing constantly and is therefore constantly producing new things that the "curriculum" (P. 9) of

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18. All references to Browning here are from "Never the time and the place", in "Jocoseria", Selected Poetry of Robert Browning, The Modern Library, New York, 1951, p. 680.

habit cannot foresee. Watt has not robbed Mr. Knott of his ability to threaten Watt's complacency, and since Mr. Knott is not serial<sup>19</sup> he retains his mystery. In the next stage of his stay on the ground floor of Mr. Knott's house, therefore, Watt turns his attention to this challenge.

Mr. Knott

Watt both wishes to see Mr. Knott more often and fears to do so:

Yes indeed, in so far as he wished, in so far as he feared, to see Mr. Knott face to face, his wish made him sorry, his fear glad, that he saw him so seldom, and at such a great distance as a rule, and so fugitively, and so often sideways on, and even from behind. (W. 145; italics added)

Earlier, the visit of the Galls, that noteworthy occasion when the threshold is "crossed by a stranger" (W. 67), is described as a "fugitive penetration" (W. 67). In Proust Beckett describes those moments when reality invades habitual consciousness when habit is said to be 'sleeping', as a more "fugitive" experience than the actual death of habit (P. 9) . When habit is sleeping we may or may not suffer pain and a period of transition is not inaugurated.

The problem of Mr. Knott is like the other circumstances that trouble Watt while he is on the ground floor of Mr. Knott's house: in all cases the tension is heightened momentarily, and in all cases Watt succeeds in mutilating reality so that it can no longer conflict with his well-worn<sup>20</sup> illusion. The scene for this, his seventh challenge on the ground floor, is set when, one day, Watt comes across Mr. Knott in the garden. Mr. Knott's head is bowed, and Watt stands beside him looking at the ground. Mr. Knott is probably asleep but Watt sees "a little blue flower and close by a fat worm burrowing into the earth" (W. 144). For a short time, until the worm is gone and only the flower remains, master and servant stand together with heads bowed.

One day the flower would be gone and only the worm remain, but on this particular day it was the flower that remained, and the worm that went. (W. 145)

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19. Later Arthur says the words "Knott family", but by this time Watt is beyond caring. See below pp. 259 f.

20. He is middle aged and has "literally" experienced nothing since the age of fourteen or fifteen (W. 70) which he cannot formulate satisfactorily.

In the Addenda that close Watt we learn that at some point Arthur (the servant who replaces Watt on the ground floor) refers to the "Knott family":

This was the first time Watt had heard the words Knott family. There had been a time when they would have pleased him, and the thought they tendered, that Mr. Knott too was serial, in a vermicular series. But not now. (W. 254; italics added)

Here the worm is explicitly connected with the series that have been Watt's habit's mainstay against the obstacles put in its way by reality. The series - of dogs, of men, of pictures, of series, and ultimately of Knotts - are wormlike and have no more contact with experiences they purport to explain than the worm has with the little blue flower in the garden. The worm can thus be seen as linked with the way in which Watt's habit tries to serialise Mr. Knott, and the flower as identified with the unique reality of Mr. Knott that can threaten Watt's habit.

The worm and flower image serves to introduce the challenge afforded by Mr. Knott and to indicate the outcome. "On this particular day it was the flower that remained and the worm that went". This is the introduction of the challenge, for if there is to be any challenge at all, there has to be some possibility that the worm - habit - will disappear for a while. So Mr. Knott must be seen, if only briefly, as an enemy of Watt's sensible habits of mind, an enemy with the potential to undermine Watt's prejudices:

The figure of which Watt sometimes caught a glimpse, in the vestibule, in the garden, was seldom the same figure, from one glance to the next, but so various, as far as Watt could make out... that Watt would never have supposed it was the same, if he had not known that it was Mr. Knott. (W. 146)

Watt is so far, at this point, from his usual serialising that he can hardly connect Mr. Knott-at-one-moment with Mr. Knott-at-another-moment. Far from being able to conceive of a "Knott family", a series of Knotts, Watt cannot even conceive of Mr. Knott. What little he does see of Mr. Knott, he does not see clearly, and he both wants and fears the direct perception of the reality of Mr. Knott. Thus he has recognised the potential for joy and for terror that such perception entails.

The moment passes. "One day the flower would be gone and only the worm remain". This heralds the subjugation of the enemy of habit. Watt robs dread and longing of their ability to make him suffer by reducing them, as is his wont, to manageable proportions:

But as time, as time will, drew on, and Watt's period of service on the ground floor approached its term, then this wish and this fear, and so this sorrow and this gladness, like so many other wishes and fears, <sup>so many other</sup> sorrows and gladnesses, grew duller and duller and gradually ceased to be felt, at all. (W. 145)

There are several different possible reasons given for why this happens and no reason for preferring one explanation to any of the others. The effect, however, is the same no matter what the cause. Dread and longing, inevitable reactions to an awareness that there is potential for change, are emasculated and are thus no longer able to threaten to relieve, deprive Watt of the boredom of living.

This gradual elimination of dread of, and of longing for, direct perception of Mr. Knott is very closely tied to the gradual elimination of the suffering caused by the experience of irreducible nothingness and the failure of words. Before he leaves the ground floor it has, as I will show, become imperative that he rid these elusive, but very dangerous enemies of their power to kill his habit.

Before we proceed, however, Watt's progress so far should be assessed.

The seven challenges that I have discussed are challenges to Watt's habit. In each case he experiences, if only momentarily, the total absence of relation that is the flux of reality. Watt's habit excludes this flux and tries to create an illusion of fixity. To Watt, therefore, reality is literally nothing: it has no place in his outlook.

His habitual need, which Beckett calls the need of Dives, is the need to maintain the illusion that there are relationships between things and that these can be understood. In Beckett's view, man is not totally under the domination of habit or of the habitual need of Dives, i.e. he does not only need the comfort of illusion: he also

needs, however seldom this need comes to the fore, to confront the disturbing beauties and cruelties of reality, to dispense, for a time, with all prejudice and all illusion. This need that is the need to abandon the security of habit's false fixity is what Beckett calls the need of Lazarus.

In Watt, habit is in a very powerful position and allows no more than a fleeting awareness of reality. His need for satisfaction, for immunity from unsatisfactory reality, never lets his need for unsatisfactory reality get the upper hand for long enough to kill the habit it would have made defunct. Since reality is in flux, and since Watt's habit remains as it always was, the discrepancy between the real world (inexplicable composite of inner and outer) and Watt's habitual projection of the world becomes wider as time goes on. His habit is in one sense like a photograph taken of London in 1939: in 1940 it is badly out of date, in 1941 more so, etc.<sup>21</sup> The need to bring it up to date becomes more and more insistent. The voice of this insistence is the voice of Lazarus. On the occasions on which Watt experiences what he calls nothing, Lazarus is confronting Dives with the reality that Dives has, through fear of change, excluded.

The results of these confrontations have been varied.

Watt seems to have been successful in turning nothing into something, in wrapping a disturbance up in words, on most of these occasions. The problems of the Galls, of the food and the dog, of the bell, of the length of Watt's stay, seem to have been solved to his satisfaction since he seems able to forget them. As far as the picture in Erskine's room is concerned, he seems to have been neither successful nor unsuccessful: not successful to the extent that the significance of the picture as a particular object is not annihilated but only gradually diminishing; not unsuccessful to the extent that he sees the picture as one of a series. There is, it must not be forgotten, at least a possibility

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21. The photograph image is, of course, insufficient to express the complexities of the workings of habit since a photograph is inanimate and unable to generate any change in itself; habit can at least alter quantitatively, as it 'digests' experiences that are not alien to it, and it can die when confronted with something totally 'indigestible'.

that some - or even all - of the problems he seems to have solved are, in fact, one problem, variously interpreted (see W. 75). If this is the case - and we have no way of knowing - then he is not strictly speaking successful in these instances: they must, rather, resemble the problem of the painting in being neither solved nor unsolved, since his formulation has to be revised.

The problem of the painting is the type, then (if not necessarily the only one) of these problems that require re-formulation. The reason for the gradual diminution of the troublesome aspects of this type of problem will become clear in our discussion of Watt's period of service on the first floor. For the moment it is enough to say that, since this type of problem allows of interim, if not of definitive, solution, it does not unduly threaten Watt's habit.

There remain, however, those incidents that Watt has completely failed to formulate in any satisfactory way. Of these we learn - can learn - nothing at all:

As to giving an example of the second event, namely the failure, that is clearly quite out of the question. For there we have to do with events that resisted all Watt's efforts to saddle them with meaning, and a formula, so that he could neither think of them, nor speak of them, but only suffer them, when they recurred. (W. 75)

Mr. Knott's name, and the fact that of him Watt knows nothing (W. 147) - which means that we can know nothing of him either - make him the prototype of all these experiences of nothing.

At the end of Watt's period on the ground floor, he gradually rids this type of experience of its ability to make him suffer and of its ability to make him long for, dread anything. The way in which this is possible will be seen in Watt's reaction to the last of the incidents that trouble him during this period.

#### The Telephone Call

One day the telephone rings and a voice, claiming to be the voice of a friend, asks how Mr. Knott is.

Watt stated this incident as follows:

A friend, sex uncertain, of Mr. Knott telephoned to know how he was.

Cracks soon appeared in this formulation.

But Watt was too tired to repair it. Watt dared not tire himself further.

How often he had pooh-poohed it, this danger of tiring himself further. Pooh-pooh, he had said, pooh-pooh, and set to, to repair the cracks. But not now.

Watt was now tired of the ground floor, the ground floor had tired Watt out. (W. 147)

From this it is clear that Watt has not survived his ordeals effortlessly. His battles with the foes of his habit have been won (to the extent that they have been won) at some cost: he is tired. His habits of mind have repeatedly tried to formulate and re-formulate nothingness, and these formulations have repeatedly been cracked. Up till now he has set to, to repair the cracks. He is now ready to 'crack up'.

His habit has shown itself resistant to change up to now, but the very fact that it could be threatened so often and so seriously demonstrates its defectiveness. He has suffered from contact with reality. "Suffering", Beckett writes in Proust, "represents the omission" of habit's duty, "whether through negligence or inefficiency" (P. 16). Watt's "fugitive" experiences of suffering, while abortive (since they have not led to any transition), occur alarmingly often and show that Watt's habit is guilty of a serious omission of its duty to shield Watt from reality.

If his habit is merely negligent it can, like any top-hatted Minister of Security, be made to take its responsibilities more seriously, to pay more attention to its duties. If his habit is inefficient then it must either die or recruit new forces to its arsenal.

As we have seen, Watt's faculties of sight, hearing, etc. are very much on the alert. His mental faculties are if possible even more so - the prose is littered with phrases like "Watt wondered", "on further reflexion", "the answer to that would be this", "and the reason for that was this", and with lists, pages long, of permutations and combinations. His rational, sensible, facultative habit is strained to its limits. This is why he is tired by the end of his stay on the ground floor:

"This constant tension of some of his most noble faculties tired Watt greatly" (W. 83). Negligence is not the problem.

Watt's habit is inefficient in the circumstances of Mr. Knott's house. It does not have the power, in its present arsenal, to screen Watt from reality properly. It must either die or expand its capabilities. If it dies, a qualitative change will come about; if it enlarges, it will even further delay the coming of the new day because its power to keep reality at bay will have been increased.

A note is in order about the gulf separating qualitative from quantitative change in Beckett. Habit, Beckett writes in Proust, is a compromise effected between the individual and his inner and outer worlds. In "Tal Coat" Beckett speaks of this painter as "straining to enlarge the statement of a compromise" (DGD I, 102). Coat has, in Beckett's view, failed to "stir from the field of the possible". What this means is that he has failed to accept that there is no relation between the reality of the perceiving subject and the reality of the perceived object. There is only a quantitative ("question of degree", Beckett says) difference between the painting of Tal Coat and all previous painting. The value of Coat's painting is "cognate with those [values] already accumulated" (DGD I, 102). As against this enlargement, this change of degree, Beckett wants to see art turning away "in disgust" from "puny exploits": he wants to see a qualitative change, a departure from what he calls the "dreary road". No amount of progress on that dreary road can bring about the qualitative change that Beckett feels is necessary.<sup>22</sup>

Watt is tired and yet cracks are appearing in his formulation of the telephone call. The cracks will widen. His habit must either

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22. In this respect there is no difference between what Beckett writes in the dialogues and what he writes in the two articles on the van Velde brothers. The road taken by the brothers, he writes in "Peintres de l'Empêchement", is a new road (already bifurcated) totally unlike the "chemin des repentis" and totally unlike "le chemin qui n'en est plus un, mais une dernière tentative de vivre sur le pays conquis" (PE. 3). Tal Coat, presumably, is one of the 'repentent', for in the dialogue he is associated with those who have "turned wisely tail, before the ultimate penury" (DGD III, 122).



enlarge its powers or die. He tries once more to believe that the nothings are somethings.

What had he learnt? Nothing.

What did he know of Mr. Knott? Nothing.

Of his anxiety to improve, of his anxiety to understand, of his anxiety to get well, what remained? Nothing.

But was not that something?

He saw himself then, so little, so poor. And now, littler, poorer. Was not that something?

So sick, so alone.

And now.

Sicker, aloner.

Was not that something?

As the comparative is something. Whether more than its positive or less. Whether less than its superlative or more.

Red, bluer, yellowist [*sic*], that old dream was ended, half-ended, ended. Again.

A little before morning. (W. 147; italics added) 23.

He is not sure. This is the final crisis of his stay on the ground floor. His "old dream" is his habit's old dream of establishing connections, relationships. That the things it tries to see as connected are not in reality connected is clear: "red, bluer, yellowist". When Watt first sat down in the kitchen of Mr. Knott's house, there apparently remained "six, five, four hours still, of the old dark, the old burden" (W. 38); now it is "a little before morning": the prospect for the new day that will find Watt's habit dead and him directly facing the beauties and cruelties of reality is closer now than it has been since his arrival in Mr. Knott's house.

But the old dream is "ended, half-ended, ended. Again". Instead of an actual death, the earth only "seem/s/ dressed for the grave" (W. 148; italics added) and instead of the "day without precedent at last" (W. 63), there is only a morning when the milkboy measures out the milk "with all his usual liberality" (W. 148; italics added).

It should be clear that anything that is perceived as "usual" is being perceived with the eyes of habit. When habit dies the day and everything in it (including the ex-victim of habit, see Proust, 20) is totally unprecedented since the connections which habit assures us exist between instants of time have been annihilated. There is nothing usual about reality.

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23. Some editions of Watt have "ended, half ender, endest"; again the implications of a comparison, and thus of quantitative change, are clear.

It is not, of course, in fact a usual morning. That Erskine has gone and a strange man arrived are clear indications of change. Every morning is, in reality, entirely unprecedented. What we must concern ourselves with here, however, is whether or not Watt can be seen as aware of anything unprecedented and the answer is no. The change of servants is easily assimilable into his habit of viewing the servants as a series.

It is here, following directly on Watt's final attempt to turn nothing into something, that he solves the problem of nothingness to his satisfaction, to the satisfaction of his habit. Too tired to make repeated attempts to turn nothing into something, to repair cracked formulations, etc., he has expanded his habit to include nothingness. This, in my opinion, explains how<sup>24</sup> he can stop feeling hope and fear at the prospect of direct contact with the nothingness of Mr. Knott, and how it happens that he stops needing the "semantic succour" of formulas that won't crack.

The kind of enlargement of habit, of his current facultative habit, that this acceptance of nothingness has required, and the consequences of this enlargement, will be seen in the following discussion of Watt's period of service on the first floor of Mr. Knott's house.

#### Watt on the First Floor of Mr. Knott's House

Watt learned towards the end of his stay in Mr. Knott's house to accept that nothing had happened, that a nothing had happened, learned to bear it and even, in a shy way, to like it. But then it was too late. (W. 77)

We are to learn very little about the period that Watt spends on the first floor (Part III of the novel). In the Addenda there is a passage which explicitly connects the paucity of material on this

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24. Various possible reasons why this happens have, as has been noted, been listed by the narrator, and all are hypothetical.

period with Watt's ability to accept nothing - with, in fact, the above quotation:

Watt learned to accept etc. Use to explain poverty of Part III.  
Watt cannot speak of what happened on first floor, because for the greater part of the time nothing happened, without his protesting.  
(W. 248)

It is "too late" now for the experience of nothingness to clash with Watt's habit and to cause him to change since the experience of nothingness is now a comfortable and familiar experience that his habit has assimilated. He has no need to protest at this experience any longer.

It is a concomitant of his acceptance of nothingness that he should accept the failure of words. At first, as we have seen, he longed for Erskine's voice "to speak of the little world of Mr. Knott's establishment, with the old words, the old credentials" (W. 81).

"Much later", - but still while Watt is on the ground floor, Erskine does speak to Watt, ask him questions:

These questions, absurd as they were, constituted nevertheless an acknowledgement of Watt that Watt was not slow to appreciate. But he would have appreciated it more if it had come earlier, before he had grown used to his loss of species. (W. 82; italics added)

The connection between habit and growing used to anything has been noted. Now, on the first floor, Arthur converses with Watt on several occasions, yet Watt doesn't even comment on the "acknowledgement" of his existence that these conversations constitute. The process of accepting nothingness is now complete. It began on the ground floor when he felt, as he did at times, "a feeling closely resembling the feeling of satisfaction at his being so neglected, by the last rats" (W. 81), and it continued throughout his stay there when he appreciates Erskine's questions less than he would have earlier on, and it is now complete. The difference is entirely quantitative; Watt has, with time, learned to accept nothingness and grown used to the meaninglessness of words. He no longer feels the need to turn nothings into somethings or the need for semantic succour since the absence of relationship between words and things no longer worries him.

In both these cases, the absence of a relationship - between a thing and nothing, between words and things - has been turned into a

new term of relation.

What this means can be shown by developing further the comparison between Watt and the modern painters whom Beckett discusses in his dialogues with Georges Duthuit.

An artist may get to the stage where he has to admit that there is an absence of relationship between himself, as perceiving subject, and the object of his perception (or "occasion"). So too, I would suggest, Watt has, by the end of his period of service on the ground floor, got to the stage where he has to admit that there is an absence of relationship between something and nothing, between words and reality, between his formulation of an event (e.g. the telephone call) and the event itself. The realisation that there is no relationship does not, however, necessarily lead to the art of a new order that is qualitatively different from any previous art. "All that is required now", Beckett says, "in order to bring even this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation" (DGD III, 125). It is possible, in other words, to treat the absence-of-relationship-between-perceiving-subject-and-perceived-object as a new object perceived by the subject. Since in reality there is no relationship of any kind - cannot be since all is in flux - the artist who sets up any relationship, including this one, is turning away from direct contact with reality. In bringing even the "horrible matter" that is awareness of the inaccessibility of reality to an "acceptable conclusion", he is turning "wisely tail, before the ultimate penury" (DGD III, 122). Watt's ability to accept nothingness can be seen as the result of the same kind of cowardly and habitual wisdom. This is the only way that it is possible for the creature of habit - whether he be Tal Coat, Masson, or Watt - to accept nothingness. Instead of facing the "incoercible absence of relationship" that is nothingness, reality, Watt has (like Tal Coat and Masson and uncountable others) treated nothingness as a new object of his habitual perception - has, if you like, become a nihilist, for whom nothingness is an article of faith.

As I showed in the discussion of Beckett's aesthetics, there is ambiguity about the value of turning the absence of relationship into

a new term of relationship. Although Beckett in "Bram van Velde", the dialogue, considers this as equivalent to shunning awareness of the disturbing inexplicability of reality, in "Peintres de l'Empêchement" he describes Bram and Geer van Velde approvingly as having through their art glimpsed precisely such a new term of relationship on the new road on to which they are leading painting. We cannot, of course, merely assume that only the former of these views held by Beckett is relevant to Watt at this stage, but we can show this. The new relationship is of value only if it is a new road: if it is still part of the old dreary road then it is as valueless as any habitual procedure. Only, therefore, if Watt's old habit can justifiably be seen to have died before he espouses the new way of looking at nothingness, is it possible to view his acceptance of nothingness as incompatible with his old habit (as, in other words, a spontaneous experience). As I have shown, this old habit has not died and therefore the new term of relationship applauded in "Peintres de l'Empêchement" is inapplicable here. Further evidence that Watt's habit has not undergone any qualitative change is to be found in a comparison between Watt now and Watt as he was.

By the end of his stay on the ground floor Watt's 'facultative' habit is tired. Now, on the first floor, his senses are, it seems, less acute than they used to be. He remains "in particular ignorance" of "the nature of Mr. Knott" and explains this by "on the one hand the exiguity of the material propounded to his senses, and on the other the decay of these" (W. 199). His senses, one of the mainstays of his habit, are on the decline. Decay, any quantitative change, is a notion fabricated by habit. In reality ("red, bluer, yellowist"), where everything is totally disconnected from everything else, including moments of time, every change is a qualitative change - "We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday" (P. 3). It is habit, shielding us from reality, that clings to the "old dream" that is the notion of causal, temporal, serial connection. The fact that Watt can consider his senses now in relation to his senses as they used to be shows again that his habit has not stopped sheltering him from reality. He is as dogged as ever in his conviction that his habitual facultative approach is capable of solving all his problems,

and he continues to use his faculties adamantly and to the best of his ability in the same way as he did earlier on, if with less effectiveness.<sup>25</sup> This is clear in the statements he makes about the first two stages (of eight) of his period of service on the first floor:

Now with Knott part of night, most of day. Up to now oh so little heard, oh so little seen. From morning till night. What then this I saw, this I heard? Dim, quiet thing. Ears, eyes, now also failing. So I moved in mist, in hush. (W. 162) 26

To orb, pale blur, dark bulk. To drum, low puff, low puff. To skin, gross mass, gross mass. To smell, stale smell, stale smell. To tongue, tart sweats, tart sweats. (W. 163) 27

It does not - cannot while he is so dominated by habit - occur to Watt that the reality of Mr. Knott is inaccessible to such an approach. Similarly it did not occur to Hackett that the reality of what he saw on the other side of the road was inaccessible to the facultative approach. The nothingness of reality is by definition inaccessible.

Mr. Knott was harbour, Mr. Knott was haven. (W. 133)

One day they were all four in the garden, Mr. Knott, Watt, Arthur and Mr. Graves... But the great mass of the empty house was hard by. A bound, and they were all in safety. (W. 167)

As Watt rebuffs, one by one, the challenges to his habit, he comes to associate Mr. Knott (who at first was a threat to his habit) with satisfaction of his need for safety from the barbs of reality. Now, on the first floor, Watt notices an "ambience" of "empty hush.. airless gloom" moving whenever Mr. Knott moves about his premises, an ambience "dimming all, dulling all, stilling all, numbing all, where he passed" (W. 199). The relationship that Watt creates between himself

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25. It might be suggested that human beings can do nothing else. This, however, is clearly not Beckett's view: as we have seen, the habits of Belacqua and of Murphy are entirely different - they shut their eyes to reality instead of inspecting it attentively and habitually.

26. "Day of most, night of part, Knott with now. Now till up, little seen so oh, little heard so oh. Night till morning from. Heard I this, saw I this then what. Thing quiet, dim. Ears, eyes, failing now also. Hush in, mist in, moved I so."

27. "Ot bro, lap rulb, krad klub. Ot murd, wol fup, wol fup. Ot niks, sorg sam, sorg sam. Ot lems, lats lems, lats lems. Ot gnut, trat stews, trat stews." "Stews" may be 'sweets' rather than 'sweats', although 'sweats' is certainly possible: earlier Watt kept his taste-buds active by carrying around a portable spittoon (W. 83).

and Mr. Knott can be seen by comparing Mr. Knott as he is now seen to be and Watt as he is now (or as he is seen by Sam). This relationship is, at first anyway, not one of identity. Mr. Knott is not seen as identical to Watt at least at the beginning of this period. There are certainly similarities between Mr. Knott, as he now appears, and Watt, but at this stage there are also dissimilarities.

Mr. Knott habitually (W. 201) refrains from touching the buttons on his clothes once they have been "adjusted... to his satisfaction" (W. 201); and he does not seem to know "what is cold, what is heat" (W. 202). In short, he seems to Watt to be immune to his surroundings, ideally undisturbable. It is to such immunity that Watt aspires - such immunity is the object of Watt's habitual need, the goal of his quest of Dives.

The relationship between Mr. Knott and Watt during the early stages of Watt's stay on the first floor is the relationship between one who is thought to be successful in his search for rest and one who would like to be successful. This relationship is very similar to that between the mental patients (especially Mr. Endon) and Murphy. Murphy "insisted on supposing" that the patients were "immured in mind" (M. 125). He saw them as having achieved the ideal to which he aspired, and he resolutely disregarded all evidence to the contrary. Watt now sees Knott as having achieved the immunity from the flux of reality to which Watt, as a creature of habit, is aspiring. He has only been able to see Knott in this light by ignoring, as I will show, all indications that contradict this supposition.

That Watt's own need for immunity has not been satisfied can be shown with reference to a few occasions when, on the first floor, he finds it necessary to alert the forces of his habit in a manner reminiscent of the tactics used on the ground floor.

He pays the "closest attention" (W. 197) to Arthur's story and is glad when Arthur cuts it short<sup>28</sup> since it has "tired" Watt. He

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28. Arthur's story is told outside the house (though not outside the grounds) and it is not finished because Arthur desires "to leave Louit and return to Mr. Knott's house, to its mysteries, to its fixity", for he has been absent longer from them than he can bear (W. 190). The

admits that he hasn't quite finished with the kind of ingenious explanation of the inexplicable that he used to resort to, that Arthur is now resorting to (W. 199).<sup>29</sup> And he is, we discover, "still extremely curious"<sup>30</sup> about night sounds (W. 212). Attentiveness, attempts to explain the inexplicable, and curiosity are, as we have seen, some of the ways that his habit has reacted when confronted by something that clashes with its projection of the world. The fact that Watt has to resort to such tactics shows that reality is still capable of threatening him.

The nothingness of Mr. Knott that Watt can accept is not the same as - is in fact infinitely far from - the nothingness of reality. In approaching Mr. Knott Watt is approaching what he calls the temple, the teacher, the source, of nought (W. 164), and this is the nothingness that his habit has assimilated and accepted.

The difference between these two can again, perhaps, be best expressed in terms of numbers: it is the difference between 0, on the one hand, and pi or  $\sqrt{2}$  on the other.

Pi and  $\sqrt{2}$  are irrational numbers, unrelated both to each other (and to other irrational numbers) and to all the rational numbers. They are off the ladder of rationality, accessibility. Nought (0) is part, in fact the centre of, the ladder (...-3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3...) of rationality that stretches to infinity on either side of it.

In shrinking from intolerable nothingness, from pi and  $\sqrt{2}$ , Watt is again like those painters discussed in Beckett's dialogues with

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28. (cont.) story told by Arthur is a mental venture into the external world and a possible source of disturbance and confusion.

29. Watt sympathises with Arthur's attempts to understand the appeal of Mr. Knott's house and the occasional need to leave it: "Had not he Watt himself, in the beginning, resorted to similar shifts? Was he finished with them now? Well, almost" (W. 199). This is further evidence that Watt is quantitatively rather than qualitatively charged.

30. Note that by the evening of his departure from Mr. Knott's house Watt is no longer curious: Watt "heard dully the first night sounds" (W. 214; italics added).



Georges Duthuit, who have attempted to "escape" from their sense of failure, "with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offence against the deity, not to mention his creature".<sup>31</sup> (And Beckett continues: "My case, since I am in the dock, is that van Velde is the first to desist from this estheticised automatism, the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence of relation, in the absence of terms, or, if you like, in the presence of unavailable terms..." DGD III, 125) .

Reality, inaccessibility, irrationality, nothingness,<sup>32</sup> all these terms are used by Beckett for the world excluded from habit's projection of the world. Pi and  $\sqrt{2}$ , as symbols for what Watt's rational habit cannot cope with, are the enemies of his habit. Nought, on the contrary, is its keystone. Since Watt now sees Mr. Knott as the source, etc., of nought, it will be as he approaches Mr. Knott that he will approach - and, as we will see, find - satisfaction of his habitual need, identification with Knott.

#### Towards Nought and Identification at Last

Attainment of a goal, satisfaction of a need, is, Beckett writes in Proust (P. 3), "the identification of the subject with the object of his desire". (He also calls it "total possession", which again is "only to be achieved by the identification of subject and object" P. 41).

In order to approach the "noughtness" of Knott Watt has to become like nought. In order to satisfy his habitual need he has to become identified with nought, to become nought, to become (since he thinks Knott is nought) Knott. He has to become the kind of nothingness that is bearable.

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31. See the other comments made about the Pythagoreans in "Les Deux Besoins" and in "Dream", quoted on p. 68 above.

32. If irrationality, nothingness, or inaccessibility is made into a cult, an article of faith, then it is a habit, as in the case of Belacqua's habitual attempts to achieve his Limbese state and in the case of Murphy's habitual attempts to immure himself in mind. Watt is, at this stage, more like the earlier characters than he was in the beginning since he now has an article of faith.

It is this process of coming to find, to learn, to have, and to love the noughtness of Knott that is described in the statement that Watt makes about the third stage of his stay on the first floor:

Abandoned my little to find him. Forgot my little to learn him.  
Rejected my little to have him. Reviled my little to love him.  
To him I brought this body homeless, this mind ignoring, these  
emptied hands, this emptied heart. To the temple. To the teacher.  
To the source. Of nought. (W. 164) 33

Watt's need for Mr. Knott is satisfied by the fourth stage of Watt's stay on the first floor. In the statement that he makes about this time Watt explicitly says that he has what is required to satisfy this need: "What did need? Knott. What had got? Knott." The crucial point is, however, that his worries are not over, that he remains unsatisfied even when his need for Knott is satisfied. He continues his statement: "Was cup full? Pah!" (W. 164).<sup>34</sup>

In Proust Beckett writes of the "perpetuum mobile of our disillusions":

The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday's ego, not for today's. We are disappointed at the nullity of what we are pleased to call attainment. But what is attainment? The identification of the subject with the object of his desire. The subject has died - and perhaps many times - on the way. For subject B to be disappointed by the banality of an object chosen by subject A is as illogical as to expect one's hunger to be dissipated by the spectacle of Uncle eating his dinner. (P. 3)

Watt's habit saw in Mr. Knott its ideal of immunity from the flux of reality - "Mr. Knott was harbour, Mr. Knott was haven". In identifying himself with Mr. Knott he, as a creature dominated by habit, hoped to achieve this ideal for himself. But in reality neither Mr. Knott nor Watt (nor any human being, no matter how fixed in his ideas, no matter how much he shies away from the realisation) is immune from flux.

The world projected by Watt's habit is illusory. He is not aware of the reality either of himself or of Mr. Knott except when Lazarus

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33. "Of nought. To the source. To the teacher. To the temple. To him I brought. This emptied heart. These emptied hands. This mind ignoring. This body homeless. To love him my little reviled. My little rejected to have him. My little to learn him forgot. Abandoned my little to find him."

34. "Doen did taw? Tonk. Tog da taw? Tonk. Luf puk saw? Hap!" "Taw" may be "Watt" rather than "what"; in either case the implication is clear.

makes it impossible for him to ignore it, and even then, as we have seen, so fleetingly that his habit has not so far died. But even if he isn't often aware of the flux of reality, he is, and Mr. Knott is, subject to that flux. Watt (or Knott, or anyone) at one moment is, in reality, as completely different from Watt (or Knott, or anyone) at the next moment as A is different from B. Beckett's people do not admit change, do not let their current habit die, but in reality they are always changing (and their habits, accordingly, become increasingly out-dated). Thus in spite of Watt's conviction that Mr. Knott has achieved immunity from change, and in spite of the fact that Watt has satisfied his need for, become identified with, Mr. Knott, Watt is still infinitely far from final satisfaction. He was deluded in thinking that his need, the habitual need of Dives, (any need) could ever be truly satisfied.

Mr. Knott is not, in reality, immune from reality. "Fumbling", "stumbling", "pausing irresolute", he moves about his premises, with which he seems to be "unfamiliar" (W. 203). His premises cannot, of course, be identified with reality (nothing can be identified with reality), but since familiarity with his environment is characteristic of the creature of habit, the fact that Mr. Knott is described as behaving as though he is unfamiliar with his premises suggests that he is not as immune as Watt thinks to the possibly disturbing aspects of his environment. Habit's efforts are directed towards reducing the strange and the new "to the condition of a comfortable and familiar concept" (P. 10): Mr. Knott's habit<sup>35</sup> is clearly not succeeding very well. He seems "unacquainted" with the beauties of the garden, and looks at plants as though they, or he, had been created in the course

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35. Mr. Knott does, of course, have a habit, as all human beings do: he "habitually" refrains from touching the buttons on his clothes once they have been "adjusted... to his satisfaction" (W. 201), and he, like Watt, Arthur, and Mr. Graves (the gardener), is described as needing only to "bound" into the house in order to be in "safety" (W. 167). There seems no reason for thinking Mr. Knott anything other than a human being since he does eat, drink, sleep, etc. (W. 202), and since he and Watt are described as "two men" (nem owt; W. 166). If Watt is at one point described as guilty of "anthropomorphic insolence" (W. 202) in trying to fathom Mr. Knott, this seems to me more a result of Watt's (and possibly Sam's) mistakenly regarding Knott as an ideally immune being than of any real difference between them. Mr. Hackett, after all, found Watt (who is undoubtedly human) as mysterious and as unfathomable as Watt originally finds Mr. Knott.

of the night (W. 203). Even in his room, where "he seemed least a stranger", and where he "appeared to best advantage" (in Watt's view), Mr. Knott is not always able to see things in a familiar light: "he sometimes offered to leave it [his room] by the hanging cupboard" (W. 203). That he has not come to rest - which would, after all, mean an end to bodily existence - is most clearly shown in the fact that he does have needs, even if these are only, one, never to need, and two, a witness to his not needing (W. 202). (These, incidentally, are the needs of Dives, habitual needs, and not the spontaneous needs of Lazarus: the need of Lazarus is the need to need, not Knott's need never to need.)

Watt is not immune from reality either. It is spontaneity - that part of him that is not dominated by habit and that therefore allows him to perceive reality directly - that forces Watt to realise that even when his habitual needs are satisfied his cup is not full.

Proust writes that "of all human plants, habit requires the least fostering, and is the first to appear on the seeming desolation of the most barren rock" (P. 16). For Beckett it seems as though habit is not only the first of human plants to appear on the seeming desolation of the most barren rock but also an extremely hardy plant resistant to the attempts made to dislodge it, although the possibility always remains open. Life, in Proust, is a succession of habits. There is no evidence to show that the one Watt started with has yet given way to another:<sup>36</sup> he so far has consistently resisted the danger to this habit

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36. Similarly there was no evidence in the earlier fictions to show that Belacqua's or Murphy's habits ever die, except when the two protagonists die physically.

posed by reality and has stifled any faculty of suffering that could have made him realise that his habitual projection of the world bears no resemblance to reality. The possibility of his ever admitting change is remote. Yet even at this point he has totally failed to shut himself off from Lazarus: to do so is impossible. It is Lazarus, perceiving reality directly, irremediably and necessarily dissatisfied, that prompts Watt to say "Pah!" to the idea of satisfaction and that causes Watt to feel dissatisfied in spite of the fact that his habitual needs have been fulfilled.

Watt's "Dabus complex (morbid dread of sphinges [sic])" (W. 252) is dread of the sphinxes of reality, the dread of inexplicability felt by a creature of habit, whose needs are the needs of Dives for satisfaction, when confronted with unanswerable questions, with mystery, riddle, confusion. The only other time that Beckett uses this phrase is in "Denis Devlin" when he defines the habitual need of Dives (DD. 290).

It is the need of Dives that has led Watt to seek refuge from the sphinxes of reality that challenge his complacent view of the world. Such a refuge from reality, from Lazarus, is completely unattainable in reality since man is composed of both Dives and Lazarus. So too Murphy's desire for refuge in his mind is completely unattainable in reality since man is in reality composed of both mind and body.

To the extent - and it is considerable - that Belacqua, Murphy, and Watt want refuge, immunity, Beckett provides resistance against their delusion and the "evil and necessary" (P. 29) structure of their habits that are ultimately a denial of what it means to be a human being. The crisis for Murphy came when he realised that his goal was unattainable. There have been many crises in Watt's existence in Mr. Knott's house, but it is only here, in the crisis following his awareness of

the inadequacy of satisfying secondary, habitual needs, that he realises that his goal is unattainable. Until now he could comfort himself by pretending that it is attainable and that his only problem was that he had not yet succeeded in attaining it. Having identified his need for immunity with his need for Knott, having satisfied this need, identifying himself with Knott, having found that he is decidedly not immune (Pah!) from reality, he is faced with the realisation that he has been deluded in thinking Knott-ness, nought-ness, tolerable nothingness, identical with immunity.

Unable to hide from himself the fact that his cup is not full, Watt has two alternatives - there are always two alternatives when habit is confronted with reality: he can either accept dissatisfaction and briefly face reality, or he can reject dissatisfaction and retreat yet again from reality. As we saw Murphy, and as we have at earlier stages seen Watt, so now we will again see Watt retreat from reality.

#### Nought Confronted with Inexplicable Nothingness

Watt tries to explain his undeniable dissatisfaction away. First he doubts whether in fact he needs anything, then he doubts whether in fact his need has been satisfied: "But did need? Perhaps not. But had got? Know hot." (W. 164).<sup>37</sup> He cannot be sure and he has to be sure: uncertainty is anathema to habit.

(In "Peintres de l'Empêchement" Beckett criticises attempts to escape uncertainty:

...ce qui importe, si l'on ne veut pas ajouter à son trouble et à celui des autres devant la peinture moderne et autres sujets de dissertation, c'est d'affirmer quelque chose, que ce soit sans précédent ou avec, et d'y rester fidèle. Car en affirmant quelque chose et y restant fidèle, quoi qu'il arrive, on peut finir par se faire une opinion sur presque n'importe quoi, une bonne opinion bien solide capable de durer toute la vie... Et cela semble être tout particulièrement vrai des opinions ayant trait à la peinture moderne... Mais en affirmant, un beau jour, avec fermeté, et puis encore le lendemain, et le surlendemain, et tous les jours, de la peinture moderne qu'elle est ceci, et ceci seulement, alors dans l'espace de dix, douze ans on saura ce que c'est que la peinture moderne, peut-être même assez bien pour pouvoir en faire profiter ses amis, et sans avoir eu à passer le meilleur de ses

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37. "Deen did tub? Ton sparp. Tog da tub? Ton wonk."

loisirs dans des soi-disant galeries, étroites, encombrées et mal éclairées, à l'interroger des yeux. C'est-à-dire que l'on saura tout ce qu'il y a à savoir sur la formule adoptée, ce qui constitue la fin de toute science. Savoir ce qu'on veut dire, voilà la sagesse.) (PE. 1)

Dates are not assigned to any of these events on the first floor, and, in particular, we do not know if this question of dissatisfaction is developed in the subsequent account of some of Watt's doings on the first floor (it doesn't appear to be). It is therefore impossible to tell very much about how he copes with it. The only statements that we can be sure refer to a time subsequent to this fourth stage of his stay on the first floor, when he encounters the problem, are those statements that refer to the fifth, sixth, and seventh stages, and to his condition when he leaves Knott's house.

The statement about the fifth stage seems to reinforce the expression of the problem:

Shave, he'd say. When had got things ready to shave, the bowl, the brush, the powder, the razor, the soap, the sponge, the towel, the water, No, he'd say. Wash, he'd say. When had got things ready to wash, the basin, the brush, the glove, the salts, the soap, the sponge, the towel, the water, No, he'd say. Dress, he'd say. When had got things ready to dress, the coat, the drawers, the shirt, the shoes, the socks, the trousers, the vest, the waistcoat, No, he'd say. (W. 165) 38

Here Watt is doing everything he can to satisfy Knott and is being entirely unsuccessful since the orders keep changing. He is doing everything possible but all his (puny) exploits meet with the same negative response. He is here clearly not identified with Knott as he was when he said that his need had been satisfied, but rather the servant of an implacable master.

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38. "Say he'd, No, waistcoat the , vest the, trousers the, socks the, shoes the, shirt the, drawers the, coat the, dress to ready things got had when. Say he'd, Dress. Say he'd, No, water the, towel the, sponge the, soap the, salts the, glove the, brush the, basin the, wash to ready things got had when. Say he'd, Wash. Say he'd, No, water the, towel the, sponge the, soap the, razor the, powder the, brush the, bowl the, shave to ready things got had when. Say he'd, Shave."

This disparity seems to have lessened considerably by the next stage. Knott, in not seeming to know "what is cold, what is heat" (W. 202), was seen to be immune to the shocks to his system that can be caused by extremes of temperature. The statement made about the sixth stage of Watt's stay on the first floor shows that Watt is now living a similar, but not identical, kind of twilight existence undisturbed, unrelieved by extremes:

Lived so for time. Not gay, not sad. Not asleep, not awake. Not dead, not alive. Not spirit, not body. Not Knott, not Watt. Till day came, to go. (W. 165) 39

That Knott/Watt should appear, here, as a coupling of opposites as closely related and as distinct as gay/sad, asleep/awake, etc. and that both of any two of these opposites are irrelevant to the two men, both establishes the close connection between them and shows the limits of their resemblance. They are now back on the same plane, but not identified with each other.

In the seventh and last statement that Watt makes about his stay on the first floor (there is, we are told, an eighth stage, but of this we learn nothing), Knott and Watt are close, but still not identified with each other again:

Side by side, two men. All day, part of night. Dumb, numb, blind. Knott look at Watt? No. Watt look at Knott? No. Watt talk to Knott? No. Knott talk to Watt? No. What then did us do? Niks, niks, niks. Part of night, all day. Two men, side by side. (W. 166) 40

It is unclear from this how Watt copes with the realisation that the satisfaction of need is inadequate, although there seems little doubt that he does cope. His twilight existence ("not gay, not sad", etc.), his completely limited vision ("blind"), his silence ("dumb"), his

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39. "Lit yad mac, ot og. Ton taw, ton tonk. Ton dcb, ton trips. Ton vila, ton deda. Ton kawa, ton pelsa. Ton das, don [sic] yag. Os devil, rof mit." "Don" (instead of "ton") is probably a misprint in the edition we are quoting from; the Grove Press edition (New York, 1959, p. 167) has "ton yag".

40. "Dis yb dis, nem owt. Yad la, tin fo trap. Skin, skin, skin. Od su did ned taw? On. Taw ot klat tonk? On. Tonk ot klat taw? On. Tonk ta kool taw? On. Taw ta kool tonk? Nilb, mun, mud. Tin fo trap, yad la. Nem owt, dis yb dis."



insensitivity ("numb"), his inactivity (doing "niks, niks, niks") are all entirely consistent with his habit and seem to indicate that he has sunk even further into the "boredom of living". That this is the case is shown in the discussion of his condition when he leaves Mr. Knott's house, and it is here, too, that it is possible to discern what has happened.

From time to time Mr. Knott disappeared from his room, leaving Watt alone. Mr. Knott was there one moment, and the next gone. But on these occasions Watt, unlike Erskine, did not feel impelled to institute a search, above stairs and below... no, but he remained quietly where he was, not wholly asleep, not wholly awake, until Mr. Knott came back.

Watt suffered neither from the presence of Mr. Knott, nor from his absence. When he was with him, he was content to be with him, and when he was away from him, he was content to be away from him. Never with relief, never with regret, did he leave him at night, or in the morning come to him again.

This ataraxy covered the entire house-room, the pleasure-garden, the vegetable garden and of course Arthur.

So that when the time came for Watt to depart, he walked to the gate with the utmost serenity. (W. 207)

At the end of his stay in Mr. Knott's house, Watt is indifferent to Mr. Knott, to Mr. Knott's house and grounds, and to the servant on the ground floor. He has achieved the Epicurean goal of ataraxy<sup>41</sup> and is undisturbed by pain. He is also undisturbed by pleasure ("never with relief, never with regret", "not gay, not sad"), but since Epicurus found what he called 'pleasure' in ataraxy, a few words of explanation are in order.

The Epicurean concept of pleasure is entirely negative: it consists not in joy, gaiety, etc., but solely in absence of pain.

The happiest men are they who have arrived at the point of having nothing to fear from those who surround them. 42

Diogenes Laërtius quotes this extract from one of Epicurus' didactic letters in his Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers. It describes

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41. As an aside it is perhaps worth pointing out that, strictly speaking, the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary is mistaken in defining ataraxy as "stoical indifference". The Stoic ideal is Apathy, not Ataraxy.

42. Diogenes Laërtius, Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers, (translated by R.D. Hicks, William Heinemann, London, 1925), 10, 154.

almost exactly Watt's situation now that his surroundings and his companions are "covered" in ataraxy. Ataraxy (ἀταραξία) is usually translated as "serenity", and Watt concludes his stay at Mr. Knott's house in a state of "utmost serenity". Watt does not feel any sensations at all; this absence of sensation is what the Epicureans considered pleasure.

The 'pleasure' that the Epicureans found in ataraxy, which they saw as the end (in both senses of the word) of human striving, is an intellectual, rational 'pleasure'. Epicurus shunned contact with unique and particular sensations (such sensations, Beckett feels, make it possible for us to have direct contact with reality), and urged the exercise of reason<sup>43</sup> to exclude confusion (which Beckett feels must be let in; it is our only chance)<sup>44</sup>:

It is sober contemplations, which examine into the reasons for all choice and all avoidance, and which put to flight... the confusion which troubles the soul... that make life pleasant. 45

This intellectual pleasure in ataraxy Epicurus sees as "enduring a lifetime"<sup>46</sup> (which recalls Beckett's mockery of "une bonne opinion bien solide capable de durer toute la vie" PE. 1). Epicurus shuns what Beckett considers reality by using reason. In Watt Beckett portrays the epicurean Watt who does precisely that.

Absence of pain, using reason to shun confusion, ataraxy, serenity, "pleasure", the goal of Epicurus, is entirely consistent with Watt's sensible, rational habit of using his faculties only to see and to think of what is undisturbing.

Ataraxy is as near stasis as is humanly possible. The only way that it is possible to eliminate pain at the disillusionment that, as Watt found out to his cost, results from the nullity of attainment is to renounce striving for attainment. Epicurus realised that a multi-

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43. In "La Peinture des van Velde..." Beckett says "Impossible de raisonner sur l'unique... l'enfin vu... cette chose adorable et effrayante" (PvW. 352-353).

44. "Confusion... is all around us and our only chance is to let it in", "Beckett by the Madeleine" (interview with Tom F. Driver), op. cit. p. 506.

45. Diogenes Laërtius, op. cit., 10, 129-132. (Both Murphy and Watt are "sober": Murphy never touches alcohol, and Watt drinks nothing but milk.)

46. Diogenes Laërtius, op. cit., 10, 133.

plication of need means a multiplication of possibilities of suffering, and accordingly recommended an obliteration of needs.<sup>47</sup>

The Epicurean ataraxy depends on such obliteration: its stasis is the stasis of not needing anything, not hoping for anything, not fearing anything. The wisdom of Epicurus is of the same kind as that of Brahma and of Leopardi, which Beckett explicitly identifies as dependent on (habitual) voluntary memory and habit:

Memory and Habit... are the flying buttresses of the temple raised to commemorate the wisdom of the architect that is also the wisdom of all the sages, from Brahma to Leopardi, the wisdom that consists not in the satisfaction but in the ablation of desire:

'In noi di cari inganni  
non che la speme, il desiderio è spento'.

\* \* \*

The laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit. (P. 7)

Wisdom consists in obliterating the faculty of suffering rather than in a vain attempt to reduce the stimuli that exasperate that faculty. 'Non che la speme, il desiderio...'. (P. 46)

This wisdom is now shared by Watt's habit which has reached the state of ataraxy. He has preserved his habit by ceasing to feel his habitual need - which was the need for Knott-nought - and with it the possibility both for satisfaction of this need and for awareness that such satisfaction is not enough. This explains why he does not become identified with Knott again after his brief awareness of dissatisfaction: he does not want identification, satisfaction (he doesn't want anything) because he fears the nullity of satisfaction.

Watt's serenity shows that he has not opened a window on the real, that his habit has not died, that he still refuses to admit change. His habit has now quite literally achieved what Murphy achieved in his rocking chair: "such pleasure that pleasure is not the word" (M. 6; italics added). (When Beckett wrote these words he may well have meant them to be taken literally: Murphy too is very much an epicurean.)

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47. Ibid.

## Serenity

When Watt was on the ground floor it was possible for him to be disturbed by Mr. Knott:

One day Watt, coming out from behind a bush, almost ran into Mr. Knott, which for an instant troubled Watt greatly, for he had not quite finished adjusting his dress. (W. 144; italics added)

Adjustment of dress, or buttoning up, is, in my opinion, an image for the adjustment that habit makes when confronted with the unforeseen, the strange, the unfamiliar. This adjustment has, as we have seen, consisted in disregarding the reality of any event or circumstance, in turning the unfamiliar into the familiar, and in assimilating the familiar: in short, in increasing immunity from disturbance. To adjust one's dress, to button up, is to seal oneself off from reality. Mr. Knott, as we have seen, was described by Watt as "habitually" refraining from touching his buttons once they had been adjusted to his satisfaction (W. 201).

Yes, not one button would he touch, to button or unbutton it, except those that nature obliged him to, and these he habitually left unbuttoned, from the moment of his putting on his clothes, and adjusting them to his satisfaction. (W. 201)

Mr. Knott does not even touch the buttons that "nature" could oblige him to touch: he leaves them unbuttoned all day. He does not feel the need to seal himself off from reality. This is the stage that Watt has now reached. In his serenity Watt is incapable of fretting as he used to when he meets up with Mr. Knott with his Watt's buttons undone: Watt is now suffering "neither from the presence of Mr. Knott, nor from his absence" (W. 207). He no longer feels the need that characterised so much of his stay in Mr. Knott's house, his habitual need for immunity.

The imperative to turn particular events into series of events - an imperative that marked many of Watt's confrontations with reality - has now been annulled by his indifference. It is while he is on the first floor that Arthur uses the words "Knott family" which would once have pleased him. "But not now. For Watt was an old rose now, and indifferent to the gardener" (W. 254).<sup>48</sup>

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48. This is a reference to a story that Belacqua told the Alba in "Dream":

Watt is now the occupant of the room that used to be Erskine's, in which Watt discovered the painting of the broken circle and the dot. While Watt is on the first floor, we learn, "the painting, or coloured reproduction, yielded nothing further. On the contrary, as time passed, its significance diminished" (W. 208). The painting is the type, if not (for reasons discussed above) the only example, of a problem that Watt could not definitively solve, that he had to re-formulate at various times. We do not know if the significance of such problems diminishes before or after his collapse into ataraxy or if this happens both before and after. What we do know is that the significance of the painting "diminise[s]" - which implies a quantitative change - and that Watt is, by the very end of his stay in Knott's house, serenely incapable of worrying about anything. The man who can, as Watt certainly can, accept a total failure to formulate any given circumstance, is certainly able to accept partial failure.

Watt's epicurean pleasure, his indifference, cannot last. Time passes, as time has a way of doing, and Watt has to leave Mr. Knott's house. If it were possible to escape from time altogether, he could remain serene. For Watt, however, as for Murphy, it is too much to expect that time will stop. Granted, as it is granted in all Beckett's work, that time passes, ceaselessly, then Watt and his surroundings must, in reality, change. No "pact" that habit makes, even the insouciance of "wisdom", can, in reality, ever be final. When he leaves Mr. Knott's house, Watt and his circumstances change, and he has, once more, to adjust his habit or admit change.

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48. (cont.) "At the garden gate he told her a storiette. 'You know what the rose said to the rose?' No she did not seem to have heard that one. 'No gardener has died within the memory of roses.' 'Very neat', she said 'very graceful. Adios'." (D. 156). At the very end of More Pricks Than Kicks, "the words of the rose to the rose" float up into the gardener's mind: "No gardener has died, comma, within rosaceous memory" (MP. 204). Roses die frequently, whereas gardeners are relatively long-lived. In Proust Beckett writes of the death of habit in comparable terms: "The mortal microcosm [habit] cannot forgive the relative immortality of the macrocosm. The whisky bears a grudge against the decanter." (P. 10). If, by the time he achieves serenity Watt is an "old rose", then he is showing that his habit, which should have been just one of innumerable lives making up his life, has survived far longer than habits usually do; and if he is "indifferent to the gardener" then he is showing the extent to which he is serenely incapable of worrying about the "macrocosm" of the real world.

On the Road and in the Station

When he arrived at Mr. Knott's house, Watt wanted the new day to dawn. This need for change, however, was soon forcefully opposed by his need to remain the same, and in the early stages of his service on the ground floor Watt could be described in the terms Watt himself uses to describe Mr. Knott at that time: "Here is one who seems on the one hand reluctant to change his state, and on the other impatient to do so" (W. 83). As I have shown, Watt's habit consistently gets the better of his impatience for change until, by the end of his stay on the first floor tension has collapsed into the serenity of habitual nirvana.<sup>49</sup> The revolutionary voice of Lazarus, dissatisfied with Watt's ever increasing disregard of reality, has sounded frequently but has not been able to overthrow the conservative régime of Dives. Lazarus has not been, cannot ever be, definitively silenced- it is as impossible to shut reality out once and for all as it is to exclude hunger once and for all. It is as vain to affect indifference to food as it is to gorge oneself: the need for food is basic to existence and will recur. Time passes. At Watt's departure from Knott's house the voice of Lazarus, of the need for change, is heard as insistently as it was heard when Watt was anxious for the new day on his arrival, as insistently and as temporarily.

The description of Watt's journey from Mr. Knott's house to the station bears certain resemblances to the description of his arrival at the house from the station.

There are two accounts of Watt's departure from Mr. Knott's house, both of which indicate that Watt's ataraxy is disturbed after he leaves the house. The first of these accounts is in the continuation of a

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49. Lawrence E. Harvey claims that for Beckett "the choice between suffering existence and unfeeling nirvana [is] made in favor of the latter" (Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, op. cit., p. 288). ~~My~~ My disagreement with this should be clear, although ~~we~~ do not have space here to take issue with Harvey's interpretation of the poem ("je suis ce cours de sable qui glisse") that prompted the claim. Beckett does not choose between any contraries, but if nirvana is a habit, i.e. the dominant contrary, then he provides "resistance" against it, as in Watt.

passage already quoted:

So that when the time came for Watt to depart, he walked to the gate with the utmost serenity.

But he was no sooner in the public road than he burst into tears. He stood there, he remembered, with bowed head, and a bag in each hand, and his tears fell, a slow, minute rain, to the ground... (W. 208)

The second description does not specifically mention tears, although this may be what is referred to by "the passing weakness already mentioned" (W. 222) which overtakes him on the road. According to this later account his ataraxy seems to have broken down, at least somewhat, between the house and the public road, i.e. before he reaches the gate. Here he "recalled, with regret, that he had not taken leave of Micks [the new servant], as he should have done" (W. 221). He feels an "inclination" to retrace his steps, halts, but continues on his way:

And he did well, for Micks had left the kitchen before Watt. But Watt, not knowing this, that Micks had left the kitchen before him, for he only realised it much later, when it was too late, felt regret... (W. 221; italics added)

When he arrived at Knott's house, he did not pay attention to, among other things, Arsene's speech, with the result that he could not remember, later (when it mattered to him that words should be applied to his situation), what Arsene had said. In the Addenda we discover "that Arsene's declaration gradually came back to Watt" (W. 248). Now Watt seems again not to have been paying attention, this time to Micks, and it is only "much later" that he realises that Micks left the kitchen before him. Watt's extreme inattention has registered circumstances that his habit is serenely indifferent to in Mr. Knott's house, and these circumstances will now challenge his habit.

On his way to Mr. Knott's house Watt rested in a ditch. The moon was up and was "pouring its now whitening rays upon him, as though he were not there" (W. 31); Watt, we are told, "disliked" the moon. When he got up he found himself able to resume his journey "with less difficulty than he had feared" (W. 34).

Now, as he is leaving Knott's house, the moon and the other heavenly bodies "poured down on Watt...to Watt's disgust a light so strong, so pure, so steady, and so white, that his progress, though

painful and uncertain, was less painful, less uncertain, than he had apprehended when setting out." (W. 221-2; italics added). He seems in every way the same person now as he was when he arrived. When he set out from Mr. Knott's house, Watt apprehended pain and uncertainty; now he is disgusted that it is not as bad as he feared. Pain and uncertainty are anathema to habit. It is therefore not the habitual voice of Dives that is disgusted with the comparative ease with which Watt is progressing, but the spontaneous voice of Lazarus. He is not indifferent: he feels fear, he feels disgust. He is once again dangerously close to admitting reality.

The fact that Watt's progress is, in fact, not unduly painful or uncertain is an indication that the spontaneous challenge will yet again prove unequal to the task of making Watt suffer for long enough to kill off his habit. All the same, the fact that his progress is painful and uncertain to some extent shows that the tension is here re-established. This tension is, as always, the tension between reality and illusion, between danger and safety, between suffering and boredom, between Lazarus and Dives, between spontaneity and habit.

In the course of both journeys Watt finds a certain gratification. On the earlier journey to Knott's house he finds gratification in various positions of rest: sitting on the edge of the path, lying half in the ditch, lying face down in the ditch. These positions are images for the temporary rest from flux that is provided by habit in the different stages of its development. None of these positions can content Watt for long: adjustments become necessary. The fact that in the last of these positions he is half-buried in pain-inflicting, purgative plants - hyssop, nettles, and foxgloves (as well as in pain-killing hemlock) - is an indication that even in rest, even when he is dominated by habit, there is the potential for suffering.

Now, as he makes his way to the station, his gratification is the result of his contact with one plant and of his avoidance of the nettles in the ditch. He derives "peculiar satisfaction" from the "lapping, against the crown, of his hat, of some pendulous umbel, perhaps a horn's" and stands under the bough "attentive to the drag, to and fro, to and fro, of the tassels, on the crown, of his hat" (W.



222). On this occasion he does not lie down in the ditch, but he is watched by a "strayed ass, or goat" lying in the ditch until he has walked out of sight, when the ass, or goat, lays back its head, "among the nettles".

When he has climbed the steps to the station he stops and admires the view.

His eyes then rising with the rising land fell ultimately on the mirrored sky, its coalsacks, its setting constellations, and on the eyes, ripple-blurred, staring from amidst the waters. Finally suddenly he focused the wicket. (W. 223)

These "eyes" are suggestive of Narcissus, who sees himself reflected in the pool, and this implies that Watt is at this stage still labouring under an illusion, i.e. that he is still a creature of habit.

Watt climbs over the wicket to the station platform. "Watt's first care, now that he was safe and sound within the station, was to turn, and to gaze, through the wicket, the way back he had come, so recently" (W. 223).<sup>50</sup> Safety is a characteristic of a dutiful habit. However, Watt soon finds it necessary to revive his attention when he notices a mysterious figure approaching him. As he is looking back along the road, "a figure, advancing along its crown, arrested and revived his attention" (W. 224). He waits "with impatience" for this figure to "draw near, and set his mind at rest" (W. 225):

He did not desire conversation, he did not desire company, he did not desire consolation, he felt no wish for an erection, no, all he desired was to have his uncertainty removed, in this connexion. (W. 225)

Attentiveness, impatience, a need for rest, a desire to have uncertainty removed - these are all typical of the way Watt's habit used, before it achieved serenity, to react when threatened by reality. Watt has

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50. When, after Dante and Virgil's ascent of the lower slopes of Mount Purgatory, they reach the 'porta' (which is usually translated as "wicket") that marks the entrance to Purgatory itself, the angel guarding the entrance tells Dante: "ma facciovi accorti/ che di fuor torna chi 'n dietro si guata" - 'back outside he goes, who looks behind him once he's passed' (Purg. IX. 131-132). The fact that Watt looks behind him as soon as he has climbed over the wicket is perhaps indicative of his refusal to enter into the "flood of movement and vitality" (DBV. 22) of purgatory where habit and spontaneity would alternate/conjoin.

completely lost his indifference. He is undoubtedly still dominated by habit, but he has fallen back into his old ways of resisting challenges to his habit. His concern is still with appearance, not with reality:

Watt's concern, deep as it appeared, was not after all with what the figure was, in reality, but with what the figure appeared to be, in reality. For since when were Watt's concerns with what things were, in reality? But he was forever falling into this old error, this error of the old days when, lacerated with curiosity, in the midst of substance shadowy he stumbled. (W. 226)

He is reduced to the same kind of "shifts" (W. 199) as those which marked his early failures to foist meaning on the meaningless in Mr. Knott's house, and he finds this "very mortifying" (W. 226). He is so "agitated" that he finally shakes the wicket "with all his might" (W. 226).

In The Shape of Chaos David Hesla has argued that, on his way to Mr. Knott's house, Watt is enacting the fourteen Stations of the Cross,<sup>51</sup> and though I would not agree with Hesla entirely on this point, there is, perhaps, a sense in which the idea of a Calvary is relevant to Watt. The challenges to his habit which cause him distress in Mr. Knott's house can be seen as stations of suffering when, for a short while, the tension is heightened and the possibility arises that Watt's habit may die. Watt's departure from Mr. Knott's house can be seen as what Beckett in Proust calls an "inverted Calvary". When Albertine dies, the Proustian narrator

...must return and re-enact the stations of a diminishing suffering. Thus his astonishment that Albertine, so alive within him, can be dead... gives way to the less painful astonishment that one who is dead can continue to concern him. But the stations of this inverted Calvary retain their original dynamism, their tension towards a cross. At each halt he suffers from the hallucination that what has been left behind is still before him. (P. 60; italics added)

The "hallucination" (W. 227) that Watt is now suffering from bears remarkable resemblances to Watt as he was at the beginning of the novel. Watt's description of the figure's manner of walking, the feet flung outwards as much as forwards (W. 225), is entirely consistent

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51. David H. Hesla, The Shape of Chaos, op. cit., Chapter 3, "The Defeat of the Proto-Zetetic".

with what we know of Watt's own "tardigrade" (W. 28) gait. The figure's hat is described as "yellow with age" (W. 225); Watt's own hat used to be "mustard" and is now "pepper, in colour" (W. 217). Watt decides that the "testimony" of the figure's clothes is "of no more assistance, at that distance, and in that light, than if they had consisted of a sheet, or a sack, or a quilt, or a rug" (W. 225). When, in the opening section of the novel Mr. Hackett saw Watt "lit less and less by the receding lights" he was not sure if what he saw was "not a parcel, a carpet for example or a roll of tarpaulin, wrapped up in dark paper and tied about the middle with a cord" (W. 14). Watt cannot tell if the figure he sees is that of a man or a woman or a priest or a nun (W. 224); Tetty Nixon, on seeing Watt, had not been "sure if it was a man or a woman" (W. 14). Watt finds that the figure's "arms did not end at the hands, but continued, in a manner Watt could not determine, to near the ground" (W. 225); watching Watt, Tetty had remarked that he was "like a sewer-pipe... Where are his arms" (W. 16). In the figure that Watt sees now from the station, Watt seems to be seeing something very like what others saw of him when he was setting out on his journey towards Mr. Knott's house.

This "hallucination" finally disappears without Watt's having satisfied his curiosity. The station, in which he thought himself "safe and sound" has proved a poor refuge: his faculty of suffering has been aroused. He is able once more to feel hope and fear ("it was as he feared, earlier than he hoped" W. 228), and sadness and gladness - all of which emotions had been numbed while he was serene. The tension, however, does not last very long.

After describing the three "stations of diminishing suffering" and the hallucination experienced by Marcel after Albertine's death, Beckett says that

...as before, wisdom consists in obliterating the faculty of suffering rather than in a vain attempt to reduce the stimuli that exasperate that faculty. (P. 46)

Watt's habit does not allow his sensitivity to spontaneous sensation to last long: "sadness and gladness" are "distinctly perceptible in an alternation of great rapidity, for some little time" but "∕die∕ blurred together away in due course" (W. 232) while Watt is in the station waiting room. The last time that Watt was neither sad nor glad was

when he was well on his way to indifference at the end of his stay in Mr. Knott's house. It may be that he will now re-achieve indifference. It hardly matters. His experiences since leaving Mr. Knott's house have shown that the achievement of a lasting indifference is impossible, that reality can impinge on his consciousness even when he is serene.

The habitual quest of Dives cannot come to an end. Its quest is for satisfaction. Satisfaction leads to dissatisfaction. The only way that habit can remain intact when faced with dissatisfaction is to anaesthetise its need and become serene. Serenity cannot last. Reality can pose its threat again. When habit is threatened the habitual need re-asserts itself and the circle begins again.

There is at least a suggestion that Watt is always, when he is journeying (and he is "an experienced traveller" W. 19), journeying both to and from Mr. Knott's house, since "there was no other place, but only there where Mr. Knott was, whose peculiar properties, having first thrust forth, with such a thrust, called back so soon, with such a call" (W. 199). Watt has taken the train to the station near Mr. Knott's house on at least one occasion previous to the occasion described in Watt: "Watt had once been carried past this station, and on to the next, through his not having prepared himself in time, to get down, when the train stopped" (W. 28). He has also, apparently, been to the house before, since he recognises the chimneys from a distance. This is all very inconclusive. All we can say is that there seems at least to be some doubt about whether in fact Watt goes to Mr. Knott's house only once and leaves it only once.

What Watt calls "the little world of Mr. Knott's establishment" (W. 81) is a world projected - at times falteringly - by Watt's habit. When we leave it to discuss the mansions and the gardens, we are leaving the world projected by Watt's habit for the world projected by Sam's habit.

#### The Mansions and the Gardens

Sam, the narrator of Watt, tells us that he and Watt were living in the same "mansion" or "pavilion" when Watt started to tell Sam his story. They used to meet and converse in the garden of this mansion

when the weather suited their respective needs, 'and Sam would take down in writing what he understood of Watt's story. At some point in time Watt is transferred to another pavilion, with another garden, and he and Sam subsequently meet and converse less often.

Inside their mansions they are each, according to Sam, in a "separate soundless unlit warmth" (W. 150). Sam talks about "our windowlessness", "our bloodheat", "our hush" (W. 150). Suffering, which Beckett describes as "opening a window on the real" (P. 16), seems very far from their experience in their mansions. Indoors habit seems to be unchallenged.

Their mansions may be windowless, but they cannot be doorless: both Sam and Watt do leave their mansions at times. The only hope for a sign that something remains that is not under habit's sway is the hope that the "boredom of living" is in a more precarious position out of doors, in the gardens, than inside.

As far as what we learn of Watt is concerned, the hope appears to be slight. When he speaks, tells Sam his story, he speaks "as one speaking to dictation, or reciting, parrot-like, a text, by long repetition become familiar" (W. 154). He seems free of uncertainty (W. 154) and his "habitual" tone is "one of assurance" (W. 202). Only on one occasion does he falter, and this is when he conjectures about the needs of Mr. Knott (W. 202).

This description of Watt's behaviour is Sam's description, and it bears certain similarities to Watt's own description of Mr. Knott, while Watt is on the first floor. Sam tells us that Watt "spoke in a low and rapid voice" and that much of this "impetuous murmur" is lost for ever in the wind (W.154). On the first floor Watt grew fond of Knott's "wild dim chatter, meaningless to Watt's ailing ears" (W. 208). Watt articulates proper names "such as Knott, Christ, Gomorrha, Cork" with "great deliberation" in what Sam finds a "most refreshing manner" (W. 154). Mr. Knott was "addicted to solitary dactylic ejaculations of extraordinary vigour, accompanied by spasms of the members. The chief of these were: Exelmans! Cavendish! Habbakuk! Ecchymose!" (W. 209) Watt, as we have seen, mistakenly saw Mr. Knott as ideally immune from reality.

That there should be even a suggestion of similarity between Watt-as-he-appears-to-Sam and Knott-as-he-appeared-to-Watt (on the first floor) is a caution against assuming that Watt is in reality as immune as Sam makes out.

Watt is described by Sam as walking backwards, wearing his trousers back to front, and as inverting the order of letters, words, sentences (and the four parts of the story). Sam "fancies" that Watt's "slow and devious" progress backwards is "painful too" (W. 157). Watt frequently falls into brambles, briars, nettles, thistles, but if he often falls, he as often picks himself up, and he proceeds "without a murmur" (W. 157, 161). When he turns, Sam sees his face, and the rest of his front:

His face was bloody, his hand also, and thorns were in his scalp. (His resemblance, at that moment, to the Christ believed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, was so striking, that I remarked it.) And at the same instant suddenly I felt as though I were standing before a great mirror, in which my garden was reflected, and my fence, and I, and the very birds tossing in the wind, so that I looked at my hand, and felt my face, and glossy skull, with an anxiety as real as unfounded. (For if anyone, at that time, could be truly said not to resemble the Christ supposed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, I flatter myself it was I.) (W. 157)

The painting referred to is the "Christ Mocked (The Crowning with Thorns)" which is the only Bosch the National Gallery in London has ever owned. The Gallery's trustees bought this painting in 1934, and it is not unreasonable to presume that Beckett saw it when he was in London in the thirties. This painting is very clearly depicting a moment prior to the actual "crowning" when the crown of thorns is being held over Christ's head and is not yet touching him. Neither Christ's face nor his hands are bloody; no thorns are in his scalp. In terms of the physical characteristics mentioned - the blood and the thorns - Sam is mistaken in thinking that Watt looks anything like the Christ believed by Bosch in Trafalgar Square.<sup>52</sup> It is, moreover, not simply

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52. The full description is necessary. Bosch painted three canvases entitled "The Crowning with Thorns" other than that in the National Gallery in London, and it is only in the one "hanging in Trafalgar Square" that Christ is seen before he is actually crowned.

It is possible, of course that Watt looks like Bosch's Christ in other respects, but of this we know nothing and the fact remains that in terms of the only physical characteristics mentioned by Sam there is no resemblance.

a case of faulty memory: the mirror in which Sam sees himself and his world reflected is another evocation of the myth of Narcissus and shows that Sam is deluded. Watt-as-he-appears-to-Sam is no more real than was Knott-as-he-appeared-to-Watt on the first floor. Watt is at this stage a figure in Sam's habitual projection of the world.<sup>53</sup>

Sam's explanation (to the extent that it is an explanation) of Watt's inversion of speech, method of locomotion, etc. is: "So to every man, soon or late, comes envy of the fly, with all the long joys of summer before it" (W. 162). This suggests that Sam thinks Watt is moving, speaking, etc. backwards because Watt envies the fly who has a future of sensations, experiences, before it. Amazed to see Mr. Knott barefoot and dressed for boating in winter, covered in furs by the fire in summer, Watt had wondered "Does he seek to know again, what is cold, what is heat?" (W. 202). Fancying that Watt is experiencing pain when he stumbles, that he envies the joys of the fly, Sam seems to be guilty of "anthropomorphic insolence" (W. 202) not unlike that of which Watt was guilty with his conjectures about Knott. It is clear, from the only other passage in Watt that mentions flies, that the joys of the flies are very limited:

The flies, of skeleton thinness, excited to new efforts by yet another dawn, left the walls, and the ceiling, and even the floor, and hastened in great numbers to the window. Here, pressed against the impenetrable panes, they would enjoy the light, and warmth, of the long summer's day. (W. 236)

In moving and speaking backwards, Watt is (Sam thinks) looking for an experience that will give him a little thrill and yet not endanger his preconceptions<sup>54</sup>. Like these flies that are content with what they can experience through the window, within the shelter of the room, Watt is seen to be content with what he can experience within the con-

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53. It is quite possible that Watt has all along been a figure in Sam's habitual world-view.

54. Habit doesn't veto any excitement so long as it is consistent with habit's preconceptions. Belacqua, as we have seen in "Dante and the Lobster", is only too pleased to have a spicy lunch made of ingredients that are "alive". He is, however, not at all pleased to realise that the lobster is to be boiled alive: he is not prepared for that, and recoils in horror before retreating back into his complacency.

finer of his habit. Watt's mansion is a world within which Watt is thought to be entirely immune from reality. The difference between the mansion and the garden, for Watt, is the difference between the walls (or the ceiling, or the floor) and the window for the flies. The flies go to the window on a summer's morning; Watt is described as venturing out into the garden when the weather is bright and windy. The window is impenetrable, but it can be seen through; the gardens are surrounded by fences which, though "greatly in need of repair" (W. 154), "limit motion, without limiting vision" (W. 156). "Yet another dawn" excites the flies. This, by contrast, recalls the "new day" that Watt wanted when he arrived in Mr. Knott's house. He may now want it again, for all we know, but Sam is quite convinced that he is, like the flies, excited by nothing so drastic. "Yet another dawn" is one of a series, habitual, comfortable, dull; the "new day" was going to be (will be?) none of these things.

Sam tells us that "as though by mutual tacit consent" neither he nor Watt ever approaches closer to the fence than "a hundred yards, or a quarter of a mile". The fence can be seen as an image for the screen provided by habit, as marking the outer limits of the area dominated by habit. Beyond it is the void, nothingness, reality.

Sometimes we saw [the fence] afar, faintly the old sagging strands, the leaning posts, trembling in the wind, at the end of a glade. Or we saw a big black bird perched in the void, perhaps croaking, or preening its feathers. (W. 156)

Dante's Belacqua refers to the angel at the entrance to purgatory as "that bird of God who perches at the gate" (Purg. IV. 129). In Dante this angel symbolises the ideal priesthood or confessor. I would suggest that Beckett's hope that the Belacqua's of this world will admit reality and enter "life on earth, that is Purgatory" (DBV. 22) leads him to see this figure (who appears variously as a bird and as a confessor figure in Beckett's work) as crucial. Dante presents the angel as a forbidding figure carrying a sword; for Beckett he is both forbidding and welcoming: the prospect of entering purgatory is the prospect of beginning life properly, with all the suffering, all the enchantment, that that entails. This angel, priest, confessor, appears, I would suggest, as the "Auditor" in Not I<sup>55</sup> who makes a move of "helpless com-

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55. Not I, Faber and Faber, London, 1973.



passion" when "Mouth" refuses to admit reality (i.e. to admit that her story has any bearing on her own life): "what?...who?...no!... she!... (pause and movement)". The Auditor (who is enveloped from head to foot in a loose black djellaba, with a hood) moves less and less perceptibly and finally not at all when Mouth persists in refusing to relinquish the third person ("she", not "I"), but he is still present, still waiting. The latest recurrence of the figure is in Beckett's Au Loin un Oiseau.<sup>56</sup> This is a very bleak piece - it begins "terre couverte de ruines" - and the only hope is that the bird in the distance will be seen by the man wandering on this terrain: "il n'aurait qu'à lever les yeux, qu'à les ouvrir, qu'à les lever, il se confond avec la haie, au loin un oiseau, le temps de saisir et il file..." but his face is set, and his eyes are closed and "les heures passent, il ne bouge pas".

On one occasion Sam does find himself near the fence: "I found my steps impelled, as though by some external agency, towards the fence, and this impulsion was maintained, until I could go no farther, in that direction, without doing myself a serious, if not fatal, injury; then it left me and I looked about, a thing I never used to do, on any account, in the ordinary way" (W. 155-156). Sam reacts violently. He looks about him "like a mad creature,... like one deprived of his sense" (W. 156-157). It is at this point that he observes "whom do you think but Watt" progressing backwards towards the fence. When Watt says "Not it is, yes", this is the first time Sam has heard Watt's inverted speech and it augments Sam's already considerable anxiety:

This short phrase caused me, I believe, more alarm, more pain, than if I had received, unexpectedly, at close quarters, a charge of small shot in the ravine. This impression was reinforced by what followed. (W. 157)

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56. The italics are added in the quotation that follows. Au Loin un Oiseau has not yet been translated into English. The total length of the written text is approximately 350 words. It has so far been published only in a special limited edition (unpaginated, with five signed original etchings by Avigdor Arikha) by The Double Elephant Press Ltd., New York, 1973.

Sam's senses are now "sharpened to ten or fifteen times their normal acuity", and it accordingly does not take him long to find a way of meeting up with Watt in the narrow strait that separates the fence of Watt's garden from the fence of Sam's garden. Sam's comment on their meeting again is strikingly similar to remarks that Watt was wont to make in connection with Knott:

To be together again, after so long, who love the sunny wind, the windy sun, in the sun, in the wind, that is perhaps something, perhaps something. (W. 162)

There is just room for them to move between the two fences and they do not venture beyond the point where the fences diverge. They do not, in other words, venture near the void: they are even more "fenced in" in the narrow strait than they are in their gardens.

For Watt, ideal weather conditions are a very high wind and some sun; for Sam a bright sun and some wind. Watt speaks and walks backwards; Sam speaks and walks forwards. Sam is still, clearly, prey to terror, and at each modification of Watt's manner of speaking Sam becomes disconcerted by the strange sounds until he gets "used" (W. 163,4,5,6,7) to them. Where Sam thinks that Watt is far out of the reach of reality and trying to re-discover sensations of a moderate kind, Sam himself is still trying to eliminate the vexatious sensations that he is still prone to and that can challenge his partial immunity. Sam's relationship with Watt at this stage is very like the relationship between Watt and Mr. Knott at the beginning of Watt's stay on the first floor, when, as we have seen, Watt was convinced that Knott was completely immune to reality.

At the end they part, "never to meet again (in this world)" (W. 212-13), and Sam watches Watt stumble backwards "towards his habitation":

And from the hidden pavilions, his and mine, where by this time dinner was preparing, the issuing smokes by the wind were blown, now far apart, but now together, mingled to vanish. (W. 213)

Dinner is being prepared for them. At the very least they, like Mr. Knott, "need never to need, never never to need, food and drink, and sleep, and other things". Even the need not to need food has to be satisfied (i.e. by eating regularly), and satisfaction inevitably leads

to dissatisfaction, and the circle is well on its way again, assuming that habit continues to refuse to die.

This circle is not a continuous circle. It is composed of countless arcs, in between each of which there is a space. These spaces represent those moments when reality briefly impinges on habit before habit continues on its way. This circle is entirely a fabrication, a mental construct. A circle is not a circle if its circumference is broken, and an unbroken line (whether curved or straight) does not exist in reality. It is only by ignoring these spaces that the conception of a circle is produced. For Beckett the only circle that exists in reality is inconceivable. Sam, like all of Beckett's people, cannot bear the inconceivable: he too clings to his mental constructs.

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## CONCLUSION

It is possible to view art as a means of making experience intelligible. The artist who makes such an attempt is, according to Beckett, like the architect of the Madeleine, or like Balzac: he is imposing a form on to his experience, making experience fit in with an explanation. This kind of art is a lie, because it buckles the chaos of experience into a sham coherence or intelligibility, an artificial orderliness, and it shuts out our awareness of anything that is extraneous to that artificial order. It wraps up experience in a neat parcel of words, of stone, of paint, or of any other medium, and it is comforting because it does exclude all that is potentially disturbing. This kind of art is popular because it is comforting -- we all, Beckett says, love and lick up Balzac, we lap it up and say that it is wonderful. It is always more pleasant to have one's own world view reinforced than to have to discard the tenets on which we have built our lives. Some of us may prefer talking to someone who disagrees with us, but we like disagreement only if there is some common ground on which we can base a discussion. The reason why new art forms have always caused such resentment on their first appearance is that there is no common ground on which to relish any discussion. A work of art creates its own world, and that world will either be consistent with our world or it will be inconsistent. If consistent, it may be popular; if inconsistent, it will create resentment and anger. When a world is consistent with our own I mean that it operates in accordance with certain values that we share and in accordance with the laws we consider applicable to our own situation. It may add to those values, or rearrange them, or alter some of them, but it will retain certain basic assumptions, and thus permit us to fathom its meaning relatively easily when we compare its world to our own.

The second kind of art is that which creates a world that is so radically different from our own that we have no way of fathoming it and no way of coping with it. We either reject it out of hand, preferring to cling to our own world, or we enter its world and, since the two are inconsistent, leave our own old world behind in the process. This will be a disturbing process and an unpleasant one, but we might emerge changed. The artist who creates this new kind of world in his art is like the architect of

Chartres, and like Bram van Velde. He allows the mystery to invade us, because somehow his form accommodates those aspects of experience that are inconsistent with our world view.

Tom Driver asked Beckett how it was possible for art to let in the chaos. Art is formal order, and chaos is therefore the enemy of all that art holds itself to be. Beckett replied that he does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art, but that there will be new form. This new form will not buckle the chaos into false coherence. On various occasions in his articles, reviews, and interviews, Beckett talks of what lies behind the work of art, and of how a poem, a painting, a novel, can allow what lies behind to "trickle through" so that we become aware of it. In "Denis Devlin", for example, he admires the poet's "evocation of the unsaid by the said", and in his interview with Israel Shenker he says that, in his own work as opposed to Kafka's, consternation lies behind the form.

Spontaneity is the kind of experience that is the very opposite of anything coherent, intelligible, or comforting. It is impossible to speak of it or to write of it without, as Beckett said of "le grand besoin" in "Les Deux Besoins", falsifying it. Language has its own order, its own form, as has every medium of expression.

The notions of habit and spontaneity, as used by Beckett in Proust, can help us to understand how Beckett has tried to let chaos into art without turning chaos into something coherent. At least since "Dream of Fair to Middling Women", it is spontaneity, the unutterable, that is behind his work, and it is habit, the utterable, that is in his work. The said, the evil and necessary structure of the orderly and habitual vision, evokes the unsaid.

In "Dream" spontaneous experience is linked firstly with the possibility that Belacqua may be disturbed and "die", and secondly with the question as to the value of his descents into gloom or Limbo. As far as the former is concerned there is no doubt that Belacqua's habit does not die. There is, however, considerable ambiguity as to the value of Limbo: Limbo has elements both of habit and of spontaneity. It seems to me that in this first attempt at novel writing, Beckett was still trying to express spontaneity in words, and that he chose the experience of Limbo for the job of representing spontaneity, and that he realised, each time he attempted to apply words to that kind of experience, that he was falsifying it. That realisation undercuts, at

every turn, his attempts at expression. He never finished "Dream", and he still refuses to allow it published: it seems as though he was and is aware that he had put himself into an impossible situation in that novel. There were three roads he, as a writer, could have taken from that point on. One would have been to shun his awareness of the total inadequacy of words. He might then have convinced himself that the problem lies not with any impossibility of expression, but rather with his own choice of words, and that he had only to press on, learning his trade better, in order to come up with a more adequate statement of Limbo. This is what, in "Peintres de l'Empêchement", is called "le chemin du retour à la vieille naïveté, à travers l'hiver de son abandon, le chemin des repentis" (PE.7). Another possible road would have been to resign himself to the impossibility of expressing spontaneity, and to give up trying to express it. He might then have concentrated, in his later work, solely on those elements of experience that words can express. This is "le chemin qui n'en est plus un, mais une dernière tentative de vivre sur le pays conquis" (PE.7).

And the third road? In "Peintres de l'Empêchement" this is described as "le chemin en avant d'une peinture [...] d'acceptation, entrevoyant dans l'absence de rapport et dans l'absence d'objet le nouveau rapport et le nouvel objet, chemin qui bifurque déjà, dans les travaux de Bram et de Geer van Velde" (PE.7). In the third Dialogue with Georges Duthuit, Beckett also speaks of Bram van Velde as having left the "dreary road of the possible", as having submitted wholly to the incoercible absence of relation. Here, however, Beckett denies that van Velde turns this absence of relation into a new term of relation.

In both these articles Beckett makes it clear that he is talking about himself as much as about the van Veldes when he discusses this "peinture d'acceptation". Of the three roads open to him after he gave up on "Dream", we must conclude that Beckett took the third, accepting the impossibility of expressing spontaneity, and knowing that it is precisely the inexpressible that he has to express. He will not shun his awareness of impossibility, and he will not simply resign himself to the limitations of words; he will find a way of moving 'en avant'. What is this way? We cannot reconcile the two different views Beckett has given of it: the one implies that he finds a new object to which he, as subject, can relate to, that he does have something to express; the other implies that he is unable and unwilling to find any new object, and that he can and will express nothing, not even the impossibility of expression. Let us leave this contradiction aside for

a moment while we examine what we have found about what Beckett did in fact write after "Dream of Fair to Middling Women".

In More Pricks than Kicks Belacqua's habit is threatened on several occasions, most notably in "Dante and the Lobster" and in "Yellow". In the former story, it is the fact that the lobster is to be boiled alive that is the circumstance that might have caused Belacqua's old habit to die, and in the latter it is the idea of his forthcoming operation that disturbs him. Other incidents in the stories -- Winnie's 'sensibleness' and chatter in "Fingal", Ruby's distracting legs in "Love and Lethe", Lucy's inconvenient promise of fidelity in "Walking Out", etc. -- are temporarily upsetting in a somewhat lesser way, and do not constitute serious disturbances. Belacqua's habit in More Pricks than Kicks (as in "Dream") could be described as that of a very inward man who has limited commerce with women, tradesmen, acquaintances and relatives, but who generally prefers his own company to that of anyone else, and who loves most of all to be free both of himself and of others. Just as he can tolerate others only so long as they harmonise with him, so too he can tolerate himself only so long as nothing inside him -- whether physiological or mental -- conflicts with his habitual view of himself. He is upset with Winnie when she points out unremarkable physical attributes which conflict with his own view of Fingal as a "magic land" of sanctuary, and he is upset with himself for feeling listless after his physical exertions, since he has rejected the idea that there could be a sequitur from his body to his mind. In either case his urge is to escape from the source of the irritation into a third state of existence where he feels at peace: this state is not, in More Pricks, called Limbo, but it is functionally equivalent to the Limbo described in "Dream". This habit is characteristic of Belacqua throughout the collection up to the point of his actual death on the operating table. It is unclear whether or not his habit dies beforehand or not, but since he does himself die there is no period of transition -- of value restored -- leading to the formation of any new habit.

Murphy is in many ways similar to Belacqua, although some form of the third "Limbo" state is here joined with the mental side of Murphy, and the distinction between the big world of the body and the little world of the mind is insisted upon more strenuously by Murphy than it ever was by Belacqua. Murphy veers from his big world to his little and back again throughout the novel, thinking himself torn between two contraries. His two

worlds are, however, contrary only in his conception of them, and Beckett shows that Murphy habitually needs both his worlds. When he finds the big world disturbing he seeks refuge in torpor, and when he finds the little disturbing he seeks refuge in Celia. The passage from the one to the other is normally as painless as Belacqua's first descent into gloom in "Dream". The dangerous moments in any passage from one state of mind to another, Beckett explains in "Dream", are those moments that separate the stages. Usually this creates no problem. For Belacqua the stages are "chained" together beautifully by an "ergo"; in More Pricks, too, Belacqua is able to switch from Winnie to the tower and the bicycle ("Fingal"), and from death to love ("Love and Lethe") without any difficulty; and Murphy can slip in and out of torpor fairly easily on most occasions. It is when Murphy finds himself left high and dry without either of his worlds that he is in trouble, as at the end of his last night in the Mercyseat. His little world, which he has identified with Mr. Endon, has rejected him, and yet he cannot form any picture of the big world either. What is interesting about his predicament at this point is not only that it constitutes a very serious threat to his habit of veering from one of his worlds to the other, but also that it bears striking resemblances to what in "Dream" is called the state of Limbo: the negation both of the centrifugal Apollo persona and of the centripetal Narcissus persona. The state that Belacqua sought to mechanise is here experienced by Murphy as a dispensation, and the experience terrifies Murphy in a way that it does not terrify Belacqua. Is the reason for this that Belacqua has included Limbo in his "trine" habit, while Murphy has failed to do so? This is possible, but it is not sufficient as an explanation since, on the one hand, we have not been able to determine quite how far Belacqua's Limbo is habitual and, on the other, Murphy does seem to have included some conception of Limbo in his habitual view of his little world. - in the second of Murphy's mental zones, we are specifically told, he finds his "Belacqua bliss".

Whether or not he ever does experience it spontaneously, i.e. whether or not the actual experience of Limbo is ever valuable, Belacqua certainly does habitually long for Limbo. Murphy does not. Murphy's habitual needs oscillate between his little and his big worlds, between what in "Dream" are called Narcissus and Apollo. In "Dream" Belacqua views Limbo as infinitely preferable to the "dreary fiasco of oscillation"



between Apollo and Narcissus "that presents itself as the only alternative" (D. 108; italics added). To the extent that the "Belacqua bliss" figures in Murphy's habit at all, however, it does so merely as an example of the kind of experience Murphy can have in his mind where he can love himself - i.e. it is a function of his little world, of Narcissus.

I have argued that Belacqua's negation of both of any two contraries is opposed by the narrator's (and Beckett's own) emphasis on the simultaneity of contraries and that, to the extent that Belacqua does deny simultaneity, he is resisting the threat such a notion could pose to his compartmentalised habit, which consists of 1) centrifugal Apollo, 2) centripetal Narcissus, and 3) neither. It is precisely this "neither", however, that is what is disturbing to Murphy's habit at the end of his last night at the Mercyseat. Limbo, as described in "Dream", can thus be either habitual or spontaneous, depending on the particular habit that is dominant in the individual experiencing Limbo. For Belacqua Limbo appears to have been experienced habitually in "Dream", but this does not mean that it is necessarily a habitual experience. Murphy seems to experience it habitually as the second zone of his mind, but spontaneously as the negation of both his worlds, which terrifies him. In "Dream" we are told a good deal about Limbo; in More Pricks Than Kicks and in Murphy hardly anything at all - but what we do learn about Belacqua's "moving pauses" and about the second zone of Murphy's mind (or about Murphy's "life in his mind" generally) is sufficient to allow us to conclude that here the experience is habitual. It is at the end of Murphy's stay at the Mercyseat that we come closest to seeing what such an experience might be like if it is not habitually experienced, and here Beckett gives not the slightest indication that he sees any connection between it and the negation of oscillation that is discussed in "Dream". It seems to me that there is a connection and, moreover, that Beckett is aware of the connection, but that he has learnt from the predicament he got himself into in "Dream", and that henceforth he would not try to tie the unutterable up in words, or name the unnameable. Instead he creates situations in his books such that the inexplicable and the disturbing are allowed to have a certain effect, without ever being explained.

Murphy rushes indoors to his rocking chair to ward off the strange

sensations that he knows he must stop as soon as possible. He succeeds in slipping off into torpor and his dualistic habit seems safe until the explosion which presumably kills both Murphy and his habit - too late, as in "Yellow", for any possibility of renovation.

If Belacqua's habit (in "Dream" and in the stories) can be seen as trine (with a preference for the Limbese), Murphy's as dualistic (with a preference for the mental), then Watt's is unitary or monistic. Unlike Murphy and Belacqua, Watt does not divide his experience into two or three compartments. Everything is welcome grist to Watt's habitual mill, and he is as content examining objects with his eyes as he is puzzling over them or being indifferent to them. The kinds of very concrete circumstances that disturb Belacqua and Murphy - a button-busting Weib, the fate of a lobster, an encounter with chandlers - are unlikely to have any adverse effect on Watt. These are all circumstances that Watt could reduce to insignificance with his mental and physical faculties. What can disturb Watt, however, are precisely those "mysteries" that Belacqua and Murphy delight in - the "inner meanings" of things, the lack of a clearly definable connection between the self and the world outside the self, the stars, etc. The unfathomables of life, which in large part constitute Belacqua's and Murphy's "dud mystic" habits, are beyond the habitual ken of the man who has been content with face values nearly all his life. Murphy and Watt set off from diametrically opposed positions with respect to the mysterious elements in their lives, as is evident in their respective attitudes to Mr. Endon and Mr. Knott, the two personifications of the unfathomable. Murphy begins by being delighted with Mr. Endon (and the other patients in the Mercyseat), feeling himself at last close to his little world, and it is only at the end of his last chess game that he realises that Mr. Endon is not only indifferent to Murphy but qualitatively different. For Murphy, in other words, Mr. Endon appears first as a reinforcement to Murphy's habit, and only at the end as a threat. Mr. Knott, on the other hand, is perhaps the most seriously disturbing of all the challenges to Watt's habit while Watt is on the ground floor, and it is only gradually that he comes to be able to accept Mr. Knott's mysteriousness and to achieve serenity.

Limbo, in "Dream", was to have been a depiction of the spontaneous experience that restores the maximum value of our being. Describing it, however, falsified it, and in More Pricks there is no mention of it. The nearest Beckett comes to describing it in the short stories is in his description of Belacqua's "moving pauses" which, however, appear to be habitual: in the only example given (in "Ding-Dong"), the unexpected circumstance of the woman selling seats in heaven disturbs Belacqua as he enacts one of his moving pauses. In the stories the most seriously disturbing incidents are not explained or labelled: Beckett shows how they might have caused Belacqua to change. In Murphy he again refrains from mentioning Limbo in the manner of "Dream", but Murphy's attempts to escape into his mind are clearly similar to Belacqua's dogged attempts at mechanising Limbo. Murphy's habitual view of his little world is explained and named, as is his habitual view of his big world, but again Beckett makes no attempt to explain or to label those circumstances that cause Murphy to feel spontaneously: we are shown how they disturb, and that is all. In Watt we find endless explanations, each of which cancels the next so that, in sum, nothing is explained.

Refusing to attempt to describe spontaneous experience, Beckett has allowed such experience to retain its power. It is not only Watt who is disturbed by the strange circumstances he is confronted with in Mr. Knott's house: we too are puzzled and irritated at the lack of any clear or obvious explanation. There are gaps in Beckett's writing, and he allows them to gape open. We would find his work far more comforting and pleasant if he would fill them in, joining up loose ends with a neat explanation - an "ergo". By refusing to do so, he is allowing the chaos that lurks behind his work to trickle through to our awareness. The form that accommodates the mess is like a shelter that has windows or like a bell interrupting silence or like a circle that is broken. Beckett's creatures are creatures of habit, and are described at length in habitual terms. It is when something happens that is outside the habitual world of the fictions, inexplicable and disturbing, that the form allows the mess to trickle through.

This certainly can explain why Beckett gave up trying to say the unsayable, but it does not explain why it is that renovation never

actually takes place. If he can show habit being threatened, then he can surely show habit dying, allow us to be aware that a period of transition takes place, and show a new habit forming. He could, for example, have refrained from implying so clearly that Belacqua will, after all, lash into the lobster for his dinner. He could have allowed Murphy to be unsuccessful in stopping the reel of fragments. He could have allowed Watt's old habit to die under stress. There would be no need to falsify the spontaneous experience by actually describing it. Does Beckett feel that habits do generally tend to survive under even such abnormally disturbing conditions as those faced by Watt? This does seem to be the implication.

The contradiction between the new road "en avant" that posits a new relationship, and that which refuses to do so, can perhaps be illuminated in terms of another contradiction. In "Dante...Bruno. Vico..Joyce" Beckett writes of the flood of vitality that is life on earth, purgatory. This is the flood of interaction between any two contraries. It is, it seems to me, what is hoped for in Beckett's work. It is hoped that Belacqua in "Dream" will admit the simultaneity of opposites, that the victimising Belacqua in "Dante and the Lobster" will allow himself to be victimised, that Murphy will admit the falsity of his view of himself, that Watt will admit the new day instead of either serialising everything or being indifferent to everything. In Proust Beckett describes the habit--spontaneity--habit etc. cycle as a series, and he says that this series of renovations leaves us indifferent. Similarly in "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", when he describes Joyce's work as purgatorial, in the sense that opposites are constantly replacing each other as the the vicious circle of humanity is achieved, he is not attributing any value to the cycle: neither prize nor penalty, only a series of stimulants to enable the kitten to catch its tail. This vicious circle, this purgatorial process, is, however, not achieved in Beckett's English fictions: again with the possible exception of "Dream", there isn't a single renovation to be found, not a single explosion takes place. (And even in "Dream", as I have shown, Beckett promises an explosion that never happens.)

Beckett's work, as opposed to either Proust's or Joyce's, is ante-purgatorial. The world he depicts is a world of arrested development, in which one of any pair of contraries is constantly dominant: in the Belacqua stories and in Murphy it is division rather than unity, inner meanings rather than face values, transcendence rather than immanence; in Watt it is unity rather than division, face values rather than inner meanings, immanence rather than transcendence. In all cases it is habit rather than spontaneity. Only if Belacqua, Murphy and Watt admitted what their respective habits exclude, would the explosion take place, allowing the "machine" to proceed. As it is, their habits never die and they remain in ante-purgatory: life on earth is awaited but it never comes.

It is, I think, the ambiguity surrounding the value of entrance into "life on earth", purgatory, that is behind his contradictory statements on the type of new road that he sees himself and van Velde as following in their art. The explosion itself that occurs when two contraries conjoin - when the Cartesian meets the dialectician, when the Jansenist meets the materialist, when silence meets sound, when the immanent meets the transcendent, when habit meets spontaneity - is undoubtedly valuable, as is the painful and fertile period of transition that follows. The problem arises when we ask whether in fact the new habit that forms is in itself preferable in any way to the old. When Beckett says that he (and perhaps an "innocent" Bram van Velde) cannot reaffirm any new relationship, he is in effect saying that he cannot get beyond the explosion, and that, in any case, to do so is to betray the artist's vocation of failure. When he describes the van Veldes (and by implication himself) as having found a new road and a new relationship, he is in effect saying that he can get beyond the explosion, and that to do so is to move forward - "le chemin en avant".

In his work he presents an ante-purgatorial world awaiting entrance into life on earth, purgatory. Behind his work lies purgatory itself. The hope in his work is that his people will enter purgatory. Will this mean an instant's restoration of value followed by the same old story?

Or will it mean a new road forward? There is nothing in his English fictions that can help us with this question, since no new habit ever forms. It is not, however, a question that is irrelevant to the fictions, for if Beckett is interpreted as looking forward to some change, it is certainly important to ask what this change would involve. Perhaps Beckett is ambiguous on this issue because he does not know. Maybe he feels the change has not taken place in his actual environment any more than it has taken place in his fictional world, and unless and until it does happen, he cannot judge it. It is a question that must remain unanswered.

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## APPENDIX

Incommensurable is a term used in mathematics to denote two or more quantities or magnitudes having no common measure. It is sometimes used in an absolute sense to denote a quantity that cannot be measured by the same standards as those applicable to ordinary or rational quantities (such as the natural numbers).

According to the historians of mathematics, Pythagoras in the sixth century B.C. discovered the theorem that "in the right-angled triangle the square on the side subtending the right angle is equal to the squares on the sides containing the right angle". This theorem is true for the triangle having sides 3, 4, and 5 ( $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$ ); the triangle which, it is alleged, first suggested the theorem to Pythagoras. However, when this theorem began to be tested for other right-angled triangles the discovery was made that the length of the diagonal was not always expressible as an integer. This was the case most obviously for the diagonal of the square, the length of which proved to be  $\sqrt{2}$ , or irrational/alogos. Some historians suggest that the term alogos expresses the horror of the early Pythagoreans at the discovery and that it is to be translated as "unutterable", a meaning that the word has once, in Sophocles. Otherwise it means without logos or ratio and so irrational.

The actual discovery of the irrational, and in particular of  $\sqrt{2}$ , is not usually attributed to Pythagoras himself. It is often connected - as Beckett connects it - with the name of Hippasos. The awful secret that the Pythagoreans discovered is said to be either that the diagonal of a square cannot be rational ( $1^2 + 1^2 = \sqrt{2}$ , and  $\sqrt{2}$  is not rational) or that the square on the hypotenuse is not commensurable with the squares on the sides, or both these truths, the first deriving from the context of arithmetic and the second from that of geometry. This secret caused consternation in the "Pythagorean brotherhood" because their whole structure of theory was built on the notion of rational numbers and of

an orderly universe wherein everything has its assigned place. The dreadful secret was therefore strictly kept and all investigation of the irrational was dropped until some of them (Hippasos, according to some accounts) made it public and, as punishment meted out by the gods, perished in a shipwreck.

There are several versions of the tale, the secret being promulgated by Hippasos, or by an anonymous Pythagorean, or by more than one Pythagorean; that secret being irrationality, or incommensurability, or the discovery of the dodecahedron. In all cases the impious crime was apparently punished by drowning at sea.<sup>1</sup>

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1. I am indebted to J.A. Philip, Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1966) and to S.K. Heninger, JR., Touches of Sweet Harmony (The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 1974) for the foregoing account.



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- III. Other Works

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