Music and Language

in the Work of Samuel Beckett

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Abstract

While critics, actors and directors have frequently referred to the "musicality" of the works of Samuel Beckett, nobody has really addressed the question of quite how or why such an effect is achieved. *Music and Language in the Work of Samuel Beckett* starts from the perception that the musical effect actually stems from Beckett's frustration with the inadequacy of words, and his consequent breakdown of conventional structures and the referential function of language. The construction of the texts becomes increasingly musical, dependent upon the compositional implications of the sounding qualities of the words and the minimal semantics which unavoidably remain. At the same time, however, Beckett's early fiction covertly deploys the *idea* of music in order to explore the boundaries of logical thought and the constitution of meaning. Examining this process, its relationship to attempts to account for the significance of music becomes apparent, and it is therefore considered alongside various such theories.

The treatment of identity and meaning in Beckett's later work prefigures the ideas of much recent critical theory - aspects of deconstruction in particular - and again the musical effect is fundamental. This relationship is therefore explored as a means of clarifying that between music theory and recent critical theory. Finally, the discussion of composers' responses to Beckett's texts provokes further questions. While setting the texts in the traditional sense is problematic, certain composers have taken less conventional approaches, and the analysis of works by Morton Feldman and Richard Barrett examines the extent to which similar preoccupations can be explored in the different media of language and music.

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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

Both textual references to specific musical works and the actual use of music in several of his plays betray Beckett's knowledge of the art-form. Beckett's wife was a pianist and he himself was a keen amateur musician, as were (and are) several members of his family. Many of those involved with Beckett's work, whether practically or theoretically, have commented on its "musicality". Interviews with actors and directors more often than not include some reference to the musical nature of Beckett's texts. To catalogue all such instances would be pointless, but George Devine seems to sum up the prevailing attitude when he says that "one has to think of the text as something like a musical score wherein the 'notes', the sights and sounds, the pauses, have their own interrelated rhythms, and out of their composition comes the dramatic impact"[1]. The working relationship between Beckett and the actress Billie Whitelaw provides an ideal example of this approach, and Whitelaw has described herself as the musical instrument which Beckett used in order to "play the notes"[2]. No doubt much of this derives from the terms in which Beckett has himself attempted to convey his dramatic vision; Ruby Cohn (amongst others) has commented on Beckett's tendency to use musical terminology (especially Italian terms) in rehearsal[3], while Whitelaw has also described Beckett's preference for directing her by "conducting" the lines[4]. According to Deirdre Bair, Beckett even went so far as to use a meeting with Stravinsky to question the composer about possible means of notating the tempi of his plays and the length of pauses[5].

No doubt it would be possible to dismiss all this as a kind of conceit, an appropriation of terminology which has its uses as a metaphor for the required effect, but which has little to do with music itself. Nevertheless, many of the comments reach deeper than this and seem to imply that this "musicality" is closely bound up

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[1]George Devine quoted in Alan Schneider, "Working with Beckett" in Stanley E. Gontarski (ed.), *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 249.

[2]James Knowlson, "Extracts from an Unscripted Interview with Billie Whitelaw by James Knowlson," *Journal of Beckett Studies* III (Summer 1978), 89.

[3]Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 153. Occasionally, Beckett seems to have extended these musical analogies further; for example, Walter Asmus describes Beckett comparing a particular transition with a specific tonal modulation. See Walter Asmus, "Rehearsal Notes for the German Premiere of Beckett's *That Time* and *Footfalls* at the Schiller-Theater Werkstatt, Berlin," *Journal of Beckett Studies* II (Summer 1977), 93.

[4]Billie Whitelaw describes this working method in an interview in Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.), *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 6. Whitelaw also discusses this method and makes frequent reference to the musicality of Beckett's plays in her autobiography. See Billie Whitelaw, *Billie Whitelaw ... Who He?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).

[5]Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (London: Vintage, 1990), 581.

with Beckett's approach to literary and dramatic language. Many of the performers, for example, clearly relate the musical effect to Beckett's determination that his characters and their words or actions cannot be explained and that actors should avoid imposing an interpretation upon the words[6]. For example, Peggy Ashcroft reports that in rehearsal for *Happy Days* "Beckett would answer questions like 'Why does she gabble as she does at a certain point?' by saying 'Because it has to go fast there'"[7]. Similarly, rehearsing *Footfalls* with Rose Hill, Beckett announced "we are not doing this play realistically or psychologically, we are doing it musically"[8]. For some actors this approach is problematic, preventing them from feeling in control of their character's identity. For others, though (and especially for those who have become particularly associated with Beckett's work), this attitude is fundamental to Beckett's dramatic vision. For Barry McGovern, for example, it seems that to discuss content or motivation in the usual fashion is unhelpful: "once you start talking about what some of his plays are about, it's really *how* they are about"[9]. David Warrilow, like Whitelaw, even claims that understanding the text in the traditional sense is completely irrelevant: "I know that if an actor gets up onstage and starts to play the meaning of the thing it dies, it just dies. Meaning is whatever happens in the viewer's experience of it"[10].

From this point of view, the use of musical terminology provides a directorial method which treats the characters, words, and stage directions as given, the only remaining question being the effective portrayal of their structural relationships. Again, Beckett's own approach would seem to emphasise this; Roger Blin describes Beckett's contribution to rehearsals of *Fin de Partie* causing the actors some difficulty:

> at first, he looked on his play as a kind of musical score. When a word occurred or was repeated, when Hamm called to Clov, Clov should always come in the same way every time, like a musical phrase coming from the same instrument with the same volume. I thought that this idea was very much a product of the intellect and would result in an extraordinary rigour. He didn't see any drama or suspense in Clov's imminent departure. He would either leave or he wouldn't[11].

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[6]For example, Beckett wrote regarding the interpretation of *Endgame*: "Hamm as stated and Clov as stated ... in such a place and in such a world, that's all I can manage, more than I could". Letter to Alan Schneider (December 29, 1957), quoted in *ibid.*, 163.

[7]Peggy Ashcroft interviewed by Katherine Worth in Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.), *op. cit.*, 12.

[8]See James Knowlson, "Beckett as Director" in S. E. Wilmer (ed.), *Beckett in Dublin* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1992), 13.

[9]Barry McGovern in a discussion of Beckett's *Rough for Radio II*. Everett C. Frost (director and producer), *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays* (New York: Voices International, 1988) [Audiotape].

[10]Warrilow quoted in Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 229.

[11]Tom Bishop, "Blin on Beckett Interviewed by Tom Bishop" in Stanley E. Gontarski (ed.), *op. cit.*, 233.

Such an approach to character and drama is clearly antithetical to the training of most actors and directors[12], yet not only do Beckett's notebooks for the play reveal such thinking to be absolutely fundamental to its structure[13], but it is similarly central to its effectiveness (and, not least, to its comedy).

Walter Asmus has commented on Beckett's general determination to match particular movements to particular themes or even words (and, further, to any incidental sounds or pauses), the movements being choreographed as precisely as possible[14]. Beckett expressed his views on this most succinctly in the 1960s: "producers don't seem to have any sense of form in movement, the kind of form one finds in music, for instance, where themes keep recurring. When, in a text, actions are repeated, they ought to be made unusual the first time, so that when they happen again - in exactly the same way - an audience will recognize them from before"[15]. Thus the plays demand great sensitivity to intonation and rhythm, repetition and variation. Asmus describes this as a part of Beckett's general "striving for an identity between form and meaning that would prevent, ultimately, their being differentiated one from the other"[16]. Clearly, then, the general perception of Beckett's texts as musical relates closely to his reluctance to discuss questions of content except as questions of form and his preference for exploring how something should be said rather than why it should be said.

Beyond this, however, little real attention has been paid to the question of quite how or why such an apparently musical effect is achieved, and how it may or may not differ from the approaches of other authors. Many critics have, like the actors and directors, commented in passing on the musicality of Beckett's works[17], while others have employed musical terms in their descriptions. This latter tendency, involving manifold references to the "orchestration", "counterpoint" or "harmony"

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[12]For example, Pierre Chabert, an experienced director of Beckett's work and one who clearly has great respect for the writer, suggests that Beckett's own directorial methods move too far away from psychological questions and are too formalist: "Beckett leaned towards music, and music basically goes against what is "natural" in the theatrical interpretation of a text. Personally, I think that one must find an equilibrium that tends toward something more human, something that has a more spontaneous feel to it". Chabert quoted in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *Directing Beckett* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 74.

[13]In particular, see Stanley E. Gontarski (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett: Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992). Also see Paul Lawley, "Symbolic Structure and Creative Obligation in *Endgame*," *Journal of Beckett Studies* V (Autumn 1979), 45-68.

[14]Walter Asmus quoted in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *op. cit.*, 44.

[15]James Knowlson, "Beckett as Director" *op. cit.*, 13-4.

[16]Walter Asmus quoted in Lois Oppenheim (ed.), *op. cit.*, 44.

[17]This can easily be seen in reviews of Beckett's work. See, for example, A. Alvarez on *For to End Yet Again* and the comments on Stanley Kauffmann's review of *Not I*, both collected in Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 35, 351. Similarly, see Benedict Nightingale on *Not I* and Martin Esslin on *Words and Music*, collected in Virginia Cooke, *Beckett on File* (London: Methuen, 1985), 34, 47.

of the voices[18], usually amounts to little more than a metaphorical conceit. While the actors' and directors' use of musical terminology seem to result from a sincere perception of a difference in Beckett's approach to language and to the resultant sounding effect, the critical deployment of technical musical terms does little to explore this difference; often, the correspondence seems merely an attempt to elevate the critic's own status, invoking his or her apparent knowledge of the apparently "higher" art (in the Schopenhauerian tradition) so as to display an ability to move beyond "mere" literary theory. One or two critics have attempted to extend such analogies even further, into the realm of specific musical techniques. However, such approaches always seem to fail, either by unwittingly exposing the superficiality of the analogy as a result of the ignorance of technical detail, or else by failing to acknowledge the structural significance of the fact that Beckett does continue to use words and therefore maintains some semantic links where music cannot[19].

Generally, then, the more pertinent references to Beckett's musicality have avoided the comparison with specific musical techniques and seem to recognise, if not to explore, the fact that the perception of Beckett's texts as musical must be

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[18]Enoch Brater, for example, is one prominent Beckett critic who clearly likes to employ musical terminology in his discussion of the sounding quality of Beckett's work. *All That Fall* is described as reliant upon "melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic relationships" and as "an oratorio for interior voices that is musically and emotionally complete". Brater also makes more frequent general references to "harmony", "instrumentation", and so on, as does Judith Dearlove (amongst others). See Enoch Brater, *The Drama in the Text: Beckett's Late Fiction* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 18, 28, 32-3; Judith Dearlove, "The Weaving of Penelope's Tapestry: Genre in the Works of Samuel Beckett," *Journal of Beckett Studies* XI-XII (1989), 126.

The work of Mary Bryden demonstrates a different (and in my view more effective) approach, employing musical terms for the examination of Beckett's work, but doing so in a wholly theoretical context. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of music as a space of "deterritorialised flow" free of semantic oppositions, Bryden uses this theoretical formulation as a means of exploring Beckett's destabilisation of linguistic boundaries and, in particular, the related undermining of traditional gender positions. See Mary Bryden, *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama: Her Own Other* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 195-8.

[19]William E. Grim, for example, compares the structure of *Molloy* to Brahmsian developing variation, while Emmanuel Jacquart discusses *Endgame* in relation to sonata form by establishing exposition, development and recapitulation sections. Both are insightful with regard to Beckett's structural thinking. However, the musical analogies are severely limited by the failure to recognise both the fundamental importance of harmonic relationships to these musical forms and the fact that the semantic tensions of language are wholly different to the structural tensions effected by composers' deployment of tonality.

Mary Catanzaro, on the other hand, attempts to relate the chance procedures used in the composition of *Lessness* to avant-garde music of the 1960s. While Beckett might possibly have derived the initial idea from musical works - he did, according to Deirdre Bair, urge Jean Reavey to pay attention to developments in contemporary music - the approaches have nothing more in common and Beckett did not extend this experiment further (other than in the similar permutational techniques of *The Lost Ones*). Thus Catanzaro's determination to relate Beckett's techniques to what she describes as "the composer/serialists of the late 1960s", grouping together composers with such hugely varying approaches as "Cage ... Xanakis [*sic*], Subotnik, and Stockhausen", suffers from the lack of any real detail and from the sweeping over-simplification of musical ideas.

See William E. Grim, "The Developing Variation in Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*," *Romance Studies* XI (Winter 1987), 47-52; Emmanuel Jacquart, "*Endgame*, Master Game," *Journal of Beckett Studies* IV/1 (Autumn 1994), 77; Mary Catanzaro, "Song and Improvisation in *Lessness*," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* II (1993), 213-8 ; Deirdre Bair, *op. cit.* , 585.

bound up with his formal treatment of content. Probably the most effective work in this area is found in composer Kenneth Gaburo's discussion of *Play*; Gaburo examines in real detail the possibility of a musical approach to the performance of the play, while still acknowledging the inevitable differences between the text and a piece of music[20]. Nevertheless, even this is confined to the discussion of one work.

Other critics have taken different approaches; both Stanley Gontarski and Hannah Copeland make use of the Nietzschean opposition of Apollonian and Dionysian art, seeing Beckett's contraction away from rational contemplation towards the more direct evocation of the fundamental suffering of existence as effecting an attempted eschewal of reference that is fundamentally musical (following Nietzsche's re-working of the Schopenhauerian vision of music, wherein a direct evocation of the artist's vision can be attained through music's union of idea and expression)[21]. Daniel Albright seems to reach the same conclusion, asserting that Beckett gradually loses interest in specific images: "it is this quality of disengagement, of teeming contentlessness, that makes Beckett's work seem musical - the biologist Lewis Thomas has written that Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion* is about the act of thinking itself, not about any particular thought, and the same might be said of *The Unnamable*"[22].

As will become clear, this study shares aspects of approaches such as those of Copeland and Gontarski. However, there is something unsatisfactory about the simplicity of this position, which seems to reduce Beckett's work to a gradual process of contraction towards nothingness. For Copeland, for example, the musical effect of Beckett's work is envisaged as a stage in the process of reducing the object-content of the texts, a process which, it seems, has as its aim the total abandonment of expression: "the general evolution in his works takes the shape of a dynamic spiral moving downwards toward the perfect coincidence of form and content, an ideal that can be attained only in immobility and silence"[23]. Yet, despite the indisputable fact of Beckett's gradual distillation of ideas, fundamental to the whole of his output is the impossibility (and even, in later works, the undesirability) of silence. The process of reduction does not entail the gradual abandonment of words or of the need to express, but rather the refinement of that expression towards a more authentic presentation of the human condition ("the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power

[20]See Kenneth Gaburo, *The Music in Samuel Beckett's Play* (La Jolla: Lingua Press, 1976).
[21]See Hannah Case Copeland, *Art and the Artist in the Work of Samuel Beckett* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 39-45; Stanley E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 183-5.
[22]Daniel Albright, *Representation and Imagination: Beckett, Kafka, Nabokov and Schoenberg* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 171.
[23]Hannah Case Copeland, *op. cit.,* 45.

to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express"[24]). Similarly, despite Beckett's apparent determination to negate the referential content of words as far as is possible, he nevertheless continues to work with language in the full knowledge that some semantic element will always remain.

This is central to the question of the musical quality of Beckett's work, for, as Anna McMullan writes with reference to the various comments on Beckett's musicality,

> these references to music fail to take account of the agonistic relationship between music and meaning in Beckett's drama. Alvin Epstein, who has acted in numerous American productions of Beckett's work, insists that 'No matter how abstract and disconnected you want to keep yourself from the meaning in the text, it still has meaning; it's not notes in music, where you can keep your distance. These are specific words, they say things, they have referential meanings'[25].

Epstein's comments provide an important refutation of the tendency to present Beckett's work as a pure drive towards abstraction and finally silence. At the same time, however, the description of a process of reduction clearly has relevance to the paring down of external reference, and this, in turn, is undeniably related to the pervasive view of Beckett's texts as in some sense musical.

Moving somewhere between these positions, this study begins from the perception that the musicality of Beckett's texts actually stems from his repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with words and with a language system which makes impossible the direct expression of ideas. For Beckett, the fact of the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified, the fact that words can be used and re-used in different contexts, and the pre-established structures of grammar combine to deny language the ability directly to evoke true experience. Yet, at the same time, its abandonment is impossible: language is our primary mode of expression and the primary means by which our knowledge of self and world is constituted. Beckett's acknowledgement of the restrictions of language, therefore, engenders the breakdown of conventional structures and the attempt to negate the referential content of words in order to maximise their ability to express ideas. A process of reduction does, therefore, take place, the conventional content of the words being reduced so as to foreground the unique relative position of each word within each text, thereby exploring the fundamental relationship between words and meaning. In *Worstward Ho* - probably the most extreme (and, in these terms, most successful) case - the referential content is almost negligible and the construction

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[24]This quotation is one of Beckett's comments in his discussion of Tal Coat with Georges Duthuit. Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1965), 103.

[25]Anna McMullan, "Samuel Beckett as director: the art of mastering failure" in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 199.

involves expansion from minimal linguistic units as a result of the compositional implications of both the sounding qualities of the syllables and the minimal semantics which unavoidably remain. Thus the musicality that is initially perceived through the sensual and rhythmic effect is fundamentally a consequence of the composition: the construction is as self-referential as is possible in language, the form as dependent as possible upon the impulsion of the syllables.

The musical effect is therefore intimately bound up with Beckett's "aesthetics of failure" and, ironically, with the fact that abandoning language is ultimately impossible. In this sense, Beckett does follow Pater's assertion that all art aspires to the condition of music, but not in the manner normally envisaged, for his work is fundamentally bound to the tensions of the language system. Discussion of the "musicality" of language is usually concerned with heightened poetic effect, with the foregrounding of the rhythmic and sounding quality of the words. With regard to meaningful content, however, this "musicalisation" is usually an effect of the loosening of semantic relations which is intended to increase the suggestive power of the language. Thus the Symbolists intensified the Romantic and Decadent valorising of music for its vagueness and abstraction, wishing to reach a communion beyond the banality of words and to evoke a higher world of mysterious allusion and unspoken ideas[26].

While Beckett may share the Symbolist view of language as an obstruction to real ideas, it is hard to see him, as does Rosette Lamont, as the heir of the Symbolist tradition[27]. The Symbolist dream is essentially that of an intensified poeticism wherein the symbolic function of words and their inner relationships are multiplied so as to increase their powers of suggestion. Thus what usually passes for the "musicality" of language - that poeticism which the Symbolists attempted to intensify - is closely bound to the extension of the referential capacity of words and, this being precisely the capacity which music lacks, therefore belongs firmly to the world of literature rather than music. For Beckett, on the other hand, the aim is not to extend the implicative potential of words, but rather to pare it down, so as to explore the relationship between referential and non-referential meaning.

This also sheds some light upon the relationship between Joyce and Beckett for, as will be discussed, it is in *Finnegans Wake* that this multiplication of reference is taken to extremes (hence the fact that it is often Joyce who is cited as the most

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[26]See May Daniel, *The French Drama of the Unspoken* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953) and Andrew K. Kennedy, *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 22-3.

[27]See Rosette Lamont, "To Speak the Words of 'The Tribe'" in Katherine H. Burkman (ed.), *Myth and Ritual in the Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1987), 58.

musical of writers in traditional terms)[28]. Of course, much of Beckett's writing displays a sounding effect that is superficially comparable to that of Joyce, but this is produced as a result of precisely the opposite process to Joyce's accumulation of reference. In this way Joyce is perhaps the ultimate writer, whereas Beckett's ambivalence towards his material produces something entirely different and less writerly. As Jacques Derrida has written, "you stay on the edge of reading Joyce ... and the endless plunge throws you back into the river-bank, on the brink of another possible immersion, *ad infinitum*"[29]. This is, of course, an exhilarating reading experience, and is so in precisely the opposite manner to Beckett's *Worstward Ho* (for example), which exhilarates by drawing the reader into the very fundamentals of signification. This point is illustrated by the difference in the working methods of the two writers: while Joyce reportedly liked to list words on separate sheets of paper and accumulate associations[30], studies of Beckett's notebooks show him to have worked by a process of textual distillation, often reducing explanatory detail[31].

The contention of this study, then, is that due to the nature of Beckett's exploration of meaning, his texts are more fundamentally musical than those of perhaps any other writer, reaching a state as close to that of music as one could get without actually abandoning the use of words. His late texts not only lay bare the workings of language, but come as close as possible to the meeting place between music and language. This, of course, has implications for music theory as much as for literature, for in claiming that the actual composition (rather than merely the sounding effect) is in some senses musical in its almost self-referential expansion, we open up the question of how music does, in any case, produce meaning. The tendency is for discussion of the relationship between music and language to treat music as if it were wholly abstract (this is found, for example, in the Symbolists' idealisation of music, and, of course, in many of the comments on the musicality of Beckett). However, the question of the sense in which music produces meaning and how its significance relates to experience has by no means been answered. Arguments over the relationship between music and emotional experience, along with the whole question of cognition and/or structural understanding, still persist. That a writer uses words in such a way that, despite the minimisation of reference,

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[28]According to Arthur Power, Joyce clearly thought of his work as tending towards the condition of music. See Arthur Power, *Conversations with Joyce* (London: Millington, 1974), 106. For a detailed exploration of Joyce's "musicality" (in this traditional sense), see Peter Myers, *The Sound of Finnegans Wake* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

[29]Jacques Derrida "Two Words for Joyce" in Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer (eds.), *Post-structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 148.

[30]Robert Martin Adams, *Afterjoyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 61.

[31]See Richard L. Admussen, *The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: A Study* (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall, 1979). Also particularly interesting in this respect is James Knowlson's study of the genesis of *Come and Go*. See James Knowlson, "Good Heavens," *Gambit* VII/28 (1976), 101-8.

significance is attributed to their experience should surely be of interest to those exploring the question of musical meaning.

By maximising the self-referential aspect of composition while still refusing to abandon words, Beckett's later work exposes not only a musical element at the heart of linguistic structures, but also, by implication, a linguistic (but not necessarily referential) element at the heart of meaningful musical structures. This implies an interdependency between the musical and linguistic aspects, a relationship that is central both to the significance of Beckett's work and to that of music: it is this which could, perhaps, begin to account for the difficulty of explaining how both, while tending towards abstraction, are nevertheless perceived as wholly and directly relevant to our experience of being. For Beckett criticism (and literary theory in general), as for musicology, this should be significant; such an approach provides a means of resisting the categorisation of either Beckett's works or music as absolutely formalist and abstract, while still countering those who maintain that to see Beckett as in any way eschewing reference, or to see music as not directly correspondent to specific emotions, is necessarily to deny the significance of the works. The artist Bram van Velde once expressed his sense that "every phrase that Beckett writes is something he has somehow experienced"[32]; to assert that the significance of Beckett's texts lies, to varying extent, outside of the realms of the referential is not to deny their fundamental relevance to experience, but rather to open up the whole question of how meaningful experience is constituted. Despite (or perhaps because of) his immersion in language, Beckett's idiosyncratic approach to words effectively posits the idea of significance as neither directly attributable to linguistic meaning nor metaphysical and transcendent, and this is of fundamental relevance to musical philosophy, music having traditionally been confined to the latter category.

Despite this assertion of Beckett's difference from most other writers, his earlier work in particular displays a detailed awareness of his literary and philosophical inheritance. As Richard Ellmann says, "reading Wilde, Yeats, and Joyce does not make the coming of Beckett predictable. Yet once he fills the scene we cannot help but consider or reconsider the writers who preceded him"[33]. Much recent Beckett criticism has been devoted to establishing precisely which ideas Beckett took from which writers, and how those ideas were absorbed into his works (whether as direct quotation, as modified allusion, or in the form of philosophical

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[32]Charles Juliet, *Conversations with Samuel Beckett and Bram van Velde* (Leiden: Academic Press, 1995), 54.

[33]Richard Ellmann, *Four Dubliners: Wilde, Yeats, Joyce and Beckett* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), 94.

systems to be explored). Additionally, it is only relatively recently that critics have begun to recognise the extent to which early characters were modelled on real figures known to Beckett[34]. In general, this tendency to allusion gradually lessens, quotations, ideas, and even landscapes that appear almost intact in the earlier works reappearing in less concrete and detailed form in later texts. Thus the distillation of Beckett's literary, Irish, and personal heritage is very much a part of the general breakdown of traditional ideas and structures. Similarly, while the earlier work explicitly discusses the viability of certain philosophical positions and particular approaches to ideas and their expression, the later work *embodies* the remaining processes, involving the reader in the actual attempt to establish identity and location. From this perspective it is hardly surprising that Beckett's early references to music, despite a tendency towards obfuscation, are relevant to his approach to language and to the musicality of effect that becomes apparent in the later work.

The post-structuralist exploration of intertextuality should imply the relevance to musical thought of literary discussion of music, and this certainly cannot be denied with Beckett. The first chapters of the thesis therefore examine Beckett's early treatment of the idea of music, moving from his idiosyncratic interpretation of Proust (and of Proust's use of music as a model for literature), to Beckett's own deployment of music in his exploration of the limits of rational thought and self-knowledge. Beckett's *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), in particular, shows him to be exploring peculiarly modernist concerns and often using images of music as a means of exposing their limitations. This leads, in *Watt* (1945), to a closer examination of the boundaries of rationality and to an intense frustration with logical thought and the inflexibility of language; again, music is here deployed as a symbol for the traditional polarisation of logocentric reason and irrationality.

As has often been discussed, *The Unnamable* (1953) essentially presents more effectively than any critical discussion the crisis of self-representation at the boundaries of modernity. However, Beckett's particular concerns and his focus upon the extent to which meaning is bound to traditional linguistic structures cannot but invoke those questions that have always been recognised as central to musical meaning. The exploration of ideas of rationality in *Watt* is therefore considered in

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[34]The work of Jim Mays has been particularly important in this respect. Additionally, James Knowlson's recent biography of Beckett demonstrates further the extent to which the author developed his characters from real figures. See J. C. C. Mays, "Young Beckett's Irish Roots," *Irish University Review* XIV/1 (1984), 18-33; J. C. C. Mays, "Irish Beckett, A Borderline Instance" in S. E. Wilmer (ed.), *op. cit.* , 133-46; James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996). Also see W. J. McCormack, *From Burke to Beckett: Tradition and Betrayal in Literary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994); Robert Welch, *Changing States: Transformation in Modern Irish Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); John P. Harrington, *The Irish Beckett* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991). For an interesting alternative perspective, see Rodney Sharkey, "Irish? Au Contraire!: The Search for Identity in the Fiction of Samuel Beckett," *Journal of Beckett Studies* III/2 (Spring 1994), 1-18.

relation to certain attempts to account for musical significance; additionally, in taking the work of Susanne Langer as a starting point, chapter four in a sense works from a musicological position that would have been roughly contemporary with Beckett's first mature works.

Beckett's sense of the inadequacy of the rational-irrational dialectic leads to the undermining of all such binary structures in his later work, and to a more complex notion of the self and of meaning. It is precisely this deconstruction of hierarchical dualisms that allows the development of the differential "syntax of weakness"[35] which is found in its most effective form in *Worstward Ho* (1983). Once more, then, Beckett's work prefigures the ideas of much recent critical theory, and again the musicality of the work is central to this. Chapter five therefore explores the idea that not only should Beckett's work be of interest to musicology, but that his position helps to clarify the relationship between aspects of recent critical theory and music theory.

Effectively, the thesis aims to present three possible ways of exploring the relationship between music and Beckett's treatment of language; the first (in chapters two and three) exploring the modernist position, the second (in chapter four) exploring the position contemporary with Beckett's first mature works (a position somewhere on the boundaries of modernism and postmodernism), and the third exploring postmodern approaches. In many ways, the areas are intended as possible starting-points for parallel explorations that could themselves easily develop further or in different directions. Finally, in the light of all that precedes, the thesis begins to explore composers' responses to Beckett's work. Not surprisingly, the texts have proved attractive to many composers, but, given their musicality, the question of setting becomes especially difficult. The final chapter, therefore, examines two less conventional musical approaches to Beckett which, ironically through their very avoidance of typical text-setting, explore the possibility of creating musical parallels to Beckett's preoccupations.

It should by now be apparent that the thesis follows the trajectory of Beckett's work. Just as the texts move from exploring the idea of music towards effecting an embodied musicality, so the thesis moves away from that which would traditionally be considered literary criticism, through increasingly "musical" concerns, and finally to the analysis of actual works of music. At the same time, however, this is not intended to imply that Beckett's work follows a single linear path: it certainly does not. Due to limitations of space, many works have been

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[35]James Knowlson and John Pilling, *Frescoes of the Skull: The Late Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (London: John Calder, 1979), 178.

ignored[36], and there is less detailed discussion of individual texts than would have been ideal. This is partly excused by the fact that a huge mass of Beckett criticism is now available, and many ideas are now recognised and accepted as central: it is pointless to rehearse those arguments unless they are of direct relevance to the particular focus. The effect of this, however, is perhaps to give the impression that Beckett's work forms a single process of thought and a teleology of gradual reduction. In some senses it is hard to avoid this conclusion, and the clear re-working of related ideas in certain different texts certainly encourages such a response. However, as with those accounts of Beckett that interpret his development as a contraction towards silence, this approach is unsatisfactory. Many of Beckett's texts do not fit directly into this pattern, and the danger, therefore, is that these works come to be unjustly regarded as peripheral. Such an interpretation falsely implies the progression towards a final solution; while the intense anxiety of many of the early works stems from a desire for such a solution, the later texts exist in a condition where not only does such an endpoint seem to be accepted as impossible, but its desirability is also questionable: a text such as *Neither*, for example, exists outside of these concerns, in a state of permanent "in-betweenness" which has no beginning and no end. This explanation, therefore, is by way of an excuse for any impression of purely linear progression that may be apparent. Finally, then, the three-fold approach to the texts, despite its specific alignment here with particular areas of Beckett's

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[36]Amongst the texts to which this thesis makes little reference are *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, and this may seem surprising, given Beckett's deployment of music as an actual "character" in these plays. Similarly, there is no detailed discussion of either *Ghost Trio* or *Nacht und Träume*, in which Beckett uses specific works of Beethoven and Schubert in a related manner, along with few or no words. While much could be written about these works, their treatment of music is really quite different both to the complex approach to the idea of music in the early prose and to the musical effect of the later texts. In *Words and Music* and *Cascando*, "Music" is cast against "Words" in a kind of competition for expressive superiority. This is clearly related to Beckett's general preoccupations, and yet the fact that the music cannot be composed by Beckett (and therefore changes according to the specific composer involved with each production) renders this opposition somewhat unsatisfactory: music is treated as a pure idea, indivisible and unchanging in essence from one manifestation to another. Thus these plays, ironically, do not display the complex understanding of music that is apparent in Beckett's treatment of language.

    Ghost Trio and *Nacht und Träume* to an extent avoid this problem by using specific compositions. Both achieve a lyrical expressivity by means of the relationship between the passages of music and the simple imagery. Again, however, music is treated as a given, effectively deployed for its essential character, and discussion of these plays would, therefore, be tangential to this study. Beckett once told his cousin, the musician John Beckett, "Schubert's music seems to me to be more nearly pure spirit than that of any other composer" (see Clas Zilliacus, *Beckett and Broadcasting* (Abö: Abö Akademie, 1976), 38); *Words and Music*, *Cascando* and *Ghost Trio* do not use Schubert, but all these plays treat music as "pure spirit", as ideal and essential in the Schopenhauerian tradition. This is not to suggest that the works are inferior, but, from a musical point of view, what is more interesting is the complex way in which structures come to take on significance, and it is in Beckett's treatment of language that this process is really explored.

    Similarly, other topics could have been discussed; the whole area of performance and its implications for the musical effect of the plays is one which could prove very rewarding (the rhythmic analysis of Billie Whitelaw's performances immediately comes to mind as a particularly interesting subject). However, this area is too substantial for inclusion here, warranting a thesis of its own.

output, is intended to mirror the material's own resistance to a single perspective on the complex relationship between music and language.

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CHAPTER TWO
Beckett, Proust and Music.

Summary:

Beckett's "Proust" and critics' interpretation of its ideas as indicative of Beckett's own - Beckett's awareness of the significance of music in Proust and his lack of discussion of the topic - the Proustian presentation of music as a model for literature, its Schopenhauerian basis and its critical misinterpretation - the fourfold structure of musical perception in Proust, its relationship to the perception of involuntary memory, to the perception of the self and other, and to the four sign-worlds elaborated - Proust's consequent positioning of music as the ideal art form, underpinning all major themes and their processes of development - the pessimistic bias of Beckett's discussion of those themes - his implicit elevation of the status of music as a result of his (anti-Proustian) rejection of the concept of a successful work of literature.

Beckett's treatment of music as an annoyance in his early works - its association with painful introspection and its deployment as a means of rejecting the Proustian solution, effectively reiterating the negative conclusions of "Proust" - the consequent focus upon the intellectual pleasures of formal patterns - the apparent relief from language that Watt occasionally finds in music - the limitations of this relief and Beckett's tendency to describe the occasions in terms associated with involuntary memory - these works as therefore extending the bias of "Proust", but reducing the status of music - the early Beckettian fear of introspection as effectively dividing Proust's concept of music into its two aspects (non-referential form and the direct reflection of essence) - the latter as rejected while the former is maintained as a fascination with pure design - Beckett's later work as beginning to repair this division through a new approach to the self, to the interior-exterior dualism, and to language - this as effectively realising the Proustian solution more completely than Proust ever could, since Proust can never eschew the referential framework where Beckett can - Beckett as therefore heeding in his own terms his acknowledgement of the catalytic role of music in Proust.

Beckett's 1931 study of *A la recherche du temps perdu* was his most extended piece of literary criticism. Not surprisingly, it has been mined by critics both as a major source of Beckett's opinions on the role of art and the artist, and also as a potential guide to the themes of his own output. Subsequently, it seems only natural that early studies of Beckett's work should have equated certain comments in "Proust"

- most particularly that "the only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent" and that "the artist is active, but negatively, shrinking from the nullity of extracircumferential phenomena, drawn into the core of the eddy"[1] - with the apparently increasing immersion of Beckett's characters in obsessive self-examination.

It is, of course, true to say that a process of reduction is taking place; even in the earlier prose works - *Mercier and Camier* or the *Four Novellas*, for example - the inclusion and description of everyday objects is restricted by the repeated appearance of a few particular items: bicycles, hats, and umbrellas most especially. From Watt's relentless attempts to assess the significance of objects by considering all the possible permutations of meaning[2], these obsessions are gradually stripped away, and instances of situational description are reduced to the basic presentation (from *The Unnamable* on) of solitary beings in barren landscapes - hence the perception of a development away from materiality towards abstract subjectivism and the critical appropriation of Beckett's comments in "Proust" in support of such an interpretation. This, however, is to ignore the ambiguity of Beckett's frame of reference, assuming that his assertions are intended as general observations rather than as specific to Proust. As Steven Connor has pointed out, it is equally possible to interpret the reductive process in the opposite manner, as a gradual progression towards an ever more intense awareness of the predicament of immanence[3]. In this sense, Beckett's presentation of characters pacing endlessly back and forth, or trapped in the purgatorial recurrence of past events, is less an excavation of the soul than a ritualised acknowledgement of the habituality of existence.

Opening up the interpretative possibilities in this way reveals the dangers in the tendency to find parallels between "Proust" and Beckett's own work. However, more recent critics - Nicholas Zurbrugg most especially, in his book *Beckett and Proust* - have been at pains to point out such problems. Zurbrugg shows that "Proust", while being an important piece of literary criticism, is rather selective in its representation of the themes of *A la recherche*. In "Proust", Beckett focuses heavily upon the more pessimistic aspects of the work - the impossibility of attaining one's desires, the problems of communication between human beings, the stultifying banality of habit, and the pain that can result from momentary lucidities when the spell of habit is suddenly broken. In the bias of his study, Beckett reveals an indifference - or even an antipathy - towards Proust's examination of benevolence and authentic social behaviour, ignoring the subtleties of the Proustian vision and reducing "the

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[1]Samuel Beckett, "Proust" in *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit, op. cit.*, 65.

[2]"Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot ... it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot.... For it was not a pot, the more he looked, the more he reflected, the more he felt sure of that". Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (London: John Calder, 1963), 78.

[3]Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 45.

multiplicity of Proust's terms to a pessimistic, Beckettian dialectic"[4]. Zurbrugg concludes that it is not so much Beckett's themes and comments in "Proust" that can help critics to understand Beckett's own preoccupations, but rather the angle from which he approaches and (mis)represents them. Beckett discusses Proust's contempt for an art based upon realism and disavows any positive interpretation of his presentation of relationships, leading to the critical assertion that Beckettian characters "similarly probe the eddy of the self". However, even if it could be argued that certain of Beckett's early heroes are at first preoccupied with such concerns, they soon find introspection too painful and retreat, with the later characters, into the attempt to "evade centripetal introspection by following the centrifugal impulse to acquire the fictional friendship - or 'company' - of imaginary, nonautobiographical data"[5].

Despite all this, it is possible to trace the bias of Beckett's study of *A la recherche* further back into Proust's own examination of the creative act. Beckett was well aware of the significance of the music of Proust's fictional composer Vinteuil - indeed, he was probably the first critic to suggest that "music is the catalytic element in the work of Proust"[6], and the first to detect the influence of Schopenhauer upon this. By examining the presentation of music in Proust and the attitude towards linguistic signification identified by Beckett, it is possible to suggest that Beckett's concentration upon certain selected aspects of the Proustian world is a specific result of his perception of those themes whose emergence is reliant upon the "catalyst" of Vinteuil's music. Thus the pessimistic emphasis results from considering the problematics of a literature which models itself upon music in order, following Schopenhauer, to attempt a pure and objectified image of the world. In turn, these difficulties were increasingly to preoccupy Beckett in his own writing (despite the difference in approach).

Beckett wrote that "a book could be written on the significance of music in Proust"[7], and since the publication of his critical text, that book has been written several times over. Sources have been suggested for Vinteuil's works[8], claims have been made as to the depth (or superficiality) of Proust's knowledge of music[9], and structural comparisons have been made between musical forms (such as the sonata)

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[4]Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust* (Gerrards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1988), 109.
[5]_____, "Beckett, Proust, Burroughs, and the Perils of 'Image Warfare'," in M. Beja, S. E. Gontarski, and P. Astier (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 178.
[6]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 92.
[7]*Ibid.*, 91.
[8]See, for example, J. N. Alley, "Proust and Art," *Revue de Littérature Comparée* XXXVII (July-Sept. 1963), 410-30; J. M. Cocking, "Proust and Music," *Essays in French Literature* IV (Nov.1967), 13-29; Dorothy Adelson, "The Vinteuil Sonata," *Music and Letters* XXIII/3 (July 1942), 228-33.
[9]See Dorothy Adelson, *op. cit.*

and the composition of this vast novel. The latter falls foul of the problem of generality often encountered in studies which compare literary and musical forms; to suggest that a literary work follows a sonata form structure through taking a couple of main themes, developing them, and achieving some kind of resolution at the end is to show nothing very much more than an extremely basic kinship between much Western art of certain periods. All that is gained is the acknowledgement of a general tendency towards statement, expansion, and cyclic reunification within mainstream, Western, temporally-based art; what are lost are the manifold variations in structural thinking which result from the differences between a form which uses semantically definitive units, and one which orders non-referential units. To quote Roman Ingarden, "the connection between the individual parts of the literary work is in general much closer than in a musical work because it contains the stratum of semantic units which determine various logical connections between sentences and as a consequence between the objective sentence correlates appertaining to them"[10]. Even though it could be argued that such a statement relies upon the questionable assumption of a preference for the referential framework and a less comprehensive understanding of musical relationships, the comment highlights the fact that the literary work automatically possesses a level of pre-established interrelations that music lacks.

It seems appropriate to conclude that such comparisons should be abandoned in favour of the examination of the role of music in the organisation of the work: this is especially the case with a project as huge as *A la recherche*. It is this path that is followed by perhaps the most effective study of Proust and music - that by Jean-Jacques Nattiez. Nattiez recognises, like others before him, that the works of Proust's composer, Vinteuil, "mark out the psychological evolution of the characters" and are vital for "the narrator's discovery of his vocation as a writer, of the nature of the 'true life', and of the recovery of Time through the literary work"[11]. Again like others before him, Nattiez sees Wagner and the *leitmotif* technique as a major influence upon Proust, suggesting that such techniques made way for the examination of different states in various circumstances. Nattiez extends this comparison, asserting that it is in the Wagnerian technique of reminiscing about one work in another, and especially in his quest for absolute truth through the work of art, that Proust finds the model for *A la recherche*. No doubt there is much to be said for such an interpretation; the little phrase of the sonata heard by Swann at the Verdurins' house becomes a *leitmotif* of variable meaning in that it is used by Charles to represent differing emotional states (especially in his relationship with Odette). For Swann, the phrase develops from his

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[10]Roman Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. Ruth Ann Crawley and Kenneth R. Olson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 228.
[11]Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Proust as Musician*, trans. Derrick Puffett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

first confused apprehension of it as a purely musical impression[12], through its appropriation as "the national anthem of their love"[13], to the sadness of hearing the music when Odette no longer loves him[14] and his final distortion of the phrase into the role of procurer between Odette and Forcheville. As a result, Swann destroys his initial appreciation of the music through his determination to interpret it in terms of the events of his own life.

Many of Proust's themes follow a similar pattern of development through repetition in different or revised states. The instances of involuntary memory could be seen as forming a *leitmotif* that relates Marcel's momentary insights into the nature of time and the potential value of those instances as a means of understanding life and art. A similar effect is achieved by the recurrence of the people and ideas related to the Méséglise and Guermantes ways, and by the reappearance of certain ideas in the various actions of otherwise very different characters: this is shown by the equally stultifying effects of the modes of habitual existence lived out by Aunt Léonie, Charlus, and others. In this way it is easy to appreciate the influence of Wagner on Proust's presentation of music and the subsequent deployment of Wagnerian techniques in the development of other themes.

This view would seem to be further authenticated by Marcel's own discussions of Wagner, particularly the direct comparison with Vinteuil[15]. There is, however, a danger that such an interpretation limits the role of music in the work and perhaps even misrepresents its structure. The Wagner analogy occurs in *The Captive* when the narrator, while waiting for Albertine, sits at the piano, opens Vinteuil's Sonata, and begins to play:

> as I played the passage, and although Vinteuil had been trying to express in it a fancy which would have been wholly foreign to Wagner, I could not help murmuring 'Tristan', with the smile of an old family friend discovering a trace of the grandfather in an intonation, a gesture of the grandson who has never set eyes on him[16].

The influence is thus acknowledged, but as a small element of the whole and with the qualification that whatever was being expressed was quite different to anything of Wagner's.

More importantly, however, it is the narrator's descriptions of musical performances which reveal the restrictive nature of an interpretation in terms of the *leitmotif.* The accounts are detailed, but mostly regarding the effects of the music upon

[12]Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, 3 vols., trans. C. K. Scott-Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Penguin, 1983), I, 227.
[13]*Ibid.*, I, 238.
[14]*Ibid.*, I, 375.
[15]*Ibid.*, III, 154-9.
[16]*Ibid.*, III, 155.

the listeners (especially Swann and Marcel). The explanation of the precise workings of the music is limited; the intervallic structure of the phrase is briefly described, and the passage of the music is related by the listener, but this is mainly confined to the statement and re-emergence of the little phrase at various points within the Sonata and the Septet. The reader is provided with little information concerning the rest of the musical material, its development, or its relationship to the little phrase; during the playing of these other sections, the narrator usually drifts either into more abstract reflection on the nature of the music, or into the consideration of the responses of his companions, re-focusing his attention only at the recurrence of the beloved phrase.

As such, the appearances of the little phrase constitute most of what we know of Vinteuil's works and, therefore, to assign to them a *leitmotif* function is to oversimplify the Wagnerian technique and falsely to assume a fuller knowledge of Vinteuil's music. Additionally, to claim for *A la recherche* the model of the musical *leitmotif* as employed by Vinteuil is to ignore the intricacy of Proust's narration. Proust delineates three levels of narration - that of Swann (narrated for him by Marcel), Marcel's own experiences, and the final level which must be sought amongst the ambiguous, interwoven perspectives: that within which lies, presumably, the voice of Proust. While Marcel may indeed be Proust, he can be Proust only at an earlier stage of development, and the strata, in this sense at least, remain distinct.

It is Swann's own distortive interpretation of the phrase that forces it to become the *leitmotif* of his relationship with Odette; this is his mistake, indicating his misconception of the function of art, and must be recognised as such, rather than as a demonstration by Proust of the workings of music. Swann's inability to perceive the Vinteuil sonata as pure music leads to his misunderstanding of the role of the creative artist, and hence to his ultimate failure in life and art. Marcel, on the other hand, is through Vinteuil's music gradually able to achieve a certain comprehension of the relationship between time, life and art, and can therefore follow his vocation as a writer. Nevertheless, in the course of his search Marcel has to make and understand his own mistakes. Thus we are constantly in the presence of the ultimate narrator, Proust himself, reminding us that Marcel can follow false trails, and that there is a distinction between Marcel's thoughts and experiences and the true state of things: Marcel is no pure subject. It is Swann and Marcel who tell us of Vinteuil's works, not Proust, and this must be taken into account when examining the role of the discussions of music in the composition of the work as a whole.

Nattiez's *leitmotif*-based understanding of the novel is, therefore, appropriate only to the directly narrated levels of the text. It informs the music - or more particularly the little phrase - as described by Swann and Marcel, but is not necessarily relevant to the conclusions to be drawn from a contextualised reading of those accounts. In addition, just as the phrase can be viewed in Wagnerian terms only by

concentrating on its appearance at the expense of the intervening passages and by its misappropriation by Swann, so the other *leitmotif*-like thematics are equally dependent upon their explication within the novel's narration. Finally, it is probable that the perception of the latter in terms of a *leitmotif* is reliant upon that of the former, and therefore disintegrates once the limitations of the former are exposed: this is especially the case if one is to claim, as does Nattiez, that Wagner provides the model for the fundamental subject of *A la recherche*.

Discussing his view of Vinteuil's phrase as a *leitmotif* of flexible semantic, Nattiez does refer to the dangers of interpretation that are exposed in Swann's application of personal feelings to music. Yet any discussion of Vinteuil's music in terms of *leitmotifs* (and especially the extension of such ideas to the non-musical events) can only proceed by establishing direct relations between the music and definable concepts. Such a process is dependent upon the assertion that at each stage of Proustian musical perception, "music maintains a certain type of symbolic relation with the external world"[17], an assertion that is in this particular sense opposed to the Schopenhauerian basis of Proust's presentation of music.

With regard to the structure of *A la recherche*, it is claimed that Proust, like Wagner, constructs large panels which are then pieced together into the formation of a whole. As before, this is in a sense true, both in terms of passages which delineate a single event and in terms of entire chapters or even books. However, this assertion and its reference to Wagner implies both a cohesive unity attained through the integration of these segments, and a sense of exhaustive completion through thematic interrelation and the re-examination of the ideas of one work in another. On closer inspection, it becomes apparent that this is misleading with regard to Proust's aims and means. *A la recherche* is undoubtedly teleological, and the search for an understanding of the self and of art is conducted linearly, as a progression towards transcendence. This does not, however, preclude the scattering of structural elements into separate paths which can be followed, one after the other, tried and either rejected or explored until a new pathway is found.

From Swann's failure in life and art, through Marcel's progressive enlightenment by way of his understanding of both Swann's and his own mistakes, false trails are embarked upon and broken off, whether almost immediately or after a far more wayward journey (as with Marcel's relationship with Albertine, for example). This results in a structural splintering, the text being composed of panels of experience; the narrator becomes involved in each for a length of time, before abandoning it for a new path. Each of these areas is complete and self-sufficient, and the narrator establishes the only relations between their otherwise isolated existences.

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[17]Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *op.cit.*, 34.

From this perspective, for Proust "the Whole itself is a product, produced as nothing more than a part alongside other parts, which it neither unifies nor totalises, though it has an effect on these other parts simply because it establishes aberrant paths of communication between noncommunicating vessels"[18]. More extremely, the work can be viewed as "pieces of puzzle belonging not to any one puzzle but to many, [the] pieces assembled by forcing them into a certain place where they may or may not belong, their unmatched edges violently bent out of shape. It is a schizoid work par excellence"[19]. Within such parameters, the only unifying factor is the progress of Marcel and the continuous, if faltering, development of the quest.

Again, then, the Wagnerian model is inadequate, and it has to be concluded that the author's references to a source of inspiration were rather too seductive. It appears that no specific musical technique can be appropriated as a model for the thematic techniques of *A la recherche* with anything more than partial success. Yet it is clear from the positioning of Vinteuil's works within the novel that a musical influence is being exerted upon the narrator and his search for insight through his creative exploration of time and memory: this is especially clear with regard to Marcel's experience of the Septet in *The Captive*.

It is, however, possible to examine the significance of music in Proust from a starting point other than that of a specific musical technique. Marcel's own reflections on music are mainly concerned with its aesthetic nature, not with analyses of musical material, and this is increasingly the case as he develops his own ideas, away from the influence of Swann. Beckett wrote, with regard to Vinteuil's Sonata and Septet, "the influence of Schopenhauer on this aspect of the Proustian demonstration is unquestionable"[20]. Since then, several critics have elaborated upon this relationship, and it serves as a useful starting-point.

For Schopenhauer, an individual's image of the world is developed as a result of the brain's interpretation of sensory impressions and, as a result, "the world is my representation"[21] but is entirely conditioned by the will. An understanding of the will can be achieved only by moving beyond the forms which our will-motivated perceptions present to us. This can take place through disinterested contemplation independent of reason and the will, thereby circumventing the fact that "knowledge that serves the will really knows nothing more about objects than their relations, knows the objects only in so far as they exist at such a time, in such a place, in such

[18]Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia Vol.1*, trans. R. Harley, M. Seem and H. R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984), 43.
[19]*Ibid.*
[20]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 91.
[21]Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 2 vols., trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), I, 3.

and such circumstances, from such and such causes"[22]. Through the transcendence of will-motivated perception it is potentially possible to become a pure subject, at one with the object of contemplation and capable of apprehending the object as the Idea, as the thing-in-itself.

By way of aesthetic contemplation a conception of the true essences of the world - the objectification of the will in the form of Ideas which are not subject to change - is possible: "the purpose of all art is the communication of the apprehended Idea"[23]. For Schopenhauer, however, music stands above the other arts as a far more powerful medium: "music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but *a copy of the will itself*, the objectivity of which are the Ideas"[24]. The composer is able to reveal the true nature of things since "music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind *themselves*, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without any accessories, and so also without the motives for them"[25]. Such assertions are clearly congruent with the beliefs expressed by Marcel in the last major discussion of Vinteuil's works (the point at which Marcel is reaching a fuller state of comprehension):

> for the vague sensations given by Vinteuil, coming not from a memory but from an impression ... one would have had to find ... not a material explanation, but the profound equivalent, the unknown ... the mode by which he 'heard' the universe and projected it far beyond himself. Perhaps it was in this, I said to Albertine, this unknown quality of a unique world which no other composer had ever yet revealed, that the most authentic proof of genius lies, even more than in the content of the work itself. 'Even in literature?' Albertine inquired. 'Even in literature.'[26].

Thus, following Schopenhauer, Proustian music does not symbolise the external world but moves beyond to a profound state of transcendence.

Several studies have examined the relationship between Schopenhauer and Proust[27], revealing the similarity in conception and even in the expression of ideas, and showing how this approach to music allows Marcel to find in the works of Vinteuil "the supra-terrestrial, extra-temporal, eternal essence of things, only glimpses of which had been vouchsafed him in rare moments of contemplation"[28]. A precise correspondence has been established between Marcel's quest and his progressive

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[22]*Ibid.*, I, 177.

[23]*Ibid.*, I, 237.

[24]*Ibid.*, I, 257.

[25]*Ibid.*, I, 261.

[26]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, III, 382.

[27]See, for example, James Acheson, "Beckett, Proust and Schopenhauer," *Contemporary Literature* XIX/2 (Spring 1978), 165-179, and J. M. Cocking, *op. cit.*

[28]Dorothy Adelson, *op. cit.*, 229.

understanding of Vinteuil's music. Nevertheless, while brief attempts have been made to relate the insights of musical contemplation to the similar revelations provided by involuntary memory[29], the relevance of the musical descriptions to Proust's treatment of other themes has not been fully recognised. As far as most critics are concerned, the instances of music merely provide an interesting counterpart to the narrator's progress, an enlightening reflection of states of awareness and an indication of the path which must be followed if true understanding is to be achieved. This is, of course, important, but to consider the role of music only in these terms is to underestimate its influence upon the workings of the novel. A consideration of the breadth of the musicality of Proust's examination of themes and characters requires an understanding of the internal Proustian conception of the nature of music as rooted in Schopenhauerian thought. It is the effect upon the listener, resulting from this conception of music, with which Proust is concerned, rather than the techniques by which various composers might structure their pieces, and it is this which allows Marcel to realise the possibility of modelling his own literary work on such effects.

The accounts of Vinteuil's music, then, comprise little more than descriptions of the recurrence of the little phrase. Whether (as has been suggested) this is due to the author's limited knowledge of music or to Proust deeming further explanation unnecessary is, in a sense, unimportant: additional details would have been superfluous to Proust's intentions. Schopenhauer's notion of music is similarly devoid of stylistic or technical detail. Music is as he states - ineffable and remote from the faculty of reason - whatever the piece, whenever it was written, and whoever the composer. Proust therefore seems to reach back to the Romantic idea of vagueness as a virtue and a sign of expressive depth[30]. At one point, Marcel specifically wonders about the states of soul which Vinteuil's phrases seem to express: "there was nothing to assure me that the vagueness of such states was a sign of their profundity rather than of our not having yet learned to analyse them, so that there might be nothing more real in them than in other states"[31].

It is interesting that these doubts arise through the direct comparison of Marcel's experiences of involuntary memory with experience of Vinteuil's music (a comparison which is made on more than one occasion). Marcel recognises that "nothing resembled more closely than some such phrase of Vinteuil the particular pleasure which I had felt at certain moments of my life, when gazing, for instance, at the steeples of Martinville, or at certain trees along a road near Balbec, or, more

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[29]See James Acheson, *op. cit.*

[30]See Bojan Bujić, *Music in European Thought 1851-1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7.

[31]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, III, 388.

simply, at the beginning of this book, when I tasted a certain cup of tea"[32]. These sensations break through the dulling effects of habitual existence to evoke sudden, unsolicited memories, recapturing lost time in an instantaneous simultaneity. This temporal exposition of atemporal ideas is, of course, the main objective of the novel, and thus the link between Schopenhauerian thought, music and time is established. For Proust, as for Schopenhauer, music apprehends those essences which are independent of time, space and causality, and yet it is experienced through time, as (however differently) are life and literature. Through involuntary memory and its association with Vinteuil's music, Marcel is able to perceive the viability of the literary expression of the relationship between life and what Proust presents as the atemporal essences of a usually hidden and unknown world.

As the process of Proustian musical understanding is examined, its correspondence to that of involuntary memory becomes increasingly clear. As J. M. Cocking points out, musical perception in Proust passes through four main stages: it was first "a set of sensations of the most individual and specific kind, bound up with his own particular experiences. Then it was a way of enriching those experiences. Then it became a way of abstracting emotional patterns from a number of experiences. Finally it became a structure, a way of dominating and patterning those emotions"[33]. Swann progresses no further than the first level and, at times, Marcel seems likely to do the same. However, by the final stages of his relationship with Albertine, he is far enough advanced to reject the inauthentic identification of his feelings with works of art: "but no, Albertine was for me not at all a work of art. I knew what it meant to admire a woman in an artistic fashion, having known Swann. For my own part, however, ... I was incapable of doing so, having no sort of power of detached observation, never knowing what it was I saw"[34].

Taking the example of the first instance of involuntary memory - the taste of the tea and the madeleine in the *Overture* - the assimilation of the experience follows exactly this process. The immediate effect is the evocation of the feelings associated with the last time he tasted the tea and cake, but this is then transformed into a powerful joy which, seeming to surpass the pleasures of mere taste, "transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature. Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it?"[35]. The experience is already being abstracted into a higher realm and begins to engender the desire for its re-capture, for the full knowledge of its workings and its meaning. Finally, Marcel asks himself

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[32] *Ibid.*, III, 381.
[33] J. M. Cocking, *op. cit.*, 13.
[34] Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, III, 390.
[35] *Ibid.*, I, 48.

"what it could have been, this unremembered state which brought with it no logical proof, but the indisputable evidence of its felicity, its reality, and in whose presence other states of consciousness melted and vanished?"[36]. In recognising its importance, Marcel is able to begin to structure his experiences, rejecting habit and voluntary memory in favour of this superior apprehension of time: from this point on he will be able to attempt to fulfil his ambitions as a creative artist through the evocation of inspired perception.

Not only, therefore, are music and involuntary memory associated at the level of the narrative, in terms of the effect on the protagonist, but they are equally precisely connected through the processes by which these effects are developed. Additionally, both rely upon a promotion of the intuitive at the expense of the intellectual; the instances of involuntary memory emphasise their unsolicited nature and the futility of attempting to contrive such associations through voluntary acts of will. Revelation cannot occur through the conscious exertion of the memory - "the man with a good memory does not remember anything because he does not forget anything"[37] - and, similarly, to attempt to draw out the meaning of an involuntary remembrance is to distort its significance, involving the strivings of the will in what was originally a moment of pure perception.

Similarly, the narrator's understanding of music seems to depend upon the primacy of intuition. This is certainly considered to be the case with composition; for Vinteuil, "the work of his intellect, necessarily superficial, never succeeded in being as striking as the disguised, involuntary resemblances which broke out in different colours"[38]. A similar attitude is apparent in the characters' actual reactions to music: despite his inability to disconnect his affections from his aesthetic enjoyment, on hearing the music Swann feels himself "transformed into a creature estranged from humanity, blinded, deprived of his logical faculty". There is even an attempt to search "the little phrase for a meaning to which his intelligence could not descend"[39], echoing Schopenhauer's assertion that "the composer reveals the innermost nature of the world and expresses the profoundest wisdom in a language that his reasoning faculty does not understand"[40].

Marcel's conception of music appears to conform to this belief in its intuitive nature. His own exploration of the question is incorporated into the discussion of whether or not the vagueness of both his involuntary impressions and his musical

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[36]Ibid., I, 49.

[37]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," op. cit., 29.

[38]Marcel Proust, op. cit., III, 257.

[39]Ibid., I, 259.

[40]Arthur Schopenhauer, op. cit., I, 260.

experiences is necessarily a sign of their profundity. Comparing the moments of involuntary insight, Marcel considers that

> even if these states are more profound than others that occur in life, and deny
> analysis for that very reason ... the charm of certain phrases of Vinteuil's music
> makes us think of them because it too defies analysis, but this does not prove that
> it has the same profundity; the beauty of a phrase of pure music can easily appear
> to be the image of or at least akin to a non-intellectual impression we have
> received, but simply because it is unintellectual[41].

Marcel, therefore, does not doubt the irrational basis of these experiences, whether musical or non-musical: his only concern seems to be whether or not they are of equal profundity.

The Proustian presentation of music is, in this way, expressly unintellectual and unanalytical, seeing as unnecessary the attempt to explain what is considered a uniquely indivisible and ineffable art. Any symbolic relationship is not to external reality, but rather to a hidden world of essences revealed only by the occasional suspension of habit. Yet, at some point, Proust has to acknowledge the role of the human mind in the composition of such works - this is especially urgent given Marcel's literary aspirations. Proust therefore allows for this by making special allowances for the notion of the *creative* intellect.

Shortly before remarking on the irrational nature of music, Marcel notes the pleasure he takes in mentally linking together the elements of Vinteuil's works, speaking of the joy "derived at these first hearings, from this task of modelling a still shapeless nebula"[42]. This is related to his impression that while literature can describe, explain, and analyse intellectual ideas, the process of reading does not comprise the re-creation of those ideas as does the process of understanding a piece of music (thanks to the lack of conventional semantics)[43]. There is, here, the suggestion that there is a mode of intellection, based on creative (or re-creative) activity, that transcends the more mundane rational workings of the mind. Correspondingly, in *Time Regained*, Marcel discusses the joy of rediscovery brought about by his involuntary experiences, adding, "as for the inner book of unknown symbols ... if I tried to read them no one could help me with any rules, for to read them was an act of creation"[44]. Thus while intuition is regarded as the purest mode of perception, it is conceded (especially towards the end of the work) that the actions of the creative mind may also result in a

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[41]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, III, 388.

[42]*Ibid.*, III, 379.

[43]"For instance, this music seemed to me something truer than all known books. At moments I thought that this was due to the fact that, what we feel about life not being felt in the form of ideas, its literary, that is to say intellectual expression describes it, explains it, analyses it, but does not recompose it as does music, in which the sounds seem to follow the very movement of our being". *Ibid.*, III, 381.

[44]*Ibid.*, III, 913.

higher level of understanding: this is, of course, a concession that had to be made if *A la recherche* was itself to be successful.

As an extension of this, re-creative processes are acknowledged as central to understanding the significance of involuntary intuitions. Just as Marcel recognises a doubly re-creative process in the appreciation of music - initially, following Schopenhauer, in that music re-creates the true conditions of reality, and secondly in the listener's extrapolation of surface interrelations - involuntary memory results in a perception of the self as caught in a state of perpetual re-creation. Rather than the self developing linearly and constantly, the moments of intuition suggest the possibility of a hidden, essential self, separate from that apparent self which lives out its day-to-day existence. This, however, denies Marcel his perception of existence as continuous. Each instance of involuntary memory provokes the idea of an instantaneous re-creation of an essential, atemporal being, an identity which normally remains unknown beneath the more cohesive self that we develop by uniting disparate experiences.

Thus the regaining of lost time involves recapturing an apparently lost and separate self. As a larger-scale reflection of this, Proust outlines a conception of the world as being in a constant state of re-creation, echoing Schopenhauer's notion of the world as will and representation. In the last book of *A la recherche*, Charlus reminds Marcel that he had expounded a theory of "things existing only in virtue of a creation which is perpetually renewed. The creation of the world did not take place once and for all, you said, it is, of necessity, taking place every day"[45]. From this perspective, the everyday world is continually created anew as the individual constantly reconstructs a coherent past by means of voluntary memory, thereby achieving a false sense of continuity.

At the level of the epiphanic unsolicited memories, however, the image of the world and the self are more genuinely re-created through the momentary transcendence of the will. Their reconstruction is cast more in terms of a revelation than a re-modelling: in this case, the original has been thoroughly forgotten or unknown until the moment of revelation. A path can therefore be traced from the example of music, presented as the uniquely *temporal* means of revealing a world of atemporal truth, through the experiences of involuntary memory, and finally to the images of an essential self and hence of an essential world. The polarisation of the intuition and the intellect, and its generation of twofold notions of memory, self, and the world, is present within the Proustian musical model, and it is only here that revelation can take place through time. The emphasis upon the recurrence of the little phrase suggests a dual perception of music as both linearly continuous and yet, at certain moments, static. Correspondingly, the creatively intellectual processes of both composition and

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[45]*Ibid.*, III, 23-4.

the "re-composition" demanded of the listener are closely related to the conception of music as intuitive, and just as he enjoys tracing the thematic relationships of Vinteuil's music, Marcel talks of the pleasure that, he thinks, must be felt by the composer during the act of creation[46].

This distinction is of vital importance for Marcel's vocation; roughly half-way through *Time Regained*, Marcel announces that he has come to believe that truths evolved by the intellect "might be able to enshrine within a matter less pure indeed but still imbued with mind those impressions which are conveyed to us outside time by the essences that are common to the sensations of the past and of the present, but which, just because they are more precious, are too rare for a work of art to be constructed exclusively from them"[47]. Thus the possibility of creating an ideal literary work is allowed for, but the concession could be made only by first rejecting the value of reason (as this made possible the subsequent understanding of intuitive experience). Throughout this process of exclusion and re-assimilation, however, the musical model remains in the background, emerging periodically as a guide to the path which Marcel must follow in order to reach a state of understanding. The distinction between the two agents of direct perception - involuntary memory and music - therefore corresponds to that which Proust draws between life and art: looking back, Marcel comments that music "helped me to descend into myself to discover new things: the variety that I had sought in vain in life"[48]. In the case of each distinction, the understanding of the former is dependent upon that of the latter - involuntary memory upon music and life upon art - again echoing Schopenhauer, for whom the Idea is more easily apprehended by art than life since the artist presents those ideas in isolation from the distracting details of the real.

The problems of Marcel's vocation, however, cannot be divorced from those of the human attempt to figure a notion of self. Both are motivated by the desire to identify with the object; for the artist this involves the apprehension of Ideas, while for the ego the object is its own past self from which it strives to form a cohesive identity. As Beckett shows in "Proust", it is voluntary memory which allows the smoothing over of contradictions in order that the past should be reconstructed in line with the present. Like habit, it "enables us to witness change in ourselves without *being* that change"[49]: it is only when a fissure accidentally opens up the framework of habit that the instability of the self becomes apparent.

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[46]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, III, 158.
[47]*Ibid.*, III, 935.
[48]*Ibid.*, III, 156.
[49]Steven Connor, *op. cit.*, 46.

As Gilles Deleuze has shown, both forms of memory are based upon repetition, but in different ways; voluntary memory reaches backwards from the present to a present that once was and, in so doing, loses something essential. Involuntary memory, on the other hand, retains an identity between the two moments. Voluntary memory treats the past as if it were constituted as such only after having existed in the present, instead of realising that the two do not form a succession, but coexist. Through involuntary memory, therefore, "we place ourselves directly in the past itself"[50]: "*the essential thing in involuntary memory is not resemblance, nor even identity, but the internalized difference, which becomes immanent*"[51]. The use of such terms might seem to contradict the notion of involuntary memory as revealing something essential and immutable. This is, however, no more than the contradiction implicit in Proust's belief in the power of art to reveal ultimate truths in different forms. For Proust, difference itself reveals essence. Multiplicity is the condition of reality, and is reproduced in art: "thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself"[52]. Thus, in *A la recherche* it is the very recognition of difference within the repetition of involuntary memory that refers the narrator beyond the mundane and towards an essential reality.

If, as been maintained, it is the presence of the musical model that allows Marcel's conception of the self and the world to be seen as potential literary material, then this should be equally demonstrable at this latest stage of the argument. In *The Captive*, Marcel describes an occasion of the relaxation of habit, and he does so in musical terms: "within our being, an instrument which the uniformity of habit has rendered mute, song is born of these divergences, these variations, the source of all music: the change of weather on certain days makes us pass at once from one note to another"[53]. It is interesting to compare this with a very early passage in which the narrator realises that "even if we have the sensation of being always enveloped in, surrounded by our own soul, still it does not seem a fixed and immovable prison"[54]. He suggests that we struggle constantly to transcend this but are always discouraged by hearing "endlessly all around that unvarying sound which is not an echo from without, but the resonance of a vibration from within"[55].

Here, we are presented with two different notions of divergence, both conceived in terms of sound. The latter passage evokes the attempt to know the exterior world and other human beings, attempts which are doomed to failure since

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[50]Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Allen Lane (The Penguin Press), 1973), 57.
[51]*Ibid.*, 59.
[52]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, III, 932.
[53]*Ibid.*, III, 18.
[54]*Ibid.*, I, 93.
[55]*Ibid.*

those people are "situated outside of ourselves where we can never reach them"[56]. The "unvarying sound", therefore, acts as a homing device, drawing the young Marcel back from the external world and towards introspection. The former passage (which occurs later in the work) is, however, concerned with internal divergence, with the avoidance of habit through the acceptance of the multiplicity of the self. In relating the events of his early life, then, Marcel uses the image of sound in order to explain the rejection of exteriority, while by the time of *The Captive*, we have reached a stage wherein the immersion within Marcel's narrative perspective is such that the exterior is re-created *inside*, and this is represented in musical terms.

Divergence from habit - that divergence which is described in the above passage as the source of all music - is that which facilitates involuntary memory. Regarding divergence itself as the *source* of music, rather than as the development *of* and away *from* the source as might be expected, would seem to contradict the idea that music directly evokes the innermost essence of the world. This apparent contradiction, though, relates to that which seemed to develop between the conceptions of involuntary memory as revealing self as essence or as difference within repetition, and it can, consequently, be worked out in a correspondent manner. Music as divergence implies its evocation of otherness, of the sense of continual (though not necessarily unified) development, and hence its existence in a permanent state of "becoming". This is emphasised by the focus upon the little phrase and its recurrence in different places and even within different works; in Deleuze's terms, the difference, again, is held within the phrase's repetition.

Just as the insight Marcel gains through music is more instructive than that gained through involuntary memory, on this further level music reveals itself as the superior model. The fact of its operation through time allows music to demonstrate more fully the process of divergence, and this is of significance given that a linear framework is needed for Marcel's work of literature. Involuntary memory can evoke otherness only momentarily, solely for an instant. With music, however, the embodiment of extra-temporal interrelations *within* the temporal framework is exactly what facilitates its presentation as the art-form most able to evoke a state of becoming or of non-being. Any apparent contradiction between this notion of music as divergence and its incarnation as the objectification of the essential world is therefore redundant. Indeed, the full circle has been travelled back to the Schopenhauerian conception of music; through this idea of becoming, Proust returns to the perception that music, as a direct manifestation of the will, necessarily copies its desire-motivated strivings[57].

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[56]*Ibid.*
[57]Arthur Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, I, 257-60.

On the level of human relationships, this striving is represented in *A la recherche* as the problem of the separation of the subject from its object of desire. As Beckett points out, the difficulty results from the positioning of "a mobile subject before an ideal object"[58]. The subject develops constantly but makes no allowance for changes in the object, and in this way the discontinuity of the self prevents the attainment of the object even before the object has itself changed: even if the object of desire is achieved, the subject is incapable of appreciating it since "the time-state of attainment eliminates so accurately the time-state of aspiration that the actual seems the inevitable"[59]. Hence the differential self would seem to preclude the unification of subject and object. Correspondingly, the false-consciousness involved in attempting to forge a continuous self by means of memory instigates (and is instigated by) similarly inauthentic attempts to satisfy desire through the attainment of the object.

At various points Proust highlights the difficulties of true communication that result from this fragmentation. Considering his failure to express his feelings to Gilberte, Marcel concludes: "we imagine always when we speak that it is our own ears, our own mind that are listening.... The truth which one puts into one's words does not carve out a direct path for itself, is not irresistibly self-evident"[60]. Similarly, in the early stages of his relationship with Albertine he notes, "our words are, as a rule, filled by the people to whom we address them with a meaning which those people derive from their own substance, a meaning widely different from that which we had put into the same words when we uttered them"[61]. This is juxtaposed with Marcel wondering "whether music might not be the unique example of what might have been - if the intervention of language, the formation of words, the analysis of ideas had not intervened - the means of communication between souls"[62]. Thus Proust specifically equates the problems of attainment with those of language.

Proust appears to recognise that to search for truth within language leads to misunderstandings as a result of the ambiguity of linguistic signs. Yet at the same time Marcel - like Proust - still aims to create an ideal work of literature. The separation of the signifier and the signified opens up a gap which results in the fragmentary nature of the self, the subject-object relationship, and the structure of the work as a whole. Yet, as Derrida has shown, "metaphysics has never ceased to impose on semiology the search for a transcendental signified, a concept independent of language"[63]; in a

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[58]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op.cit.*, 17.

[59]*Ibid.*, 14.

[60]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, I, 659.

[61]*Ibid.*, I, 942.

[62]*Ibid.*, III, 260.

[63]Alan Bass, "Introduction" to Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), xv.

sense, *A la recherche* enacts that search, and Proustian music, through its elimination of intermediary semantics, sustains the possibility of success.

Proust's exploration of the problems of linguistic signification is examined in detail by Deleuze, resulting in the identification of a hierarchy of four different sign-worlds. The first involves "signs of worldliness" which replace an action or thought, "standing *for* things rather than referring to them"[64]: an example of this is M. Cottard making signs of having said something comic when, in fact, no-one finds him amusing. The second group comprises signs of love; the subject's perception of these inspires the attempt to interpret the world inhabited by the loved one, but generally leads to misunderstandings. The third group is that of sensuous impressions; these often inspire both a sense of joy and the determination that their significance should be comprehended since "the quality no longer appears as a property of the object which now possesses it, but as a sign of an *altogether different* object which we must try to decipher"[65]. Thus these signs seem to indicate the presence of something more profound, suggesting that "a material meaning is nothing without an ideal essence which it incarnates"[66]. The final sign-world is that of art; these are dematerialised signs, the meaning of which lies in their ideal and essential nature. Having established these four levels, Deleuze explores their relationship to four corresponding time structures - time wasted, time lost, the possibility of time regained, and the attainment of time regained - examining the means by which each sign-world appropriates its own form of temporality (but not without interacting with other levels at certain points).

Moving beyond this, in each case the third category can be seen to apply to involuntary memory and the fourth to music (and eventually to Marcel's ideal literature modelled according to his conception of music). The strata of the sign-worlds relate closely to the four stages of musical perception delineated earlier, and hence to the stages by which involuntary memory is apprehended. Marcel's initial merging of his reactions to music with his own emotional experiences clearly belongs to the level of worldly signs, while his extension of this into a means of enriching those experiences corresponds to the equally inauthentic but more deeply-felt world of the signs of love. That music then provides the means of extracting emotional patterns from the experiences allows the move into the world of sense impressions and the intimation of something beyond those impressions. Finally, the true appreciation of music as a model for the organisation of abstracted ideas allows the progression to the ultimate level of signs found in the world of art.

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[64]Gilles Deleuze, *op. cit.*, 6.
[65]*Ibid.*, 11.
[66]*Ibid.*, 13.

There is, therefore, a contiguity between the stratification and the explication of the sign-worlds, between the depth of the work and its processes of elaboration; the progression through the levels of the signs corresponds to the linear development of their function. As a result, *A la recherche* exists as a coherent volume within which the fragmentation of experience is contained, unified by the movement of the protagonist through his quest, through the sign-worlds, and through his perception of their various manifestations. The depth of the novel is therefore as dependent as its surface interrelation of events upon the musical model.

The problems of linguistic signification are perhaps most succinctly presented in the exploration of the difficulties associated with naming. In *Cities of the Plain*, Marcel discusses the phenomenon of forgetting somebody's name and remembering nothing until the name is suddenly recovered, entirely unexpectedly. He considers, however, that "it is not the name that has come to us. No, I believe rather that, as we go on living, we move further and further away from the zone in which a name is distinct"[67]. This notion has earlier been suggested when, at dinner with the Guermantes, he thinks to himself that he has "already seen, in this single Duchesse de Guermantes, so many different women superimpose themselves, each one vanishing as soon as the next had acquired sufficient consistency. Words do not change their meaning as much in centuries as names do for us in the space of a few years"[68]. Subsequently, the inadequacy of names comes to reflect both the personality's lack of cohesion and the resultant difficulty of achieving any object of desire.

This idea is covertly extended into Proust's devious use of the narrator's proper name. The first-person narrative allows the circumvention of the need for the author to name his protagonist, and for much of *A la recherche* the narrator's name remains unknown. This is of especial importance, given that the narrator's first name is that of Proust. As a result it is significant, as Angela Moorjani has pointed out, that variations in the manuscript reveal that the passages in *The Captive* wherein Albertine uses the name of the narrator were actually late additions. As Moorjani says, "the first 'naming' passage in which the narrator refers to the book's author, is an astonishing example of textual paradox, since the narrator names the author who names him"[69]. Additionally, Serge Gaubert has suggested that Proust, who was certainly fond of playing anagrammatic games, invented the names of his characters by incorporating letters from his own name[70]: examples of this are the use of the letters of "Marcel" in the name Charles Morel, and of "Proust" in Robert de Saint-Loup. Gaubert and Moorjani relate these discoveries to Proust's exploration of both the extent to which

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[67]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, II, 675.
[68]*Ibid.*, II, 552.
[69]Angela Moorjani, *The Aesthetics of Less and Lessness* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 158.
[70]*Ibid.*, 159.

the personality can be considered a coherent entity, and the implications of this discussion for subjectivity and sexuality.

The names of the two major characters with whom Marcel falls in love - Gilberte and Albertine - also have many letters in common. This is referred to explicitly when, after Albertine's death, Marcel receives a telegram and reads the signature as that of Albertine, throwing him into a state of confusion and exposing his inability to come to terms with her death. A few days later, he realises that the telegram was actually from Gilberte and that he has simply mis-read her handwriting. This again prompts the contemplation of the difficulty of true communication, and he wonders "how many letters are actually read into a word by a careless person who knows what to expect, who sets out with the idea that the message is from a certain person?"[71].

The character of Albertine is itself presented as so fragmented an object that nothing more than temporary attainment can really be possible. Not long after making her acquaintance, Marcel notes "Albertine had not seemed to me that day to be the same as on previous days, and ... each time I saw her she was to appear different"[72]. This perception extends throughout their relationship, his inability to pin down Albertine's true nature suggesting her unreliability as a lover and providing an intimation of her involvement in a hidden lesbian world. By the time of *The Captive*, Marcel's jealousy has reached extreme proportions as a result of his inability to satisfy his desire by conquering Albertine's elusiveness. Her being seems quite formless, and it is only when she sleeps that Marcel's insecurity subsides: "only her breathing was altered by each touch of my fingers, as though she were an instrument on which I was playing and from which I extracted modulations by drawing different notes from one after another of its strings. My jealousy subsided, for I felt that Albertine had become a creature that breathes and is nothing else besides"[73].

Marcel's jealousy disappears only when he feels himself to be in control of Albertine's existence, and this example again associates musical imagery with the concept of divergence, relating by means of musical terminology Marcel's wish to be in full possession of Albertine and, further, his desire to control the formation of a world in writing. Similarly, the imagery which associates Albertine with the sea (as a result of their first meeting at Balbec) corresponds to that of Marcel's first experience of the Septet: "it was upon the flat, unbroken surfaces like those of the sea on a morning that threatens storm, in the midst of an eerie silence, in an infinite void, that this new work began"[74]. Thus the presentation of characters, relationships, and the

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[71]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, III, 671.
[72]*Ibid.*, I, 916.
[73]*Ibid.*, III, 109.
[74]*Ibid.*, III, 251.

imagery with which they are described all lead back to the musical template which offers Marcel a model for his work. Individuals and images are presented as unstable, in a perpetual state of becoming and without locatable origin, such that the conception of music as similarly de-territorialised clarifies their explanation at the same time as it is held in the background as an intimation of the possibility of salvation. Again, then, the directly narrated level and the deeper implications are equally reliant upon music. The model therefore offers the alternative stability of the acceptance of perpetual instability; for Proust, music achieves this openness towards alterity, and Marcel must, similarly, begin to admit multiplicity before he can realise the true nature of his vocation.

Given that the fragmentation of selfhood and its effect on the attainment of desire is reflected at the narrative level in the treatment of names and characters, by tracing back through the thematic layers it is therefore possible to identify a line of dependence upon the model of music from the presentation of Vinteuil's works through to the very workings of the narrative. This follows Beckett's identification of the catalytic function of music in Proust, and Nattiez's conclusion that music provides the inspiration for Proust's literary ideals can therefore be verified, but in terms of aesthetic approach rather than with regard to specific musical techniques. Proust is concerned with comparing the nature of the art-forms and with exploring their relationship to experience; it is only once his conception of music has been understood that its relevance to specific themes and their function can be fully comprehended. The contradictory images of the self and of time, and the question of their literary representation, are all offered a potential solution through the aspiration towards the Proustian notion of music. This re-surfaces in the form of associations between musical and non-musical intuitive perception, musical and non-musical imagery, and in the manifestation of existence as in a permanent state of becoming. Thus the hidden presence of Vinteuil could almost be viewed as transcending that of Proust himself; this is suggested by Marcel's sharing of Proust's name, which implicates Proust in the actual quest and therefore puts into question the degree of authorial omniscience. On a final level, then, this subjugation of Proust's position corresponds to the acknowledgement that the literary work can never actually achieve the condition of music and can only aspire towards it through the appropriation of certain characteristics.

Having established the nature of Proust's presentation of music and the degree to which it underpins the themes and their development, it is possible to examine Beckett's treatment of these themes in his critical study. Nicholas Zurbrugg has explored the bias of "Proust", showing that while apparently acknowledging that

Proust "respects the dual significance of every condition and circumstance of life"[75], Beckett actually reduces Proust's vision to a narrow, pessimistic world. Proust presents three levels of existence, all of which comprise the interaction of voluntary and involuntary memory with the habitual world and the suffering or joy that results: Zurbrugg describes these three levels as setting up oppositions between "poisoned" and "unpoisoned" inhabitual existence, between habitual and poisoned inhabitual existence, and between habitual and unpoisoned inhabitual existence. Despite the fragmented nature of Marcel's perceptions, his experiences never result in the final renunciation of desire; Proust must allow for the achievement of a certain degree of understanding, even of deliverance, if his project is to reach a successful state of completion. As Zurbrugg says, Beckett's characters, on the other hand, "fluctuate between the boredom of the deadeningly habitual and the intolerable anguish of the almost invariably poisoned inhabitual perceptions"[76].

It would be unfair to suggest that Beckett fabricates either the problematics of Marcel's search or the negativity which seems increasingly to pervade the text as one trail after another is revealed as false. At no point, however, does Proust allow these experiences to develop into a pervasive pessimism; Marcel's character has a quality of self-propulsion that rarely tolerates negative reflection (except at instances of involuntary memory or crises of personality), and it is left to the reader to recognise his mistakes as he makes them, rather than at a safe distance. Nevertheless, Beckett emphasises the negative aspects at the expense of the positive relationships and even of the novel's elucidatory conclusion.

For Beckett, the Proustian message is straightforward: "we are alone. We cannot know and we cannot be known"[77]. This is seen as a result of the instability of the subject and the difficulty of attaining the object in the face of the operations of time. Beckett fails, however, to recognise the different levels of communication that are, at times, achieved; the narrator's friendship with Robert de Saint-Loup, for example, is based upon a degree of mutual understanding (emphasised, perhaps, by Saint-Loup's marriage to Marcel's former lover, Gilberte Swann). Similarly, the affection between Marcel and his grandmother is so presented as to suggest its transcendence of the futility of ordinary relationships. For example, at Doncières Marcel receives a telephone call from his grandmother and, in the absence of her physical presence, is able to focus on the quality of her voice with its delicate combination of sweetness and sadness[78]. The call intensifies Marcel's sense of separation from his grandmother, thereby highlighting their closeness and the genuine

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[75]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 69.
[76]Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Beckett, Proust, Burroughs, and the Perils of 'Image Warfare'," *op. cit.*, 181.
[77]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 66.
[78]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, II, 136.

nature of their feelings. Additionally, it is significant that it is the *sound* of the voice that causes this reaction, rather than the content of the conversation: effective communication is here dependent upon non-linguistic factors, circumventing the problems of signification that hamper other relationships.

As Zurbrugg suggests, Beckett similarly ignores the fact that a kind of "non-artistic selflessness" is displayed by the grandmother and Robert de Saint-Loup. Both reach a level of self-knowledge comparable with that achieved by the artist, and this manifests itself in their modes of "ideal gestural communication". A good example of this is the knocking on the partition wall by means of which the young Marcel and his grandmother communicate. The telephone call is a similar case, as is Marcel's description of his grandmother's breathing as she lies on her death-bed: "accompanied by an incessant low murmur, my grandmother seemed to be singing us a long joyous song"[79]. With Robert de Saint-Loup, on the other hand, Marcel abstracts his appreciation of Robert's physical agility into a sign of his benevolent character, finding that "Robert's movements were the image and the symbol ... in which perfect friendship is enshrined"[80].

Beckett ignores these instances of authentic behaviour by paying little attention to characters other than the protagonist. The only detailed references to other characters concern the negative influence of the elusive Albertine, and thus Beckett is able to claim that Proust dismisses friendship outright as "the centrifugal force of self-fear, self-negation"[81]. His focus upon Albertine exaggerates the fragmentary nature of her existence to extremes; as far as Beckett is concerned, "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"[82]. The characterisation of Albertine is indeterminate and plural, and this to an extent explains Beckett's fascinated emphasis upon any such splintering. His comment that "the symbolism of Baudelaire has become the *autosymbolism* of Proust"[83] suggests a similar interpretative position; the claim that Proust's symbolism, though temporally delineated, is essentially that of itself, of the concrete Idea, asserts (despite its Schopenhauerian implication of wholeness and identity) a certain open-endedness, since that Idea is ultimately ineffable and inaccessible to language. As Marjorie Perloff has suggested, the symbolism of a Baudelaire poem would, in comparison, tend too much towards closure[84].

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[79]*Ibid.*, II, 352.
[80]*Ibid.*, II, 431.
[81]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 66.
[82]*Ibid.*, 53.
[83]*Ibid.*, 80.
[84]Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage.* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 214.

Beckett's stance is decidedly anti-intellectual - "the conclusions of the intelligence are merely of arbitrary value, potentially valid"[85] - and this extends beyond Proust's own preference for intuitive perception, disavowing the concessions made by Proust towards the creative intelligence. As a consequence, however, Beckett does seem to recognise the importance of involuntary memory, accepting that it facilitates a break with habit. Even here, though, Beckett's attitude is strangely ambivalent, and he appears reluctant to concede the full significance attributed to involuntary memory by Marcel. The recurrence of involuntary perception is described by Beckett as "a neuralgia rather than a theme, persistent and monotonous"[86]. Additionally, emphasising its accidental nature, Beckett completely dissociates the effects of involuntary memory from life, claiming that "the images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by the imagination, and are equally remote from reality"[87]. While it may be the case that the workings of involuntary memory are in some senses arbitrary, he conveniently neglects to acknowledge that it is Marcel's progressive understanding of the relationship between involuntary memory and experience which paves the way for the final revelatory stages of *A la recherche*.

Beckett was probably the first critic to perceive the indebtedness of *A la recherche* to Schopenhauer's notion of music and aesthetic appreciation as the contemplation of the world independent of reason. However, as James Acheson points out, Beckett "neglects to mention the importance to Schopenhauer of being able to transcend will-motivated perception"[88], and hence the bias of Beckett's presentation of both Proustian involuntary memory and Schopenhauerian thought corresponds at this level. Through his selective treatment of themes, Beckett is able to conclude not only that Proust reveals life to be a trial, futile and unrewarding, but that it is the comparison with music that uncovers this truth: for Beckett, the beauty of Vinteuil's music effects an intimation of an "'invisible reality' that damns the life of the body on earth as a pensum and reveals the meaning of the word: 'defunctus'"[89]. Again, Beckett here exaggerates Proust's conclusions, refusing to accept that Proust values experience as part of the route to self-perception.

Beckett does not properly discuss the influence of music in *A la recherche*; he rarely mentions Vinteuil in the main body of his text but suddenly, at the conclusion, claims this catalytic role for music and links it directly to the conclusions of his argument. It is typically obtuse of Beckett to refer to a prime factor in the narrative's motivation only at the end of the line of investigation, and it is perhaps this reluctance

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[85]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 84.
[86]*Ibid.*, 35.
[87]*Ibid.*, 32.
[88]James Acheson, *op. cit.*, 170.
[89]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 93.

to elaborate that has encouraged other critics to develop questionable analogies with musical forms. In fact, Beckett's arguments follow the path of the Proustian employment of music as a model, but he comments on music only at the end; it is as if the correspondences should have been evoked throughout, but one half of the analogy was forgotten until the conclusion was reached.

To substantiate this claim, it is necessary to demonstrate that the bias of "Proust" is directly correspondent to the role of music in Proust's presentation and treatment of themes. This becomes possible with the realisation that Beckett focuses upon those themes which, for Proust, are dependent upon music, and that this is the cause of his negative emphasis upon the problems of communication and understanding. Following, then, the development of Proust's musical model from the comparisons with involuntary memory (juxtaposed with the dulling effects of habit and voluntary memory), through the resultant conception of the self and its problematic progression through time, to the difficulties of attainment in the face of subject-object fragmentation and the questions of meaning which subsequently arise, the themes that are involved are precisely those upon which Beckett focuses. They are, of course, major themes of *A la recherche* as a whole, but in each case it is possible to suggest that Beckett's pessimism highlights the comparative insufficiency of linguistic signs and hence the dependence upon the musical model.

At each stage, Beckett casts doubt on the Proustian solution of an ideal literary work based upon the relationship between temporal experience and an atemporal world of essential reality. Albertine is used as an example of the impossibility of communication and of attainment, and hence as proof of the futility of friendship. There is no attempt to counterbalance this pessimism with examples of positive friendships. The pain that is sometimes caused by the insights of involuntary memory is emphasised by Beckett above and beyond the inspiration or understanding that can result; this is the case with Marcel's sudden memory of his dead grandmother[90] which, by recovering the sense of her presence, forces him to face the pain of her permanent absence. Beckett shows no sign of recognising the value of this experience in terms of Marcel's development, instead commenting that "this contradiction between presence and irremediable obliteration is intolerable"[91].

Beckett follows Proust in relating involuntary memory to music: music "synthesises the moments of privilege and runs parallel to them"[92]. Yet his description of the suffering that is caused by involuntary memory separates the two forms of intuition. Proust does draw a distinction between the two, and elevates music to the superior position through his belief in its ability not just to recapture essential reality,

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[90]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, II, 783.

[91]Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 42.

[92]*Ibid.*, 92-3.

but to do so within a temporal framework. This differentiation, however, does not disavow the importance of involuntary memory. Indeed, Proust could not take such a position since his authorial involvement in the quest establishes the impossibility of divorcing life experiences from artistic inspiration. Beckett's attitude exaggerates that of Proust beyond recognition; as a result of the initial rejection of the value of involuntary memory, its subsequent association with music necessarily involves the assertion of music's superiority, over-emphasising the difference established by Proust.

The fact of the thematic dependency upon involuntary memory for the link to the all-enveloping musical model, therefore, reveals Beckett's implication of the transcendence of music, and this can be traced from the polarisation of intuition and intelligence, through to the difficulties with naming. Proust's own acknowledgement of the superiority of music is thereby extended into an assertion of absolute difference; each time Beckett emphasises the negative side of the equation and dismisses the positive elements included by Proust, he ignores the fact that the Proustian quest cannot but take place in language and therefore implies its futility in the face of the example of music. The Proustian problem is that of linguistic referentiality, and the solution offered is that of expression by means of non-referential signification. Nevertheless, for Proust this resolution must be in some sense conciliatory, amalgamating the insight acquired through music with a fundamentally literary approach, rather than asserting the absolute difference of the two.

Beckett's bias results from the elevation of music to a position of otherness; his doubts as to the validity of a literary art which uses worldly experience as its material but aspires towards a state of music are the cause of his pessimistic presentation of themes. Thus his choice of themes for discussion is, ironically, conditioned by the tension between his perception of music's difference and his simultaneous acknowledgement of the thorough interdependence of those themes and their ultimate reliance upon the example of Vinteuil's music. Proust seems to follow the modernist tendency towards the encompassing of alterity within the whole, refusing to pay full attention to the difference of the other. While the Schopenhauerian basis of Proust's conception of music seems to acknowledge the difference of the art-form, its elevation to a transcendent position acts as a double bind: it is capable of saying everything and yet nothing. As both the other to language and yet assimilable into the all-encompassing vision, music is recognised as significant, but the detailed exploration of localised meaning is effectively rejected in favour of maintaining the sanctity of the mystified, ideal symbol: music is configured as the true reflection of the thing-in-itself, but this implies its inability to develop meaningful structures in a more concrete sense.

Despite the problems of the fragmentary sense of self induced by involuntary memory, Proust still leads Marcel towards a final position of revelation, implying the achievement of self-knowledge and a mastery of that other which was revealed in moments of intuition. The danger to the self has been heeded, but seems to have been overcome such that Marcel can begin his artistic life from a position of truly comprehensive certainty: in Proust, as in other literature, "modernist 'hearing' is a mode of silencing the Other by ignoring anything in the Other's discourse which disturbs the principle of identity or which disturbs one's own identity or territorial rootedness"[93]. This is, of course, necessary for the very existence of this particular book, since its teleological structure means that it is only the end of the book which makes its existence viable and its beginning possible[94]; the story cannot be written without Marcel having passed his apprenticeship as a writer, and Proust thereby follows Gide's dictum: "in art there are no problems - that are not sufficiently solved by the work of art itself"[95].

Through his pessimistic bias, Beckett, on the other hand, reveals his own fascination with otherness in terms both of his recognition of meaningful modes of expression other than language and his understanding of the self-fragmentation that results from the impurity of linguistic signification. Beckett's refusal to acknowledge in full Marcel's progress towards understanding prevents him from recognising the Proustian solution: the concept of a wholly successful literary work is alien to him.

Despite Beckett's antipathy towards Proust's solution, "Proust" clearly privileges music as presented in *A la recherche* by foregrounding those themes which rely upon the model of music. If it is true, as Carla Locatelli suggests, that Beckett's "presentation of Proust's work shows the potential development of his own"[96], then this would suggest that the discreet promotion of the musical in his attitude towards Proust might manifest itself in his own work. This is the case, but the presentation of music - or rather the manifestation of the idea of music - in Beckett's output does not follow the course that might be inferred from his approach to *A la recherche*.

As Nicholas Zurbrugg shows, the narrator of Beckett's early *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* "derides the modernist writer's characteristic reverence for music"[97]. In fact, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, in one sense music becomes a positive torment for Belacqua, as does any kind of intense perception. He would rather avoid Proustian introspection and the impulse towards

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[93]Thomas Docherty, *After Theory: Postmodernism/Postmarxism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 102.
[94]See Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification" in *Writing and Difference, op. cit.*, 22.
[95]André Gide, preface to *The Immoralist*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (London: Penguin, 1960), 8.
[96]Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the World* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1990), 7.
[97]Nicholas Zurbrugg, *Beckett and Proust, op. cit.*, 204.

enlightenment, preferring to attempt to empty his mind of significant content[98]. *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* thereby rewrites in fiction Beckett's sceptical approach to the Proustian solution. Instead of being acknowledged as providing access to a world of transcendental essences, music as conceived by Proust is here identified with the agents of self-immersion which are part of Marcel's path to revelation, but which Beckett rejects as worthless. Nevertheless, as will become apparent, this process of rejection itself engenders the development of an altogether different (and non-Proustian) model of music. Thus the narrator of *Dream* employs the musical metaphor of a regulatory tuning-fork in order to express the need for a mediatory narrator-figure, for a go-between (such as is typically found in modernist fiction) by means of which (often painful) inspired perception can be experienced at a certain distance[99].

Belaqua's avoidance, through indolence, of the anguish of memory develops, in Beckett's next prose works, into a fascination with the structure of experience. From Murphy's Cartesian isolation of mind from body, through Watt's endless cataloguing of the permutations of events, to Molloy's systematic rotation of his sucking stones[100], we are presented with countless examinations and re-examinations of the surface structure of events. Each case in some sense displays a reluctance to face the anguish of self-immersion; even Murphy's Cartesianism disavows the Proustian solution - only by appeasing his body can Murphy experience the pleasure of life in his mind, whereas the Proustian preference for intuitive experience apprehended through sensual impression favours Schopenhauer's conception of one's body as the immediate object, as "that representation which forms the starting-point of the subject's knowledge"[101]. Murphy's appreciation of the intellect acts, in this sense at least, as an attempt to fend off immediate perception as discussed by Beckett in "Proust". Early in *Murphy*, Neary remarks, "'Murphy, all life is figure and ground.' 'But a wandering to find home' said Murphy. 'The face,' said Neary, 'or system of faces, against the big blooming buzzing confusion'"[102]; the implication is that it is intellectual exploration, contemplation through reason, and the exploration of surface that can possibly lead "home", but via a path that rambles undirected.

In many of the works that follow, symmetrical formations of variable scale and the acute observation of everyday objects become the norm. Murphy's proud statement of the exact amount of tea that he manages to receive from the waitress (1.83

[98]"He lay in a beatitude of indolence that was smoother than oil and softer than a pumpkin, dead to the dark pangs of the sons of Adam, asking nothing of the insubordinate mind." Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, ed. Eoin O'Brien and Edith Fournier (Dublin: Black Cat Press, 1992), 44.
[99]*ibid.*, 125.
[100]Samuel Beckett, "Molloy" in *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Picador, 1979), 64-5.
[101]Arthur Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, I, 19.
[102]Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (London: Pan, 1973), 6.

cups for the price of one)[103] and his calculation of the number of ways in which his biscuits can be eaten[104] make way for Watt's developing obsession with examining every situation from all possible angles. Watt works through every permutation, behaving much like a student of early Wittgenstein, attempting to reach a concise statement of affairs by means of the reduction of ideas to the most fundamental logical propositions.

For Watt, however, these processes seem almost devoid of the sense of a search; they are increasingly ritualised into games in which it is the process that is important, rather than any real personal involvement. Watt peers at ordinary objects - the pot, for example, or the event of the visit of the piano-tuner and his son - but his concern is with their external appearance, the form in which they present themselves to him. This is contemplation *through,* rather than independent of, reason, and yet the reasoning is mainly restricted to superficial mental wandering. The process is without depth, however concentrated the consideration of surface details and their relationships, progressing as if meaning could emerge through the simple accumulation of facts in their presentational form. It seems to be the habitualisation of the process itself which Watt thinks could uncover meaning, rather than the revelations which might result from its suspension: it is the form of things, not their essence, with which Watt is concerned, as is shown by Beckett's incorporation of the highly-structured frog-song[105] and the meaningless song of the mixed-voice choir heard by Watt on the way to Knott's house[106].

In *Watt* it is the protagonist himself who attempts the ordering of surface events into a meaningful structure, this then being conveyed by Sam to the reader. However, Sam's role is deliberately restricted by two factors: firstly, his story is supposedly entirely indebted to Watt's description of events, and, secondly, Watt's narrative was such that Sam missed much that he imagines would have been of great interest concerning Watt's stay at Knott's house[107]. *Mercier and Camier,* on the other hand, incorporates a more conscious external influence. In the description of their attempt to meet at the outset of their strange journey, Mercier and Camier repeatedly miss each other's return to the appointed meeting-place by alternately arriving, realising that the other is absent, and wandering off for a while. This is presented in tabular form, showing the various arrival and departure times for each character, followed by the comment "what stink of artifice"[108]. Again, the event is highly structured through the very agency of extreme bad luck, and this ironical combination

103*Ibid.,* 51.

104*Ibid.,* 57.

105Samuel Beckett, *Watt,* op. cit., 135-7.

106*Ibid.,* 32-3.

107See *ibid.,* 162-7.

108Samuel Beckett, *Mercier and Camier* (London: Pan, 1988), 9.

of contrivance and chance is acknowledged in this authorial comment. Similarly, the reader of *Mercier and Camier* is periodically furnished with summaries of the important events of the preceding chapters, as if this might establish a coherent frame for the characters' apparently arbitrary experiences. In both cases, we are presented with the self-conscious imposition of the possibility of apprehending meaning through form, revealing a fascination with design and proportion and an association of the content with the organisational processes, rather than an immersive consideration of the nature of that content. It is almost as if the author is presenting both himself and his audience with the question of whether or not the work has any meaning (just as Hamm in *Endgame* tentatively ventures to ask "we're not beginning to ... to ... mean something?"[109], a suggestion that Clov dismisses as ridiculous).

There seems, therefore, to be an anti-Proustian dimension to these works: as Melvin J. Friedman has written, in Proust "everything is expressed through complex interrelationships which result in what Beckett labelled 'the chain figure of the metaphor' in his monograph on Proust. Beckett's characters, on the other hand, although they grope in this poetic direction, depend finally on what they can immediately perceive"[110]. This must be qualified, however, by the acknowledgement that perception, in this case, is reliant upon the imtellectual assimilation of the untrustworthy impressions received by the senses.

The characters' problems with substance and identity are extended into *Molloy* and *Malone Dies*. Molloy recounts his mother's difficulties with his name, the pun on the word "borne" doubly emphasising the ironical nature of this problem: "she never called me son, fortunately, I could not have borne it, but Dan. I don't know why, my name is not Dan. Dan was my father's name, perhaps"[111]. As far as Malone is concerned, his obsession is with making an inventory of his possessions, as if this will in some way clarify his perception of the world and his position therein.

Throughout these works, the exploration of events is confined to that which can be easily stated in the form of words: the superficial examination of events corresponds to their explication in the simplest linguistic terms in a deliberate refusal to seek anything beyond. Watt's progressively reductive permutations lead, finally, to the examination of the actual constituent parts of the words; he is compelled to re-organise those elements into anagrams, the combinations of the words having been exhausted. Molloy claims that "all I know is what the words know, and the dead things, and that makes a handsome little sum, with a beginning, a middle, and an end as in the well-built phrase and the long sonata of the dead"[112]; he relates both words

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109_____, *Endgame* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), 27.
110Melvin J. Friedman, "The Novels of Samuel Beckett: An Amalgam of Joyce and Proust," *Comparative Literature* XII/1 (Winter 1960), 54.
111Samuel Beckett, "Molloy," *op. cit.*, 18.
112*Ibid.*, 31.

and their neat organisation to images of lifelessness, yet claims to know nothing else, nothing beyond, instead emphasising the repetitive examination of the surface, the formulation and re-formulation of the wanderings that could, but which are unlikely to, find a home.

These themes - the deadliness of words and their typical structural organisation into the attempted reflection of the everyday world, the resultant problems of identity and naming, and the nullifying effects of habit - all reiterate those of Beckett's study of *A la recherche* in consciously pessimistic terms. While in "Proust" Beckett *states* his negative conclusions, denying Proustian affirmation, these early prose works juxtapose futility with necessity, acknowledging no real alternative to the continued search for effective expression. Puns and misunderstandings between characters (often, paradoxically, extremely funny), stress the fragmentation of the self, the gap between subject and object, and the problems of connotation. Similarly, the rejection of causality denies existence any continuity: Molloy begins, "I am in my mother's room. It is I who live there now. I don't know how I got here"[113].

Any respect that Beckett had paid to the positive intuitions of involuntary memory is dispelled by memories of the pain which often results, and thus the restriction to the surface level is maintained. The association of these perceptions with music is extended beyond *Dream*; just as Belacqua finds music annoying, Murphy identifies it with Celia - whom he decides to leave - and her sexual favours: "Celia said that if he did not find work at once she would have to go back to hers. Murphy knew what that meant. No more music"[114]. The narrator of "First Love" is similarly annoyed, "it being apparently impossible, physically impossible short of being deaf, to get through this world, even my way, without hearing singing"[115], and Molloy, in an untypical moment of certitude, tells us "if there is one thing that gets on my nerves it is music"[116].

The reliance upon words in the face of their acknowledged inadequacy, therefore, precludes the appreciation of music. In *Watt*, some semblance of relief from the difficulties of linguistic signification seems to be provided when he rests, lying in a ditch, and suddenly and inexplicably hears music[117]. The accidental and acausal quality of these rare events and the temporary calm that results appear to suggest a sense of liberation from the problems of meaning and reference. The fact that Watt's ability to hear this music dissipates in proportion to his increasing entanglement with words and their permutations indicates that he gradually loses the facility to perceive

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113*Ibid.*, 9.
114Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, *op.cit.*, 47.
115_____, "First Love" in *Four Novellas* (London: John Calder, 1977), 21.
116_____, "Molloy," *op. cit.*, 96-7.
117_____, *Watt*, *op. cit.*, 32-3.

anything beneath the surface or to be transformed by the temporary suspension of habit. Thus the Addenda includes reference to a "descant heard by Watt on the way to the station"[118], an event not mentioned in the actual narrated text.

The perception of this music fails to affect Watt in any true sense or to distract him for more than a few moments from his ordinary mode of being. The instances are not described in truly musical terms (even if the first song is rhythmically notated), and in a sense such occasions correspond to the epiphanic examples of involuntary memory in Proust. Both seem to appear as the result of the relaxation of habit, occurring suddenly and unsought, and without any designated meaning. Both involve unexpected sensory impressions, freezing the moment before the continuation of "ordinary" behaviour. Similarly, neither actually demonstrates any alternative mode of existence; they cannot, being situated outside the temporal, and it is this which distinguishes Watt's "music" and Proustian involuntary memory from Proustian music's temporal encompassing of atemporality. Additionally, this distinction is precisely that which, in Proust, defines music as a more effective model than involuntary memory; it provides an example for Marcel as well as arresting his attention with the suggestion of something beyond his experience of reality. Involuntary memory can perform the latter function only, as can the music heard by Watt in his ditch.

Through the inclusion of these experiences, *Watt* seems to stand out from its surrounding works. In several of the subsequent prose texts there are references - though less and less frequent - to singing, choirs, humming, and to distant whisperings, but none of these seem to instil the serenity of Watt's unexpected experiences of music. Molloy describes hearing a far-off whisper that "is not a sound like the other sounds, that you listen to, when you choose, and can sometimes silence, by going away or stopping your ears"[119]; his impression is of a sourceless sound which is dissociated from linguistic signification but which he seems to regard as meaningful. Here, however, there is a quality of insistence which is absent from Watt's experiences. Molloy mentions other hummings and murmurings, often associated with nature (bird-song or the buzzing of bees), all of which in a way imply the momentary transcendence of the compulsion to define. After *Molloy*, however, such references become increasingly infrequent and are no longer accompanied by the suggestion of significance. In *Malone Dies*, the noises merge into "one continuous buzzing"[120] (although a mixed choir is still detected, the sound appearing as if from nowhere), and by *The Unnamable* a fully-fledged fear of sound has developed[121].

118*Ibid.*, 254.
119Samuel Beckett, "Molloy," *op. cit.*, 39.
120_____, "Malone Dies" in *The Beckett Trilogy, op. cit.*, 190.
121_____, "The Unnamable" in *ibid.*, 356.

The incessant babble to which the Unnamable is reduced appears designed to exclude the murmurings that are perceived as emanating from a world beyond: "that's all words, they're all I have, and not many of them, the words fail, the voice fails, so be it, I know that well, it will be the silence, full of murmurs, distant cries"[122].

Existence increasingly comprises nothing more than verbal description, and the rituals of habit are therefore maintained by means of incessant chatter. Molloy perceives that the sounds he hears are not ordinary sounds of which the subject is in control, but sounds that break through his verbal barriers and present themselves without explanation, and this engenders the same fear of introspection as is expressed by Belacqua in *Dream*. By *The Unnamable*, however, the voice is all that remains; the vocal formation of words has become the sole means by which the protagonist can attempt to verify his existence, and the fear of the beyond is the fear of non-referential sound - of that beyond language - emerging from the gaps between words. The characters retreat into the safety of the here and now, away from the intuition that was warned of in "Proust" and which here takes the form of any sound which lies outside the habitually significant.

It is possible, therefore, to trace a line of progression through Beckett's own early works. In the development to *Watt* there is a fascination with the structure of superficial experience and a delight in intellectual manoeuvre at the expense of any deeper exploration: subsequently, we find a fascination with words and their meanings. Watt, however, attempts to trace signification to the very insides of surface events and their formulation, first through their reduction to their fundamental elements, and then by rearranging the constituents of the words themselves. Only in *Watt* does the protagonist seem to make a conscious decision to delve beyond words, but the anagrammatic muddle in which he finds himself is too confusing and Watt is no longer able to function in the everyday world of signs. Effectively, he has passed beyond the stage at which the continuation of his ordinary life, to which linguistic signification is vital, is possible. Thus his search beyond words, paradoxically, destroys the ability to perceive anything further. Molloy and the following narrators, therefore, gradually accept a return to words, but this entails a consequent return to the habitual and stimulates the progressive building of defences against involuntary perception. Juxtaposed with ever more reductive external circumstances, the danger grows and the flow of words becomes more desperate. It is as if Watt's failure confirms Belacqua's suspicions as to the painfulness of introspection and the pursuit of meaning.

This process of development is accompanied by the presentation of non-referential sound as an alternative, as alterior, but even when these sounds are actually

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122*Ibid.*, 380-1.

referred to as music, their intimation of something beyond adheres more closely to the behavioural pattern of Proustian involuntary memory than to Proustian music, and this is emphasised by the dismissal of music as nothing more than an irritant. From this perspective it is interesting to return to Proust and to note that, as well as frequently relating involuntary memory to music, Proust does refer to an incident which lies somewhere between the two, using a single sound without referential signification as the inspiration for an involuntary perception. This involves the sound of a spoon knocking against a plate, which for Marcel immediately evokes memories of a journey in a railway carriage[123]. This employment of accidental sound, without words, in an instance of sudden recollection finds its own origins in an incident in Proust's earlier work, *Jean Santeuil*. In this formative example of involuntary memory, the pianist, Loisel, plays a waltz tune in which Jean thinks he recognises a phrase. Suddenly Loisel moves his fingers in such a way that, by chance, he produces a tone which resembles the twanging sound of the ancient piano of Jean's grandfather; through this accident Jean remembers this childhood experience and thereby recaptures a sense of his past life[124].

Through Proust's placing of this event within a musical situation, it is perhaps possible to follow Proust's later presentation of both involuntary memory and music back to this single incident and the immediate sensual impression that points beyond its apparent simplicity. Other moments of pure communication - those which Beckett neglects to mention - are often similarly based upon non-referential sound; this is especially the case with Marcel's grandmother, as is shown by both the telephone call and the song-like serenity of her dying breaths.

Jean-Pierre Barricelli has suggested that "Proust reacted to sound more than to 'music', formally speaking, as an art"[125]. It is true that Proust displays an extreme sensitivity to noises of all kinds, and that sounds are often responsible for instances of involuntary perception. It is also the case that these instances outnumber the truly musical descriptions, but this is only to be expected, given the more experiential nature of the accidents of memory, and to restrict Proust's musical sensitivity to the notion of sound is to ignore the subtlety of the role of music as a model for Marcel's work. Proust may avoid complicated musical description, but his evocation of music in terms of its temporal operations and its effect upon the listener is quite thorough: these, following Schopenhauer, constitute the extent of his concerns, and any further detail would be superfluous.

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[123]Marcel Proust, *op. cit.*, III, 900-1.

[124]Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), 642.

[125]Jean-Pierre Barricelli, *Melopoesis: Approaches to the Study of Literature and Music* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 124.

This leads back into Beckett's early works, for, having traced the line of dependence upon music revealed by certain of Proust's themes, having recognised Beckett's preference for the pessimistic aspect of those themes and the fact that it is that very negativity that leads to the reliance upon the musical model, it becomes possible to identify a similar trail within Beckett's own output. As has been demonstrated, these works take up and extend the bias revealed in "Proust". Thus the same tendency towards fragmentation and multiplicity that Beckett recognises as engendering the idea of music in *A la recherche* is delineated in early Beckett but in a more concentrated form. Yet Beckett's apparent attitude to the Proustian musical solution is explicitly repudiatory. On the one hand music is an annoyance, and on the other its non-referentiality is reduced to the lower status of involuntary memory, effective only momentarily and rejected due to its association with suffering. Simultaneously, however, the fragmentation that disallows introspection engenders the fascination with the play of surface and with the pleasure of forming artificial structures. Meaning is denied outside the form of expression itself: the delight is in the design and in the patterning of the presentational.

Here we can detect a correspondence with the Proustian distinction between music and involuntary memory: it is the unfolding of sound-structures through time but without any specific connotation which differentiates music from the static instances of involuntary perception. Therefore, while Proust's problematics allow the emergence of the musical model from its background position, Beckett's early protagonists encounter intensified versions of the same difficulties and, in a sense, stumble in a similar direction, revealing an unacknowledged preference for the characteristics of music as defined by Schopenhauer and Proust. The possibility of epiphany is even presented in the form of non-referential sound itself, but the obsession with the naming of meaning and the fear of introspective pain are too great, and the tendency is disavowed by asserting a dislike of music.

It is possible, therefore, to begin to understand Beckett's "Proust" as the link between his early fiction and Proust's delineation of a chain of themes conditioned by the formative conception of music. It is the very bias of "Proust" that develops this correspondence, simultaneously concealing and revealing the tendency towards music that is in different ways manifested in the work of each author. This allows Beckett to conclude his study of *A la recherche* with the claim that music plays a catalytic role in Proust, thereby hinting at the path to be traced through his own study as well as through *A la recherche* itself. In Beckett's early fiction, however, the musical element as delineated within Proust's themes is forced open, such that the immediate sensory experience of sound is separated from its dynamic function: the content, as it is here presented, is divorced from the form. While the exploration of design and symmetry realises a preference for the play of referentially meaningless surface and the

consequent promotion of a state that appropriates to that of music, the content disavows any resultant transcendence or intimation of the beyond (such as would be required by Schopenhauer or Proust), instead maintaining the stability of the known, of the comfort of words even in the face of their deadliness.

A distinction between the exterior and the interior is thereby established, but the dichotomy is somewhat confused. The gradual elimination of external description implies an orientation towards the interior, but, simultaneously, the resultant barrage of words attempts to deny the beyond and to repudiate depth. In an interview concerning his lectures on Beckett and Proust, William Burroughs said "I think that my angle was that they were as far apart as you could possibly get. One is going in, and one is going out"[126]. When pressed as to whether Marcel does not, perhaps, reach inside by means of memory, Burroughs clarified his position, saying "oh yes, of course, but there's no dichotomy between inside and outside"[127], thereby implying that Beckett's approach retains such a polarisation. This perhaps reduces the complexities of Beckett's tendency towards contraction, but it nevertheless pinpoints a vital distinction. The relationship between the exterior and the interior in the worlds of both authors is essentially that of the ideal and the real; Marcel's progression through everyday experience includes occasions of insight and thus he is finally able to assert the possibility of an "ideal real". Beckett's characters, however (at least until the later work), insist on the isolation of one from the other and on the necessity of holding on to that which is known.

However, after *The Unnamable* a change begins to take place. A separate world of enclosed situations is established, each work evolving its own isolated landscape. The desperate chatter gradually calms down; the plays that follow *The Trilogy*, such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, include moments of personal crisis, but while the need for progressive motion is maintained throughout, particularly in terms of a searching through words, the anxiety of even this is very gradually reduced. Thus the writing of the later short prose is more concerned with the evocation of unnamed characters in contained situations. Experiential description is almost entirely absent and the characters gradually achieve a shade-like formlessness, as does the expression; the words are no longer employed within conventional structures, but proceed in the manner of a careful, progressive elaboration of a basic situation, avoiding poetic symbolism at the same time as eschewing the specificity of ordinary prose.

Locations simply *are* and subjects are simply *there*, in the Heideggerian sense of "being thrown", and hence the "narrative" proceeds without objective setting or

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[126]Nicholas Zurbrugg, "A Footnote to William Burroughs's Article 'Beckett and Proust'," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* VII/2 (Summer 1987), 32.
[127]*Ibid.*, 33.

explanation, plunging the reader directly into the strangeness of each world. Additionally, the progress of the words corresponds to the developing exposition of the situation: the two are inseparable, and the early dualism of the habitual "here and now" and the involuntarily apprehended "beyond" is collapsed. As Burroughs states, Beckett "is perhaps the purest writer who has ever written. There is nothing there but the writing"[128], and this is the result of the exclusion of extraneous detail: as Beckett once wrote of Joyce's *Work in Progress*, "here form *is* content, content *is* form"[129]. The words flow, incorporating elements of alliteration and onomatopoeia, but the sense often remains unclear. Landscapes may be evoked and actions are sometimes described, but their meaning remains obscure; in this way, Beckett negates the referential content of his expressive forms and moves towards the state of music.

In rehearsal for *Not I*, Beckett once told the actress Jessica Tandy that he was "not unduly concerned with intelligibility. I hope the piece may work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect"[130]; the importance of referential significance therefore recedes behind the more immediate *sense* of significance and the patterns of the words. The emphasis is upon the form that attempts to accommodate being - "it is the shape that matters"[131] - but this no longer results in the creation of artificially structured situations as in the earlier works: it is now the very exposition of content that constitutes those structures.

In Beckett's early output, the fear of penetrating the surface divides the Proustian conception of music as non-referential form and the direct reflection of essence, the former being maintained in terms of a fascination with pure and meaningless design, the latter being rejected outright. In the later prose, however, this separation of form and content has been repaired and, subsequently, there is a resolution of ideal and real, of exterior and interior. In this way, the development of Beckett's work beyond the crisis of *The Unnamable* perhaps follows more closely than Proust himself the solution to Marcel's literary problem; Marcel recognises the implications of the musical model, but Proust's writing, however impressionistic, still maintains the fundamental dependence upon linguistic signification and narrative development. Proust can never actually begin to eschew the referential framework as Beckett can, nor would he wish to. In taking this additional step, therefore, Beckett in his own terms heeds his acknowledgement of music as Proust's catalyst, this only

[128]William Burroughs, "Beckett and Proust," *Review of Contemporary Fiction* VII/2 (Summer1987), 30.
[129]Samuel Beckett, "Dante...Bruno. Vico..Joyce" in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 1983), 27.
[130]S.E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 19.
[131]Quoted from Harold Hobson's interview with Samuel Beckett in *ibid.*, 18.

being possible following the resolution of the dualities and dilemmas of the early work, having achieved a more pure evocation of the interdependence of existence and expression.

The earlier works, though simultaneously dismissing music as an annoyance, evoke an indirect reference to musical qualities through their exploration, following "Proust", of those thematic aspects which in *A la recherche* tend towards the musical. The later works, however, achieve a more full appropriation of musical characteristics, the individual connotations of words being understood only through their formal deployment. Additionally, Beckett rejects the need to assert transcendental meaning; while for Proust, following the metaphysical tradition, music must evoke an eternal world of truth beyond the ordinary, Beckett's work establishes no transcendental signified. It neither rejects nor affirms such a notion, and this, too, is appropriate to its musicality: music simply makes no comment as to its own powers of signification.

This opens up the realm of connotation for both music and Beckett's later work, for, as Derrida writes, there are

> two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics ... has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play[132].

Late Beckett, like music, has reached a de-territorialised position independent of the need for stable foundation.

Beckett thus develops an orientation away from designative interpretation and towards alterity and the true recognition of difference; he gradually dismisses the modernist need for overall unity effected by the affirmation of coherent meaning and the justification of motivation through the appeal to the transcendental. An acknowledgement of the otherness of music is therefore achieved by the movement away from these tendencies and towards the condition of music; an attempt is made to accommodate certain musical characteristics, but not to encompass it within some ideal unity: difference is ultimately fully recognised in the Beckettian admission of failure.

In this way (and as will later be explored in detail), Beckett provides a link between modernism and postmodernism, examining the preoccupations of the former before dismissing them in favour of the open conditions of multiplicity and play, and at the root of this process is the model of music and Beckett's developing perception and acknowledgement of it. It could even be suggested that Beckett effectively carries music forward from its appropriation by modernist literature, (which, in turn,

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132Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" in *op. cit.*, 292.

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followed the Romantic appreciation of musical "vagueness"), into the postmodern world, where it should find itself embraced through its natural resistance to definitive interpretation. The denial of the need for foundation or origin exorcises the Schopenhauerian conception of music's relationship to an essential reality, asserting a preference for the play of signification free from the notion of transcendence.

CHAPTER THREE
The Double Image of Music in Beckett's Early Fiction

Summary:

Beckett's early fiction - the Dantean origins of the character of Belacqua and his desire for undisturbed mental absorption - Beckett's general association of mental activity with male and (grotesque) physicality with female characters in Dream of Fair to Middling Women and More Pricks Than Kicks - the Alba (and Lucy) as transcending such divisions through their elevation beyond gender distinctions - Beckett's extension of this system of binary oppositions, associating music with the irrational, negative sequence of terms and hence with the female characters - the further use of musical metaphors to lament the impossibility of following the Proustian solution with its imposition of unity upon characters and events.

Belacqua's expression of his literary ideals in terms of the true reflection of the chaos of experience - the correspondence to ideals expressed by Beckett himself - the use of Beethoven (particularly the Seventh Symphony) as the musical model for this determination to move "between the terms" of language - the rejection of Proustian notions as not, therefore, involving the outright rejection of music as a model - the non-sexual association of this second musical model with the effectively genderless Alba and Lucy - the Beethovenian model's implication of a need to begin to dismantle the referential framework of language.

These implications as not immediately realised - the stylistic refinement of the bizarre language of Dream and More Pricks Than Kicks - the influence of both Descartes and Geulincx upon the mind-body dualism of Murphy - the additional influence of Schopenhauer, Spinoza and Leibniz, and the combination of their ideas into a single personal system - the failure of this system and the pervasive scepticism towards such solutions - the deployment of the figure of Democritus as a means of expressing this futility - Democritus' resistance to all-encompassing, unified philosophical theories - Beckett's use of Democritus to mock Murphy's attempts at self-knowledge.

The Democritean depiction of a state of dynamic flux as correspondent to Belacqua's (and Beckett's) delineation of experience as too diffuse for full comprehension and reflection - the relationship between the Democritean void and the notion of the "Beethoven pause" - the subsequent parallel between the role of Democritus in Murphy and the Beethovenian model in the early works - the proposed acceptance of chaos, otherness, and the irrational - this as an alternative to the quest for absolute self-knowledge, but an alternative which cannot be confronted until

Watt's *exhaustion of rational systematisation and the* Trilogy's *exploration of questions of identity.*

Beckett's later works as discarding dualistic knowledge-systems - the consequent breakdown of traditional linguistic structures and creation of provisional, shade-like characters - this "in-betweenness" as covertly prefigured in the early works by the use of the Beethovenian musical model and its association with the Democritean void in Murphy *- Beckett as therefore exploring the inadequacy of (traditionally male) logocentric rationality and developing a literature which, taking the genderless figure as its muse, attempts to reflect true experience through the breakdown of conventional referentiality.*

Beckett's texts display a consistent preoccupation with the nature of the self, knowledge and experience. His first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, was completed in 1932 in Paris, when Beckett was twenty-six. However, the book remained unpublished until after his death, and even then its appearance was controversial; doubts have been expressed as to whether Beckett ever intended it to reach the public and, if so, to whom the editing and publication should have been entrusted[1]. Sections of the novel appeared in other forms (as *Text* and *Sedendo et Quiescendo*[2], and much of the material was also used in the poetry of *Echo's Bones*), but Beckett clearly questioned the worth of this early work, and he later prevented the reprinting of *More Pricks Than Kicks* (a volume of short stories which includes

[1] In his foreword to the Black Cat Press first edition of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Eoin O'Brien states that while Beckett did not wish the work to be published during his lifetime, he had agreed that it was bound to reach the public eventually. O'Brien says, "he asked me to hold the 'key' to the chest 'until I saw fit'". The Black Cat edition appeared in October 1992, but in 1993 circulation in this country was halted by an injunction taken out by John Calder, who was producing his own edition. Calder had initially endorsed O'Brien's editorship and the two had worked together until falling out over the format of the book and the costs involved. Calder then claimed that he doubted the reliability of O'Brien's statement of Beckett's wishes, and accused the Black Cat edition of inaccuracy. The matter was clarified by a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* from Edward Beckett stating, in response to Calder's claims, that "Dr. O'Brien was appointed as Editor of the work by the Estate ... and he remains so". Several months later, however, a further letter from John Calder strangely continued to assert that his was the edition authorised by the Beckett Estate and that his text (and the US Arcade edition) corrected O'Brien's inaccuracies. The comments of other Beckett scholars, however, seem to support Black Cat and Edward Beckett's approval of that edition; Gerry Dukes of the University of Limerick wrote backing O'Brien's claim that the Calder and Arcade publications contain many mistakes, and the letter goes on to point out that Calder's editions of other Beckett texts are notoriously inaccurate.
See Eoin O'Brien, foreword to Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *op. cit.*, ix-x. The dispute was initially reported in the "NB" section of the *Times Literary Supplement* 4708 (June 25, 1993), 16, and the responses appeared in the following *TLS* columns of letters: 4709 (July 2, 1993), 17; 4711 (July 16, 1993), 16; 4731 (December 3, 1993), 15; 4736 (January 7, 1994), 13. Interestingly, similar arguments have more recently been taking place between John Calder and Barney Rosset (Grove Press) over Rosset's decision to publish Beckett's early play, *Eleuthéria*. See *Times Literary Supplement* 4805 (April 28, 1995), 19 and 4806 (May 12, 1995), 15.
[2] Samuel Beckett, "Sedendo et Quiescendo," *Transition* XXI (March 1932), 13-20; "Text," *New Review* II (April 1932), 57.

episodes from *Dream*). For those interested in Beckett's work, however, the early texts provide an interesting context for ideas examined more successfully in the mature writing, helping to clarify the process by which Beckett became established as a major author.

The protagonist of *Dream* (and of *More Pricks Than Kicks*) is Belacqua Shuah; he takes his name from the character encountered in Dante's *Purgatorio* as the pilgrim climbs the mountain to the gates of Purgatory proper. Sitting in the shade of a large boulder is Belacqua (said to have been a Florentine musical instrument maker known to Dante). The pilgrim asks Belacqua why he does not proceed upwards, to which Belacqua replies: "O brother, what is the use of going up, for God's angel that sits in the gateway would not let me pass to the torments?"[3]. This is Belacqua's only appearance in Dante, and yet this personification of indolence and lethargy (with his "lazy movements and curt speech"[4]) struck Beckett sufficiently for him to develop his protagonist from this image. Dante's Belacqua has postponed repentance for his sins through laziness, and as a result cannot yet be admitted to Purgatory: he must wait for a period equal to the length of his time on earth. The image, therefore, is of a continually waiting figure, sitting with his knees pulled up to his chest as if in the foetal position. Clearly there is a strong association between this character and not only Beckett's Belacqua but also many later Beckett figures, both in terms of their inactive self-absorption and their tendency either to adopt the foetal position or to express a desire to return to the womb[5].

Beckett's Belacqua is of similar character to Dante's: "he lay lapped in a beatitude of indolence that was smoother than oil and softer than a pumpkin.... 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"[6]. This laziness allows Belacqua to retreat into the depths of his mind in a manner evocative of both a return to the womb and a desire for death: "for the mind to be enwombed and entombed in the very special manner that we will have more than one occasion to consider was better still, a real pleasure"[7]. Thus Belacqua associates the life of the mind with bodily inactivity, attempting, in Cartesian fashion, the negation of his bodily existence in order to heighten the pleasure of his mental absorption; as a further indication of this we are told that, with regard to

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[3]Dante, *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio,* trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), canto IV, 63, lines 127-9.

[4]*Ibid.,* line 121.

[5]Watt, for example, seeks sanctuary from the world by crawling into ditches and adopting the foetal position. Such imagery is often echoed elsewhere, and the narrator of Murphy makes explicit the link back to Dante's original description, referring to Belacqua's "embryonal repose". See Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.,* 48, and *Watt, op. cit..* For further discussion see Walter A. Strauss, "Dante's Belacqua and Beckett's Tramps," *Comparative Literature* XI/3 (Summer 1959), 250-61, and Ruby Cohn, "A Note on Beckett, Dante, and Geulincx," *Comparative Literature* XII/1 (Winter 1960), 93-4.

[6]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.,* 44.

[7]*Ibid.,* 6.

Belacqua, the narrator cannot bring himself to conjugate the verb "to be" without a shudder[8].

This early Beckettian distinction between mind and body broadens out into associations with other binary oppositions, perhaps the most obvious being that of the male and female figures. In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and *More Pricks Than Kicks*, the male protagonist is obsessed by his mental life, attempting to attain a state of self-knowledge by transcending sensual distraction. The female characters, on the other hand, generally amount to little more than the sum of their (often fairly disgusting) physical parts. A clear misogyny is apparent in the depiction of this grotesque assortment of characters; the use of the definite article before their names (*the* Smeraldina-Rima, *the* Frica, and so on) emphasises their presentation as objects, and this is enhanced by their individual descriptions. The Smeraldina-Rima is a "slob of a girl"[9] with a body that is "definitely all wrong. Poppata, big breech, knock-knees, ankles all fat nodules, wobbly, mammosa, slobbery-blubby, bubbubbubbub, a real button-bursting Weib, ripe"[10]. Her face is beautiful, but even this takes on a negative connotation as it is this beauty, combined with Belacqua's lethargy, which ensnares him in the first place, "his fatigue on that occasion making him attentive to her face only"[11].

The entry of the Syra-Cusa, similarly, focuses attention on her physical appearance, and Belacqua immediately proceeds to compare the attributes of the two women. In the case of the Syra-Cusa the body is described as beautiful, but the analogies employed are animalistic: "the sinewy fetlock sprang, Brancusi bird, from the shod foot.... Her neck was scrawny and her head was null"[12]. The face certainly does not come up to scratch: "her eyes were wanton, they rolled and stravagued, they were laskivious and lickerish, the brokers of her zeal, basilisk eyes, the fowlers and hooks of Amourr, burning glasses"[13]. The eyes suggest a predatory sexuality, a feature which is clearly not considered a positive attribute and one which is shared by nearly all the females; early in the book, for example, we are told that the Smeraldina-Rima rapes Belacqua ("then everything went kaputt"[14]). The entry of the Frica is cast in similar terms, reiterating the horse imagery from the description of the Syra-Cusa: "her horse-face ... with nostrils of generous bore. The mouth champs an invisible bit,

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[8]*Ibid.*, 46.
[9]*Ibid.*, 3.
[10]*Ibid.*, 15.
[11]*Ibid.*, 3.
[12]*Ibid.*, 33.
[13]*Ibid.*, 50.
[14]*Ibid.*, 18.

foam gathers at the bitter commisures"[15]. Later, the description becomes more extreme - "we have the Frica, looking something horrid. Throttled gazelle gives no idea"[16] - and rampant sexuality is again suggested: "in her talons earnestly she clutches Sade's *Hundred Days*"[17].

These women are defined solely in terms of their bodies and their voracious appetites. Their enjoyment of food and drink is similarly exaggerated into the grotesque and becomes associated with their hunger for sex; for example, the Smeraldina-Rima is described attacking her food in front of Belacqua: "she countermanded the soup. Now she was lashing into the cookies.... Every now and then she would peep up at him out of her feast of cream, just to make sure he was still there to kiss and be kissed when her hunger would be appeased by the Schokolade and cookies"[18].

The Smeraldina-Rima, the Syra-Cusa and the Frica all appear in both *Dream* and *More Pricks Than Kicks*, and the minor female characters in the stories written especially for *More Pricks Than Kicks* are portrayed in a similar manner. Ruby Tough is described as a slut by her own father[19], while Hermione Näutzshe is "a powerfully built nymphomaniac"[20]. Women are often past their best (Ruby was once beautiful but is no longer so, and the description of her mother emphasises that she is "well past the change"[21]). On only one occasion do we encounter beauty, in the form of Lucy in "Walking Out": "in face and figure Lucy was entrancing, her entire person was quite perfect"[22]. However, even here the narrator cannot bear to withhold the information that this body is shortly to suffer a nasty accident ("her poor body that must wither"[23]).

The concentration on the physical description of the women is complemented by the rarity with which they display any intelligence. The Smeraldina-Rima's attempt to write down her feelings for Belacqua is mocked by the mode of expression and the spelling and punctuation mistakes, and the image of her face spattered with ink is equally ridiculous: "your letter is soked with tears death is the onely thing. I had been crying bitterly, tears! tears! tears! and nothing els, then your letter cam with more

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[15]*Ibid.*, 179, and Samuel Beckett, "A Wet Night" in *More Pricks Than Kicks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1972), 50.

[16]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 215, and "A Wet Night," *op. cit.*, 61.

[17]_____, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 179, and "A Wet Night," *op. cit.*, 50.

[18]_____, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 106.

[19]_____, "Love and Lethe" in *More Pricks Than Kicks, op. cit.*, 92.

[20]_____, "What a Misfortune" in *ibid.*, 138.

[21]_____, "Love and Lethe," *op. cit.*, 85.

[22]_____, "Walking Out" in *More Pricks Than Kicks, op. cit.*, 105.

[23]*Ibid.*, 106.

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tears, after I had read it ofer and ofer again I found I had ink spots on my face"[24]. Not only are the women uninterested in mental activity - Belacqua says to Lucy, "you don't believe in these private experiences, women don't I know as a rule"[25] - but their appetites and demands also constantly distract Belacqua from his attempts to retreat into the "asylum" of his mind: women are always "busy doing something to you, raping you, pumping your hand, fröling you like a cat in a rut, clapping you on the shoulder, smelling at you and rubbing against you like a dog or a cat, committing every variety of nuisance on you, or making you do something, eat or go for a walk or get into bed or out of bed or hold on or move on"[26].

The mind-body dualism is therefore clearly aligned with male and female characteristics and, as Mary Bryden points out, even though the women can be divided into the beautiful and the ugly (sometimes even within one body), they are clearly grouped together as essentially "other" as a result of their bestial physicality: "even when impeded by physical, often grotesque handicaps, they continue to stride remorselessly across the male life-space, appropriating it, and reportedly, polluting it"[27]. Of course, as Susan Brienza observes, the narrator's derogation of women need not necessarily imply that Beckett takes the same position. Certainly, Belacqua does not escape the biting humour of the narrator, but nevertheless, as Brienza goes on to show, that which surrounds the other characters is especially scathing, suggesting a certain empathy with the protagonist and a lack of sympathy towards those (women) who cause him difficulties[28]. Additionally, the negativity is almost universal: "in general, Beckett's characterisation of women alternates between stereotypes of femininity and bizarre reversals of the stereotypes ... [women are] either too sensuous and too concerned with matters of appearance or totally unattractive"[29].

The exception is the character of the Alba (although this has often been ignored by critics, presumably in the eagerness to stress the otherwise all-encompassing misogyny of the early works). The Alba's description, unlike that of the other women, does not comprise an immediate survey of her physical attributes. Nor is she stupid; her demand that the Polar Bear should tell her "about Louis Labbé, or the Holy Ghost or the unreal coordinates"[30] suggests a thirst for knowledge, and she listens to him speak without interrupting. With Belacqua, the Alba participates in his (often obscure)

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[24]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 55, and "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux" in *More Pricks Than Kicks, op. cit.*, 152.
[25]_____, "Walking Out," *op. cit.*, 107.
[26]_____, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 36.
[27]Mary Bryden, *op. cit.*, 15.
[28]See Susan Brienza, "Clods, Whores, and Bitches: Misogyny in Beckett's Early Fiction" in Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.), *op. cit.*, 92.
[29]*Ibid.*, 91.
[30]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 164.

banter on equal terms[31], and she is allowed to join him in the shadow of a large rock (in reference to the location of Dante's Belacqua - given the association of Belacqua's indolent self-absorption with his position in the shade of this rock, the Alba's being allowed to join him here suggests a strong empathy between the characters). We are told that she is intelligent and sensible, and that even though "what wisdom she had acquired ... she had, in common with her consoeurs, acquired empirically. It was of merely human scope. It was valid only up to a point"[32], she moves beyond those sisters in recognising the fact: "this core of awareness, a greater treasure than any extract of experience, set her apart from the few women he had met and the few more he was ever likely to meet"[33]. It is true that she, like the other women, tells Belacqua to "brood less"[34] and that she is guilty of a certain fickleness, but these are minor defects in comparison with those of the other female characters.

The importance of the Alba's difference is made clear in the episode concerning the party-dress. Belacqua reads in a paper that a woman

> is either: a short-below-the-waist, a big-hip, a sway-back, a big-abdomen or an average. If the bust be too cogently controlled, then shall fat roll from scapula to scapula. If it be made passable and light, then shall the diaphragm bulge and be unsightly. Why not invest therefore chez a reputable corset-builder in the brassière-cum-corset décolleté.... It bestows glorious diaphragm and hip support, it enhances the sleeveless backless evening gown[35].

This article causes Belacqua to panic, wondering whether or not the Alba will be wearing such a backless dress to the party; the implication is that if she does, she can no longer be viewed differently to other women as she will fit into one of the listed categories. Rushing to the Alba's house, he is relieved to find that the dress is not backless and requires no corset, instead fastening with buttons and thereby confirming that "she was not to be classified. Not to be corseted. Not a woman"[36].

This last sentence is revealing. Thus far we have been given the impression of the Alba as in a class of her own amongst her sex. Now, on the other hand, the suggestion is that she has transcended the category of woman, presumably by means of her intelligence and her empathy with Belacqua. From this perspective it seems especially significant that while the other male-female relations are always sexual, Belacqua and the Alba do not have sex: "he has not lain with her. Nor she with him. None of that kind of thing here, if you don't mind"[37]. The preference for a dress

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[31]See *ibid.*, 173, for example.
[32]*Ibid.*, 192.
[33]*Ibid.*
[34]*Ibid.*, 190.
[35]*Ibid.*, 204, and "A Wet Night," *op. cit.*, 52.
[36]*Ibid.*
[37]*Ibid.*, 177.

which fully covers the body might therefore be interpreted as a wish to ignore the female body within, and the Alba is similarly described as acquiring "a new quality in her presence, a silence of body"[38]. Clearly the Alba reaches a higher plane of being than the other female characters, but the condition of doing so is that she can no longer be considered a woman. Thus while the character initially seems to provide an exception to the misogyny, further consideration suggests that her position actually confirms such an attitude, emphasising the association of woman with body and male with mind.

The polarisation of mind-body and male-female is further extended into the association of music with the bodily and female side of things. This is as would be expected, given the long-established tendency of Western culture to articulate (sometimes covertly, sometimes more explicitly) a system of binary oppositions within which certain terms are related. The origins of this lie in the Pythagorean "Table of Contents" as set down in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*:

limit	unlimited
odd	even
one	plurality
right	left
male	female
at rest	in motion
straight	crooked
light	darkness
good	evil
square	oblong[39]

Rationality and the life of the mind have always been strongly associated with the male and with the concomitant terms in the taxonomy. Of course, this system of polarities "is not a system of archetypes; its terms are not eternal and unchanging but rather fluid and at times inconsistent"[40]. However, even a cursory survey of history and literature confirms that Western culture has always valued rational thought, its related terms, and their identification with the active male more highly than the opposite terms (which generally associate the emotions and the more passive images of nature with the female). Even the primacy of objectivity within such a system highlights the implicitly loaded values of the dualism, given the universal association of the female with the inability to sustain objectivity in the face of a (supposedly) inherently sensuous and emotional nature. As Mary Bryden states, with reference to Hélène Cixous'

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[38]*Ibid.*, 169.

[39]See Aristotle, *Metaphysics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary by W. D. Ross*, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), 142.

[40]Carol Helmstetter Cantrell, "Cartesian Man and the Woman Reader: A Feminist Approach to Beckett's *Molloy*" in Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.), *op. cit.*, 119.

deconstruction of these categories, "where male and female are regarded as polarities -
as 'Man' on the one hand, 'Woman' on the 'Other', rather than as 'men and women',
and where male is taken as the central reference point or norm - Woman becomes
deviant value, object, absence, and chaos, to subject-Man's sovereign presence"[41].
Thus the female becomes the negative value, diffuse and irrational beside the rationally
coherent male.

Examining Beckett's *Whoroscope* notebook from the early 1930s, Bryden
found that Beckett's ideas seemed to echo this system: he had

> jotted down a number of such contrastive values, set in antagonistic relation by
> an interposal *v* (*versus*). The list includes male *versus* female, though Beckett
> intervenes to reverse this ordering, then enabling the first-placed female to match
> other values such as darkness (*versus* light), imperfection (*versus* perfection) and
> 2-time (*versus* 3-time) in music (just as Aristotle aligns male with 'odd' and
> female with 'even'). Moreover the *et cetera* which closes the list indicates
> Beckett's acknowledgement of the extensibility of such hierarchical pairs[42].

Given the privileging of the logos as *man's* primary means of expressing *his*
rationality, it is perhaps not surprising that music should find itself associated with the
opposite (and, by implication, negative) sequence of terms. Similarly, the fact that
much musical philosophy focuses on its ineffability (and even, often, on its close
relationship with the emotions) also explains the tendency to associate the art-form
with the female, bodily, less rational side of things.

As a result of all this, it seems fairly logical that throughout *Dream of Fair to
Middling Women* and *More Pricks Than Kicks*, women are repeatedly associated with
music. The Smeraldina-Rima announces "that she cared for nothing ... so much as the
music of Bach and that she was taking herself off almost at once and for good and all
to Vienna to study the pianoforte"[43]. Once there, her letter to Belacqua tells him that
her only consolation in his absence is her struggle to play a Beethoven sonata[44]. In
"What a Misfortune", Una bboggs is described as very dull, "but withal she rejoiced
in one accomplishment for which Bel had no words to express his respect, namely, an
ability to play from memory, given the opening bar, any Mozart sonata whatsoever,
with a xylophonic precision"[45]. Music is frequently associated with sexual images of
women and sometimes with actual sexual activity. Again in "What a Misfortune",
Sproule has a vision of a beautiful Girl Guide: "she beckoned him with her second
finger, like one preparing a certificate in pianoforte"[46]. Similarly, the narrator says of
the Syra-Cusa that "to take her arm, to flow together, out of step, down the asphalt

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[41]Mary Bryden, *op. cit.*, 5.

[42]*Ibid.*, 17.

[43]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 3.

[44]*Ibid.*, 58, and "The Smeraldina's Billet Doux," *op. cit.*, 155.

[45]Samuel Beckett, "What a Misfortune," *op. cit.*, 121.

[46]*Ibid.*, 132.

bed, was a foundering in music"[47] (the use of the word "foundering" also extending the horse imagery found in the earlier description of her appearance).

The Smeraldina-Rima's rape of Belacqua is described as queering his pitch[48], and the association is elaborated in the protagonist's consideration of his visits to a brothel. Belacqua is disturbed by the fact that his visits leave him with a feeling of "peace and radiance, the banquet of music"[49] that he otherwise identifies (at this point, if not later) solely with the Smeraldina-Rima. This association results in his conception of her "oneness" fragmenting into images which encompass a range of similar experiences with other women, and he therefore decides to give up his use of prostitutes so as to "be spared Beethoven through a bagpipe"[50]: "it was intolerable that she should break up into a series of whores"[51].

This example establishes a link between the different uses of musical metaphor in the early works. Just as the narrator describes Belacqua as a "booby" for insisting on the indivisibility and unity of his conception of the Smeraldina-Rima[52], a musical analogy is invoked by the narrator for the discussion of the problems of the book. Early on in *Dream* we are told that if only the characters were such that they could be summed up as individual musical notes - in this case the analogy is with the twelve different Chinese liŭ and liū sung by the male and female phoenix - then "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-figured teleophony that would be a pleasure to hear"[53]. Unfortunately, however, these characters will not toe the line: "but what can you do with a person like Nemo who will not for any consideration be condensed into a liŭ, who is not a note at all but the most regrettable simultaneity of notes"[54]. Later on the same images are reiterated: the characters "let us down, they insist on being themselves.... The whole fabric comes unstitched.... The music comes to pieces. The notes fly about all over the place, a cyclone of electrons"[55]. If Belacqua were able to act as a typical modernist narrator and synthesiser of events and characters (along the lines of Proust's Marcel, for example, or "Watson or Figaro or Jane the Pale..."[56]), he could be employed as a "tuning-fork to mix with the treacherous liŭs and liūs and get a line on them"[57]. Unfortunately,

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[47] Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 33.
[48] *Ibid.*, 18.
[49] *Ibid.*, 40.
[50] *Ibid.*, 42.
[51] *Ibid.*, 41.
[52] See *ibid.*
[53] *Ibid.*, 10.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *Ibid.*, 112-3.
[56] *Ibid.*, 125.
[57] *Ibid.*

though, we are told that he is not suitable, and in the end Beckett can only "send Belacqua wandering about vaguely, thickening the ruined melody here and there"[58].

As for the female characters in *Dream*, the narrator evokes a similar musical analogy in order to indicate that he could, if his intentions were not otherwise, position the women within a neat, self-contained structure: "we could chain her [the Syra-Cusa] up with the Smeraldina-Rima and the little Alba, our capital divas, and make it look like a sonata, with recurrence of themes, key signatures, plagal finale and all"[59]. Here, then, Beckett's narrator seems to expand upon his comments in "Proust"; whereas Proust deploys the concept of music as a model for his own art, Beckett seems to stress the impossibility of this. Beckett effectively subverts Proust's model, deploying the analogy of music precisely in order to expose the impossibility of forcing the characters into a "purely melodic" little book. As Nicholas Zurbrugg puts it, this is vital to the more general rejection of the possibility of Proustian transcendental apperception: "neither *Dream*'s narrator, nor Belacqua, receive any musical intimation of the permanence and reality of either the personality or art"[60]. Not only this, but, as was seen in the previous chapter, in reflecting Beckett's own negative interpretation of Proust, Belacqua shrinks from the pain of evocative introspection. He often subverts images taken from *A la recherche*; his determination to see the Smeraldina-Rima as a unity, for example, echoes Marcel's conflicting visions of the fragmentary Albertine, and on one occasion Belacqua even attempts a deliberate re-enactment of Marcel's final experience of involuntary memory in which he stumbles on cobbles and recalls an image of Venice[61]: "the wattmen tittered as I tottered on purpose for radiant Venice to solve my life"[62]. In this way, Beckett's depiction of the characters as errant musical notes clearly stresses his rejection of Proustian pure perception.

Other writers have commented similarly on this negative deployment of the musical model in *Dream*, stressing that Beckett dissociates music and literature in order to suggest that language can never reach the order of music[63]. This is true, but more careful attention to the presentation of music in these works suggests a greater degree of complexity than has been recognised. Early narrative comments in *Dream* seem to imply a desire for the unified structure of cause and effect which would be

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[58]*Ibid.*, 117.

[59]*Ibid.*, 49.

[60]Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Beckett, Proust, and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*," *Journal of Beckett Studies* IX (1984), 49.

[61]Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, op. cit.*, III, 898-900.

[62]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 50. Also see Nicholas Zurbrugg's comments on this in "Beckett, Proust and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*," *op. cit.*, 50.

[63]See, for example, James Knowlson and John Pilling, *op. cit.*, 19, 297, and Lawrence Miller, *Samuel Beckett: The Expressive Dilemma* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 38.

produced if only the characters would fall into line: "it is most devoutly to be hoped that some at least of our characters can be cast for parts in a liŭ-liŭ"[64]. Similarly, the narrator seems disappointed that "the fact of the matter is we do not quite know where we are in this story"[65]. However, later comments suggest that to produce such a work would, in the end, be unsatisfactory. The discussion of Balzac, for example, concludes that while his novels are perfectly written, they fail to reflect accurately the chaos of existence: "to read Balzac is to receive an impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material ... because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages"[66]. This might make the art superficially more satisfactory, but it involves an element of false-consciousness, hence the narrator's decision that "the only unity in this story is, please God, an involuntary unity"[67].

Similar ideas are expressed by Belacqua. He decides that he will write a book, and here a different musical metaphor is apparent: Belacqua thinks

> the experience of my reader shall be between the phrases, in the silence, communicated by the intervals, no the terms of the statements .... I think of Beethofen [sic]... where into the body of the music he incorporates a punctuation of dehiscence, flottements, the coherence gone to pieces, the continuity botched to hell because the units of continuity here abdicated their unity, they have gone multiple, they fall apart, the notes fly about, a blizzard of electrons[68].

In many ways this language echoes that earlier in the book, where the fragmentary character of Nemo is described as causing structural problems. Similarly, not long before Belacqua's musings on literary ideas the narrator again complains of the "horrid manner" in which "the notes fly about all over the place, a cyclone of electrons"[69]. Belacqua's choice of imagery therefore echoes that of the narrator, but whereas the narrator initially laments this fragmentation, Belacqua makes a positive choice in favour of a lack of cohesion. Both employ the concept of music as a narrative model, but while the narrator's depiction of music is of a linear, unified, precisely-contained model of cause and effect, Belacqua evokes a more wide-reaching music which is, in some sense, able to reflect the fragmentary nature of existence. Additionally, Belacqua's imagery suggests that while the fixed reference points and structures of language restrict its ability to reflect true experience, music is able to transcend such limitations (though clearly not in the Proustian sense). This is apparently exemplified by the music of Beethoven; Belacqua makes several references

[64]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 10.
[65]*Ibid.*, 9.
[66]*Ibid.*, 119.
[67]*Ibid.*, 132.
[68]*Ibid.*, 137-8.
[69]*Ibid.*, 113.

to the composer, and these are always in terms of an "incoherent continuum"[70]. Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* is referred to as "less buttoned up"[71], and while the source of the musical quotation that appears in chapters two and three of *Dream*[72] and twice in "What a Misfortune"[73] (see example one) is not explicitly given, the snippet turns out to be from the first movement of that symphony.

Example 1

Beckett seems deliberately to avoid the direct attribution of the quotation; despite the fact that its first appearance in "What a Misfortune" makes reference to the "Unbuttoned Symphony", it is only by collating this citation with Belacqua's description in *Dream* of the *Seventh Symphony* as "less buttoned up" that the source can be discovered.

The first appearance in *Dream* of the musical phrase occurs as Belacqua calls at the studio of Herr Sauerwein to collect the Smeraldina-Rima (and Herr Sauerwein's comment "that can be"[74] also evokes Beethoven[75]). The second incidence comes at the point when, as he is about to ring the Frica's doorbell, Belacqua has a sudden memory of the Smeraldina-Rima; the experience of standing on the doorstep presumably reminds Belacqua of the earlier occasion at Herr Sauerwein's door, and thus the brief musical quotation links together the two impressions. In "What a Misfortune" the quotation is similarly associated with Belacqua's memories of a woman - this time "his dear departed Lucy"[76], with whom, at the end of the previous story, he has enjoyed listening to music. Thus the phrase seems to act in a manner comparable to Vinteuil's "little phrase" in Proust, bringing together experiences associated in the protagonist's subconscious.

Within the context of the Beethoven symphony, the extract quoted occurs at the end of a climax which develops after the exuberant *tutti* statement of the

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[70]*Ibid.*, 102.

[71]*Ibid.*, 188.

[72]See *Ibid.*, 106, 229.

[73]See Samuel Beckett, "What a Misfortune," *op. cit.*, 140, 151.

[74]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *op. cit.*, 106.

[75]Beethoven's String Quartet in F major Op.135 includes a section entitled *Der Schwer Gefaßte Entschluß*, wherein the initial musical material comprises phrases to accompany the question "muß es sein?" and the answer "es muß sein". Although some critics have explored the philosophical significance of this, it now seems to be accepted that the question and answer were intended as a joke in response to a debtor asking the composer whether he really must pay up. See Robert Simpson, "The Chamber Music for Strings" in Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune (eds.), *The Beethoven Companion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 276.

[76]Samuel Beckett, "What a Misfortune," *op. cit.*, 140.

movement's *vivace* main theme[77]. The phrase, on strings alone, cuts unexpectedly into the orchestral texture, interrupting the climax with the sudden *sforzando* tied five-quaver note, destroying the regular 6/8 rhythmic vitality. The phrase withholds the expected move to the dominant key and introduction of a new theme; although the dominant does appear at the end of the phrase, the material is neither new nor substantial enough to be considered a second subject, and only a few bars later the key shifts unexpectedly to C major. The effect is of a sudden held moment, and this perhaps explains Beckett's employment of the phrase as symbolic of Belacqua's association of certain experiences. Similarly, the context of the quotation perhaps sheds light upon the narrator's comments regarding Belacqua's description of himself in "Ding Dong" ("he lived a Beethoven pause, he said, whatever he meant by that"[78]). The quoted phrase seems to exemplify this "Beethoven pause", wherein a sudden interruption of the previous swirling chaos (whether of the music or of Belacqua's life) can capture a moment in between events, and the conception of this musical "pause" clearly corresponds to the ideals evoked by Belacqua in his discussion of his literary aspirations. In this way, the deployment of the quotation provides a link between the Proustian model of a musical phrase, able to symbolise involuntary associations between events, and Belacqua's attempt to capture the ineffable experience which lies between the terms of language. Finally, this invocation of the "Beethoven pause" clearly relates to the protagonist's desire to let his mind go "wombtomb"[79], escaping the everyday distractions of events and objects. Thus the Beethoven quotation takes on an almost mystical significance, referring far beyond itself, and Beckett satirises this; Belacqua is referred to as a "dud Beethoven"[80] in *Ding Dong*, and the narrator here decides to "give him up" as his explanation of himself is so incoherent: "he was not *serious*"[81]. Similarly, when Beckett himself appears in *Dream* he is announced as "a dud mystic"[82], and the combination of these references gives the impression of the author deriding his protagonist's search for the expression of a world beyond mundane experience, while at the same time implicating himself in that very search.

These repeated references to Beethoven (and especially to the *Seventh Symphony*) are perhaps clarified by a section from Beckett's 1937 letter to Axel Kaun:

> is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, so that through whole

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[77]Beethoven, *Symphony No.7* Op.92 (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1941), movement 1, bar 128.
[78]Samuel Beckett, "Ding Dong" in *More Pricks Than Kicks, op. cit.*, 38.
[79]_____, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 45.
[80]_____, "Ding Dong," *op. cit.*, 42.
[81]*Ibid.*, 38.
[82]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 186.

pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?[83].

For once, after all the ambiguity surrounding the relationships between Belacqua, the narrator and the author, it seems that Belacqua's aesthetic ideals here clearly correspond to those of Beckett. Thus the two separate delineations of music as a model correspond to two separate routes for literature; the first of these is that taken by Proust (and generally by the Symbolists and modernists), taking music as the Schopenhauerian example of a transcendental higher ordering, the depiction of the Idea itself, but an art to which the word can itself aspire by means of the dream-like association of images. This mode of literature attempts to find correspondences between the art-forms by transforming the image-content but not the actual disposition of the elements of literature. Additionally, this literature is one which repeatedly turns to "woman" for inspiration, associating the otherness of the ideal female with that of a sensual music which can eventually be assimilated into the all-encompassing whole. This, however, is a model which Beckett rejects, realising that it can never reflect the true fragmentation of reality, hence the derogation of that "clockwork" unity and the transformation of the images of woman as inspiration into those of physical grotesquery.

The second (and more covertly presented) musical model, by contrast, seeks to move beyond the surface of traditional literature, to recognise the impedimentary nature of its terms and thus to dissolve the traditional structures with which the novelist has battled. The ideal, as expressed by Beckett himself, is to find a form "that will accommodate the mess"[84] and that will not (like the writings of Balzac) "violate the nature of Being"[85]. Here, music - though a different concept of music - can again be employed as a model art-form; the greater purity and abstraction allow a wider fragmentation of ideas as a result of the non-referential nature of the terms and their (consequently looser) connections. It seems highly appropriate that perhaps the most explicit deployment of the former musical model - that of Proust - proceeds by tracking a particular musical phrase, thereby producing an idealised but inauthentic impression of unity through the deployment of a single theme. As was observed in chapter two, the narrator's description of Vinteuil's music amounts to little more than the identification of the various appearances of this phrase. Hence the use of this music as a model cannot but produce the "little book that would be purely melodic" which the narrator of *Dream* initially despairs of writing.

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[83]_____, *Disjecta, op. cit.*, 172.

[84]Beckett quoted in Tom Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine," *Columbia University Forum* IV/3 (Summer 1961), 22.

[85]Lawrence Shainberg relates a conversation with Beckett in which the author stated "I know of no form ... that does not violate the nature of Being in the most unbearable manner". Lawrence Shainberg, "Exorcising Beckett," *The Paris Review* XXIX/104 (Fall 1987), 106.

From the point of view of the second musical model, such an appropriation of a musical work is reductive and simplistic; Beckett instead suggests that a literature truly modelled on music must pay attention to the naturally more fragmentary nature of the experience. Thus while Nicholas Zurbrugg's earlier quoted comment - that Belacqua receives no concrete musical intimation of the nature of the self or of art - remains apposite, it needs qualification in that this rejection of the Proustian ideal does not lead to the outright eschewal of music as a model. Whether or not the choice of Beethoven as the prime example is totally appropriate is, in this way, irrelevant, for what is important is the prefiguring of the disintegration of semantic content and the structures of language that will take place in Beckett's later work, a prediction of an attempt to find a state "in-between", wherein the referential content is minimised in order to allow language to reflect as accurately as possible the experience of reality.

Given the association of most of the women with the former, bastard form of musically-modelled literature, mainly through association with sex and the body, it is not surprising that the only females to escape this correspondence should be those with whom Belacqua does not have sex. In "Walking Out", Lucy's accident prevents her and Belacqua from having a sexual relationship (a huge relief for Belacqua). Instead, "they sit up to all hours playing the gramophone, *An die Musik* is a great favourite with them both, he finds in her big eyes better worlds than this, they never allude to the old days when she had hopes of a place in the sun"[86]. While in the former depiction of literature, music is always connected to sexual activity with women (and, as a consequence, despised), here music is associated with a release from such concerns. Lucy, like the Alba, is no longer really a woman for Belacqua, and is instead able to join him in his appreciation of a higher world. Thus, in a sense, the second musical model for literature is, like the former model, associated with the inspiration of women, but here they must be women who have effectively transcended that category such that their physical presence is no longer a distraction nor even relevant. Additionally, the presentation of Lucy and the Alba as effectively de-sexualised indicates a route of escape from the restrictive binary associations upon which traditional linguistic structures have been based: the location "between genders" corresponds to the attempt to move between the terms of language, and both are inspired by the second musical model.

As an extension of this, the descriptions of the Alba involve musical imagery, but this is again a very different music to that associated with the other women: "she was to remain quite useless and beautiful, like the very best music that could be had. 'You are white music' he had given her indirectly to understand"[87]. This "white

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[86]Samuel Beckett, "Walking Out," *op. cit.*, 112.
[87]_____, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 193.

music" echoes the language used for Belacqua's retreat into the "wombtomb" of his mind in which he finds that pleasure of real thought: "it was at last the lush and indolence of Limbo in his mind.... Plane of white music, warpless music expunging the tempest of emblems, calm womb of dawn whelping no sun ... still flat white music, alb of timeless light"[88]. As P. J. Murphy finds with reference to the poem *Alba* (which Beckett developed into the images of *Dream*), the work "strives to place the 'white plane of music' between the self and the cosmos with all its contingent spiritual and moral dilemmas"[89]. Throughout his works, Beckett often employs the opposition of light and darkness[90], and the image of whiteness is enhanced by the link to the meaning of the word alb - a white floor-length vestment worn by priests (and therefore related to the white djellabas worn by figures in certain of Beckett's other works) - and by the further etymological link, via the word "aube", to "aubade" (a musical announcement of dawn or a song of lovers parting at sunrise). The figure of the Alba draws the musical imagery together with this etymological circle around the image of whiteness, and the character thereby comes to stand as an "open sesame to the narrator's inner paradise and the source of his artistic inspiration"[91].

The desire to locate experience "between the terms", then, corresponds to a dissatisfaction with the limitations of the fixed definitions of language and a preference for the less pre-established structures of music. This needs qualifying, however, for Beckett's presentation of two different models of music, one delineated negatively and the other positively, articulates a musical aesthetic more complex than is usually allowed for: Beckett does not simply present an image of music as an undifferentiated idea (as is usually the case in literature, and even in much musical philosophy), but instead admits that different conceptions of music can be brought into play. His

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[88]*Ibid.*, 181.

[89]P. J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 54.

[90]Beckett's careful deployment of images of light and darkness is clarified by his interest in Manichaean thought. This is most clearly supported by evidence from the notebook to *Krapp's Last Tape*, which explicitly invokes Manichaean ideas. Manichaean philosophy was founded by an Iranian, Mani, in the third century B. C., and viewed the world as a fusion of Spirit and Matter, Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, with humanity torn between these forces. The doctrine advocated an ascetic lifestyle which, by refraining from fornication, procreation, consumption of meat or alcohol, and the coveting of possessions, would effect the separation of light from dark and of good from evil in one's life. Clearly, the Manichaean influence, whether explicit or merely suggested, relates to Beckett's employment of other similarly dualistic structures. Additionally relevant in this context is the fact that, as Kenneth and Alice Hamilton point out, for Manichaeans, female sexuality was considered the most dangerous threat to man's salvation; this attitude corresponds to the early Beckettian depiction of women as distracting men from their higher pursuits. For further details see James Knowlson (ed.), *The Theatrical Notebooks of Samuel Beckett Volume 3: Krapp's Last Tape* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991); Kenneth and Alice Hamilton, *Condemned to Life: The World of Samuel Beckett* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970). For more general discussion of Beckett's use of such imagery, see James Knowlson, *Light and Darkness in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett* (London: Turret Books, 1972).

[91]Lawrence Harvey, *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), 100.

rejection of the Proustian musical model is that of music considered in terms of linear progression, of a teleological structure of clearly defined themes which can be drawn together into an enclosed unity. In opposition to this, Beckett posits his interpretation of Beethoven as composing music in which the logical continuity is more dissolved and less obviously linear.

In some ways, Beethoven may seem a strange choice of model, especially given the implication that the works reject cohesion and unity. In other respects, though, the reasoning is understandable. Beethoven certainly developed away from the early Classical, more basically melodic formal design towards a style which extended Haydn's motivic processes into more wide-reaching structures dependent upon the tensions generated by substantial use of subsidiary key areas. This more fragmentary treatment of often very simple motives, combined with the heterogeneity of the orchestration (from which motivic material can emerge and disappear), perhaps explains Beckett's choice of imagery both for his comments on music and Belacqua's discussion of literary ideals. Similarly, the traditional image of Beethoven standing alone on the brink of an era, personifying both the disintegration of musical Classicism and the impending Romanticism, perhaps sheds light on Beckett's impression of the music as indicative of an "in-betweenness" that remains slightly beyond grasp. Thus the reasoning behind the association of the Alba with this concept of music and its presentation as a model for literature also becomes clear; given the wish to find a mode of literary expression that lies between the terms of ordinary linguistic structures, and given the usual association of such terms with the fields of binary oppositions earlier identified, the association of these ideals with figures who are effectively between genders, thereby rejecting both male rationality and the traditional feminine muse, is hardly surprising. Similarly, the fact that the Smeraldina-Rima "struggles" when trying to play a Beethoven sonata now takes on an additional significance: her character is from the world of the first musical model, wherein clear dualistic distinctions can be made and women do not have the ability to grasp the complexities of Beethoven. Thus Beckett articulates a preference for a non-specificity which will admit the ineffable and non-verbal into literature itself, and even at this stage, Beckett seems to have realised that this can take effect only by means of the disintegration of the very fabric of language.

In moving from *Dream* and *More Pricks Than Kicks* into *Murphy* and the following novels and novellas, however, such a breakdown is not actually immediately apparent. While many preoccupations from the first works resurface, in many ways *Murphy* and perhaps even *Watt* are stylistically more traditional than *Dream* or *More Pricks Than Kicks*. This is a result of a toning-down of the deliberately bizarre language of the first works into an almost (but very definitely not

quite) traditional narrative voice in *Murphy*. The exuberant but inconsistent earlier language is refined considerably; a love of puns is still apparent ("in the beginning was the pun"[92]), but the enthusiasm for such elaborate chains of obscure word associations is less evident. The Joycean influence is certainly clear in *Dream*, especially in the alteration of spellings for associative wealth (as can be seen in many of the quotations already cited) and most obviously in the inclusion of the prostitute's multi-syllabled curse:

"Himmisacrakrüzidirkenjesusmariaundjosefundblütigeskreuz!"[93]. However, the self-consciousness narration produces a very definitely Beckettian semi-disgust with events ("extraordinary how everything ends like a fairy-tale, or can be made to; even the most unsanitary episodes"[94]). Beckett's constant inclusion of artistic and cultural references, along with his interest in multiple and extended metaphors, suggests an early fascination with the associative possibilities of language that tends towards that of Joyce. However, the underlying narrative aloofness - a combination of distaste for the proceedings and sympathy with the protagonist - denies the possibility of such Apollonian idealism.

Certain of the references cannot but evoke Joyce - Belacqua's quest for a decent piece of Gorgonzola in "Dante and the Lobster", for example, or the references to the countryside around Dublin's Martello Tower in "Fingal". Similarly, the passage after the party (which appears in both *Dream* and "A Wet Night") has been identified as deliberately evoking the end of Joyce's "The Dead", but the tone of voice nevertheless clearly distinguishes the writing from that of the original[95]: "the resolutely untranscendental and monotonous rain of Beckett is a long way from the chill and mysterious yet strangely tranquil snow of Joyce"[96]. The result of *Dream's* combination of Joycean elements with Beckett's sympathetic negativity is that the language cannot really flow, and the linguistic figures are at times so elaborate as to obscure what is actually taking place. As James Knowlson and John Pilling see it, "the irony is that Beckett was well aware, as the Proust book indicated, that 'style is

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[92]Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 41.

[93]_____, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 239. For comments regarding elements of Joycean pastiche and parody in Beckett see David Hayman, "A Meeting in the Park and a Meeting on the Bridge: Joyce and Beckett," *James Joyce Quarterly* VIII/4 (Summer 1971), 372-384.

[94]Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 109.

[95]In the Joyce story, snow falls "on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mountainous Shannon waves". James Joyce, "The Dead" in *Dubliners* (London: Penguin, 1956), 220. In the Beckett passage, rain falls "upon the bay, the champaign-land and the mountains, notably upon the central bog it fell with a rather desolate uniformity". Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women, op. cit.*, 239 and (in a very slightly altered version) "A Wet Night," *op. cit.*, 83.

[96]James Knowlson and John Pilling, *op. cit.*, 14.

more a question of vision than technique' and yet in *Dream* he obviously felt forced to exploit technique precisely because his vision was so dramatically occluded"[97].

Given the exposition of the two literary models in *Dream*, it is almost as if, despite his underlying scepticism, Beckett felt duty bound to make at least an attempt to produce a novel based on the modernist multiplication of reference, a literature which could produce an ordered, circular unity by extending the positive possibilities of language. Beneath this, however, lies an uneasiness with the false sophistication of the outcome, a sense that the material is being fabricated into an art which no longer reflects true experience; this manifests itself both in the anti-intellectual tendencies which mock the characters' literary aspirations, and in the self-consciousness which allows the author to imply that any bad writing results from the depiction of the narrator and protagonist as "well-read incompetents"[98]. Perhaps this is what Ruby Cohn means when she suggests that "Beckett's sophistication cloaks his metaphysical uneasiness"[99].

The re-working of episodes from *Dream* into the short stories of *More Pricks Than Kicks* to an extent aids the clarity of narrative events. However, while the language of those stories not taken from the novel is more clear than that of the other sections, it still displays the same elaborate idiosyncrasies. Underlying the stylistic oddities is an experimentation with grammatical structures through the use of the "formal declarative sentence" (to use Hugh Kenner's phrase[100]). Similarly, Beckett often delays the closure of sentences, and these tendencies betray an early dissatisfaction with traditional linguistic forms. In certain of the *More Pricks Than Kicks* stories, the slightly less elaborate style allows the emergence of narrative twists of the kind developed more consistently from *Murphy* onwards. In "Dante and the Lobster", for example, Belacqua's unpredictability is depicted by the sudden change in his attitude towards the grocery shop owners; while he initially describes the owners as "very decent obliging people", this transforms into anger at the state of the Gorgonzola they have for him: "what he wanted was a good green stinking rotten lump of Gorgonzola cheese, alive, and by God he would have it. He looked fiercely at the grocer.... Belacqua was furious. The impudent dogsbody"[101]. The effect of the change is surprising given the lack of comment from the narrator and the fact that both the appreciation of the grocer and the subsequent indignation are written from a perspective which suggests an amalgam of Belacqua and the narrator. Thus the initial

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[97]*Ibid.*, 15.

[98]H. Porter Abbott, *The Fiction of Samuel Beckett: Form and Effect* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1973), 35.

[99]Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett, op. cit.*, 28.

[100]Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), 91.

[101]Samuel Beckett, "Dante and the Lobster" in *More Pricks Than Kicks, op. cit.*, 14.

assessment of the grocer's character appears to be an objective judgement, making the sudden anger seem more unreasonable. Such narrative twists prefigure those found more frequently in Beckett's later work, and this is similarly the case with the occasional expressions of dissatisfaction with the descriptive capabilities of language. In "Yellow", for example, Belacqua decides to "arm his mind with laughter, laughter is not quite the word but it will have to serve"[102], and this inability to find the appropriate expression is echoed on more than one occasion in *Murphy*[103].

Such techniques, especially in *Dream*, are often obscured beneath the overblown language, but it is nevertheless these elements which provide the link to the later works. The more covertly delineated nature of the second musical model perhaps allows Beckett temporarily to ignore its implications and, instead, the direction taken involves a refinement of style, clarifying the attitude towards language. Along with this process of distillation comes a clear integration and explanation of philosophical ideas. Thus the dualism of *Dream* is concentrated into sharper images in *Murphy* (and this novel consciously refers back to the earlier work, describing Murphy's retreat into his mind as a quest for the "Belacqua bliss"[104]). Again, while *Dream* depicts a failure to find true self-knowledge through life in the mind, Beckett does not simply abandon the exploration of such ideas. Moreover, if anything, the dualism of *Murphy* takes a step back from the ideal evoked in the second musical model, as can be seen from the stark focus upon Celia's physicality (she works as a prostitute) and Murphy's concomitant discussion of their sexual relations in musical terms[105]. Further associations between sex and music are also made in the description of their nights together as "serenade, nocturne and albada"[106], and of their kisses being "in Lydian mode"[107].

The effect is almost of having moved back into the first, unsatisfactory literary model in *Dream*, wherein women (especially their bodies) and music provided a distraction from the exploration of the mind. The implication seems to be that the language of *Dream* and *More Pricks Than Kicks* was not capable of exploring the philosophical ideas evoked therein and that, as a result, a stylistic refinement into a more coherent and individual voice was required. Once this voice had been found (in *Murphy*), then the inquiry into the nature of knowledge and existence could begin afresh, firstly by positing a more clearly-defined Cartesian dualism, divorcing the mind from the body in order to establish whether or not such a method could lead to true self-knowledge. Effectively, therefore, Beckett does not immediately realise the

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102_____, "Yellow" in *More Pricks Than Kicks, op. cit.*, 164.

103For the most obvious instance of this, see Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 39.

104*Ibid.*, 65.

105See *ibid.*, 47.

106*Ibid.*, 46.

107*Ibid.*, 82.

aesthetic implications of his second musical model; instead, he recognises the need first to establish a clear perspective from which to begin the search for a "syntax of weakness" by breaking down the elements of style: the author has to find his own terms before he can get "between them" (as Belacqua would put it).

This highlights the fact that Beckett's work functions on more than one level, both as literature and as epistemological inquiry. Beckett is clearly interested in the exploration of what can and cannot be known and by what means such knowledge (or lack of knowledge) can be expressed. At the same time, however, as a novelist and playwright he is interested in depicting by proxy the ongoing human exploration of such ideas. Thus Beckett can be interested in the outcome of the inquiry, while at the same time maintaining an aloofness which allows the observation of the futility (and even the banality) of the process. This helps to account for both the sense of Beckett's output as a developing work in progress and the fact that *Murphy*, despite taking a step back from the almost revelatory aesthetics of the second musical model in *Dream*, is far from redundant. This "step back" partly comprises the examination of the viability of various philosophical systems; *Murphy* explores several such systems, each of which comes to be seen as flawed. Only one of the philosophical figures invoked - Democritus - seems to escape this treatment, and an examination of the nature of Murphy's inquiry into knowledge reveals that this is of great relevance to the deployment of music in *Dream* (and, as will be seen in the following chapter, in *Watt*).

Even without knowledge of Beckett's frequent references to Descartes in his early work (including the poem *Whoroscope*, the subject matter of which incorporates events from Descartes' life), the initial image of Murphy is bound to evoke Cartesianism. Murphy is described sitting naked, tied into his rocking-chair by seven scarves in order to bring about a separation of mind and body:

> he sat in his chair in this way because it gave him pleasure! First it gave his body pleasure, it appeased his body. Then it set him free in his mind. For it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind, as described in section six. And life in his mind gave him pleasure, such pleasure that pleasure was not the word[108].

Despite his later experiences (in particular with Mr. Endon), Murphy attempts to retain this distinction for the brief remainder of his life; during the description of Murphy's mind that makes up chapter six, we are told,

> 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. But he felt his mind to be bodytight and did not understand through

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[108]*Ibid.*, 6.

what channel the intercourse was effected nor how the two experiences came to overlap. He was satisfied that neither followed from the other[109].

Here we find a clear echo of Descartes' inquiry into knowledge via the method of doubt, which concludes "that we cannot doubt our existence without existing while we doubt"[110], and that, therefore, while one cannot doubt one's mental existence, it is nevertheless still possible to doubt the existence of the body and to conceive of existence without the body[111]. From this arises the conclusion "I think, therefore I am"[112] and the consequent real distinction between mind and body, thought and extension.

Beckett's deployment of aspects of Cartesianism has been discussed elsewhere[113], but it is important to note that Beckett channels this background dualism into other more obscure areas, including elements from the thought-systems of other philosophers, some named in the texts and some not, in order to explore the relationship between thought and existence. As Ileana Marculescu points out, from *Murphy* onwards, "the Cartesian ontology is refracted through Occasionalism, mainly that of Geulincx"[114]. The philosophy of Occasionalism, posited most clearly in the work of Geulincx and Malebranche, was developed as an attempt to deal with certain of the problems arising from Cartesianism, especially the difficulty of explaining by means of the mind-body dualism the fact that apparently physiological passions and emotions can arise from (often confused) thought. Descartes' explanation was that God had arranged the co-existence of the two such that, in exceptional circumstances, the "animal spirits" (centred in the pineal gland) would be disturbed, exciting unclear sensations, passions, or emotions. However, for many Cartesians this was the least acceptable aspect of the philosophy. Geulincx's reaction was to deny completely any causation on the part of matter, asserting that mind and body cannot act upon one another and instead positing the concept of the "Occasionalist Cause": the idea that

[109]*Ibid.*, 64.

[110]René Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes Vol.1: The Principles of Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T.. Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 219.

[111]_____, "Second Meditation" in *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. F. E.. Sutcliffe (London: Penguin, 1968), 102-112.

[112]René Descartes, "Discourse Four" in *ibid.*, 53.

[113]See, amongst other texts, Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Work of Samuel Beckett" in Martin Esslin (ed.), *Samuel Beckett* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), 169-175; John Fletcher "Samuel Beckett and the Philosophers," *Comparative Literature* XVII/1 (Winter 1965), 43-65; Lawrence Harvey, *op. cit.*; Edouard Morot-Sir "Samuel Beckett and Cartesian Emblems" in Edouard Morot-Sir, Howard Harper and Dougald Macmillan (eds.), *Samuel Beckett: The Art of Rhetoric* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 25-104; Michael E. Mooney, "*Molloy*, part 1: Beckett's 'Discourse on Method'," *Journal of Beckett Studies* III (1978), 40-55; P. J. Murphy, "Beckett and the Philosophers" in John Pilling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett, op. cit.*, 222-240.

[114]Ileana Marculescu, "Beckett and the Temptation of Solipsism," *Journal of Beckett Studies* XI/XII (1989), 55.

changes could occur but only as a result of God's intervention according to fixed rules.

Murphy's lack of understanding as to how his mind and body "have intercourse" therefore seems evocative of Geulincx and his claim that "nothing can be the cause of something when it does not understand how the effect was brought about"[115]. Perversely, the relevant chapter (chapter six) makes no reference to the philosopher, whereas later in the novel, after Murphy has started work at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, a quotation is specifically attributed. Considering Murphy's impression that the Mercyseat patients are actually quite lucky to have found a sanctuary from the outside world, the narrator reflects that Murphy has thus far been unable to find a comparable means of escape and reacts to the Geulincx quotation "*ubi nihil vales, ibi nihil velis*"[116] - "Where you are worth nothing, there you should want nothing" - by implying that Murphy's attempt to divorce his mind from his body has not been successful:

> it was not enough to want nothing where he was worth nothing, nor even to take the further step of renouncing all that lay outside the intellectual love in which he alone could love himself, because there alone he was loveable. It had not been enough and showed no signs of being enough. These dispositions and others ancillary, pressing every available means (eg, the rocking-chair) into their service, could sway the issue in the desired direction, but not clinch it[117].

As Rupert Wood has pointed out, this passage falls slightly uneasily in the novel; while most of the book divides itself fairly clearly between the transcendent voice of the narrator and the less self-sufficient voice of the protagonist, it is less clear here whether the Geulincx reference is specifically part of Murphy's world picture, or rather a result of the wider point of view of the narrator[118]. Additionally, this is part of a more general uncertainty over the introduction of philosophical figures into both "Proust"[119] and *Murphy*, which suggests a certain confusion over whether or not to disguise their presence[120]. As Wood suggests, Geulincx, like Schopenhauer and Proust, isolates a sphere of self-sufficient activity that can effect the transcendence of

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[115]Arnold Geulincx, "Metaphysica Vera" in *Opera Philosophica*, II, 150, quoted in a translation by Rupert Wood in Rupert Wood, "Murphy, Beckett; Geulincx, God," *Journal of Beckett Studies* II/2 (Spring 1993), 38. Beckett also refers explicitly to Geulincx in *The End* and *Molloy*, and Malebranche is mentioned in *How It Is*. See Samuel Beckett, "The End" in *Four Novellas, op. cit.*, 86; "Molloy," *op. cit.*, 48; *How It Is* (London: John Calder, 1964), 33.

[116]Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 101.

[117]*Ibid.*, 102.

[118]Rupert Wood, *op. cit.*, 32.

[119]As Rupert Wood points out with regard to the philosophising voice in Beckett's "Proust": "in 'Proust', Marcel is not merely Marcel's fiction, but also Beckett's fiction; Marcel becomes the fiction of the philosophizing voice of 'Proust'. He becomes Schopenhauerian Man discovering himself as such through the artistic experience; he is made to fit the Schopenhauerian pigeon-hole rather than vice-versa. The Proustian narrator becomes a self-conscious Schopenhauerian, sharing the same kind of philosophical perspective as the philosophizing voice of 'Proust'". *Ibid.*, 30.

[120]*Ibid.*, 37.

ordinary, mundane and unfathomable reality: Geulincx "distinguishes purely self-sufficient and free mental behaviour from the things presented to the mind that do not depend on the mind"[121], allowing for mental transcendence through abstract reason in a manner correspondent to Schopenhauer's conception of aesthetic experience and Proust's depiction of involuntary memory. Given Beckett's scepticism of the Schopenhauerian and Proustian solutions and his general pessimism with regard to the possibility of absolute knowledge, this reluctance to allow the narrator the complete omniscience of philosophical totalisation is hardly surprising. At the same time, however, there is a need for an outside observer to comment on Murphy's lack of success at living purely in his mind: once employed in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, we find that no longer "did he succeed in coming alive in his mind anymore"[122].

Both Murphy's actions and their mode of narration therefore demonstrate an inability to find a successful, all-encompassing philosophical system of knowledge and experience, and this assertion corresponds to Wood's more general observation that "Beckett gradually abandons the possibility of a transcendent perspective in art"[123]. Wood, along with several other writers[124], identifies the similarity between Geulingian philosophy and Murphy's world view. Beckett's reluctance to allow the unquestioned entry of the philosophical figure is also enhanced by the parallel between the description of the third zone of Murphy's mind and the work of Spinoza. The epigraph to the chapter ("*amor intellectualis quo Murphy se ipsum amat*"[125] - "the intellectual love with which Murphy loves himself") distorts Spinoza by substituting Murphy into the place of God: the words should contain Spinoza's statement (from Propositions XXXV and XXXVI of the fifth part of the *Ethics*) that "the intellectual love of the mind towards God is a part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself"[126]. Spinoza outlines an enclosed system of three zones of knowledge, the first concerning the imagination (which limits knowledge due to its haphazard confusion of ideas), and the second providing greater freedom from subjectivity in the form of scientific system and ratio. The third level synthesises these into a higher plane which comprises "an enhanced comprehension of one's intricate relationships

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121*Ibid.*, 39.

122Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 107.

123Rupert Wood, *op. cit.*, 28.

124For other comments on the relevance of Geulincx see Ruby Cohn, "Philosophical Fragments in the Work of Samuel Beckett," *op. cit.*, and "A Note on Beckett, Dante, and Geulincx," *op. cit.*; Ileana Marculescu, *op. cit.*

125Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 63.

126Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. Thomas Deegan, trans. George Eliot (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universität Salzburg, 1981), 237.

with reality, and of the concomitant obligations, as well as pleasures. Ethics and aesthetics come together"[127].

The depiction of Murphy's mind as "a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without"[128], wherein can be found "three zones, light, half light, dark, each with its own speciality"[129], clearly echoes Spinoza. The first of Murphy's zones concerns "the elements of physical experience available for a new arrangement"[130], while the second invokes the "Belacqua bliss" of contemplation in systematic terms. The third zone, however, comprises "a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms.... Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom"[131]. As in Spinoza, advancement to the third level (amor intellectualis) proceeds via the first two levels but, as P. J. Murphy shows, while for Spinoza the higher level involves the ethical and religious component of the approach to the love of God and resultant blessedness, Murphy "'exploits his own revisions of Spinoza's ways to blessedness solely for his own pleasure and for his own selfish reasons"[132]. Hence the substitution of Murphy for God in the epigraph, and, indeed, Murphy is rare amongst Beckett characters in that he actively seeks pleasure. Additionally, he is virtually alone in finding sex pleasurable[133], a factor which seems to confuse his desire to concentrate upon life in the mind by means of dissociation from bodily concerns: "the part of him that he hated craved for Celia, the part that he loved shrivelled up at the thought of her"[134] - even this early in the novel we are in no doubt as to which part is which.

The combined effect, then, is of the incorporation of elements from various externally imposed philosophies into a single personal system outlined by Murphy's actions. The mind-body division cannot but evoke the Cartesian inquiry, before moving into the more specific Geulingian realm, while the actual composition of the mind finds parallels in both Geulincx and Spinoza. Unfortunately, though, the correspondence with Spinoza reveals how ineffective the system is, defined supposedly as an intellectual inquiry but operating more along the lines of confused pleasure-seeking and selfishness. Beyond all this, the system itself brings no enlightenment, leading eventually to death in the rocking-chair (and the final comment, "soon his body was quiet"[135], echoes ironically the attempts throughout the novel to

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127P. J. Murphy, "Beckett and the Philosophers," op. cit., 227.
128Samuel Beckett, Murphy, op. cit., 63.
129Ibid., 65.
130Ibid.
131Ibid., 65-6.
132P. J. Murphy, "Beckett and the Philosophers," op. cit., 227.
133This point is made in Kenneth and Alice Hamilton, op. cit., 126.
134Samuel Beckett, Murphy, op. cit., 8.
135Ibid., 142.

quieten the body in order to focus upon the life of the mind). Additionally, the entry of Mr. Endon - "Endon" being Greek for "within" - shortly before Murphy's death is highly paradoxical, providing Murphy with a fascinating example of a figure perfectly self-sufficient in his emptiness: "Mr. Endon for Murphy was no less than bliss"[136]. Again the irony is extended by the knowledge that Spinoza studied classics, physics, and the philosophy of Descartes with a scholar named Francis van den Enden; as P. J. Murphy points out, despite Endon's position as an ideal example for Murphy, there could hardly be anything less like a teacher-pupil relationship in the impasse of their acquaintance[137].

The philosophical inquiry of *Murphy* is complicated yet further by the incorporation of elements evocative of the ideas of Leibniz and Schopenhauer. Leibniz is another philosopher to whom Beckett makes reference at various points in his output (in *Dream* and *Molloy*, for example), and James Acheson identifies Leibniz's *Monadology* as the source of Murphy's belief in his mind as a hollow sphere containing a microcosm of the entire universe[138]. Similarly, Acheson recognises the influence of Schopenhauer's notion of the world as comprised of chance and error in the manner in which many of the events of Murphy's life come about[139] - the job at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat results from an unexpected encounter with Ticklepenny, for example, and the circumstances of Murphy's death are equally dependent upon chance events. From this point of view, Murphy's aspiration towards a Geulingian or Spinozan transcendence could equally be viewed as that towards a Schopenhauerian will-lessness and, whichever system is preferred, Murphy fails as a result of his basic selfishness and his weakness for pleasure (usually in the form of Celia).

Clearly, then, despite the efforts of many commentators, *Murphy* cannot be reduced to a correspondence with a single philosophical system: "*Murphy* is not a Cartesian novel, a Democritean novel, or a Schopenhauerian novel. It is not even a Geulingian novel, whatever that might be. This, however, need not mean that these 'philosophical fragments' are no more than flashes of erudition, providing a witty counterpoint to the exigencies of plot"[140]. As a result of the equivocal positioning of the figure of the philosopher and the ambivalent relationships between author, narrator and protagonist, the overall effect combines sympathy with the inquiry with the clear impression of its futility. The implication is of a need to explore and subsequently discount various attempts to rationalise the nature of meaning and its expression in

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136*Ibid.*, 134.
137P. J. Murphy, "Beckett and the Philosophers," *op. cit.*, 228.
138James Acheson, "Murphy's Metaphysics," *Journal of Beckett Studies* V (Autumn 1979), 9-23.
139*Ibid.*, 16.
140Rupert Wood, *op. cit.*, 27.

language. Thus Beckett withdraws, for the time being, from the anti-dualistic implications of the Beethovenian model in *Dream* in order first to examine traditional Western philosophical approaches to the subject (and their implicitly binary foundations). The experience that results, however, leads to a general assertion of the failure of language adequately to express experience and a pervasive scepticism towards such epistemological foundations.

This sense of futility is perhaps most coherently suggested by the incorporation of yet another philosophical figure, that of the Atomist Democritus (*c*.460 - *c*.370 B.C.). An affinity between Beckett and Democritus is immediately apparent in the characterisation of Democritus as the "laughing philosopher, so-named because of his reported good-natured amusement at 'the vain efforts' of men"[141]. For Democritus, everything is pre-ordained by the fundamental constitution of the universe: nothing is left to chance, since "creation is the undesigned result of inevitable natural processes"[142], and thus any efforts to influence the course of things will be futile. Democritus consequently advocates a basic cheerfulness of attitude in the face of this, suggesting that one should aim to develop a serene and passive nature rather than actively either seeking or avoiding the pleasures of the senses[143]. This attitude of ironic but fundamentally sympathetic amusement is one shared by many Beckettian narrators in their observation of the futile efforts of characters to make sense of their situations. However, the affinity can be taken one step further. Democritus' philosophy (the first recorded strictly scientific conception of the world) is based on the idea of the universe as a collection of infinite indivisible particles in an infinite void, a theory handed on from Leucippus. Leucippus' dualism of atom and void, as Sylvie Henning points out, is actually a covert monism, displaying a perception of the possibility of ultimate unity and identity: "the atom, the basic building block, was still perceived as a *plenum*.... Although surrounded by void, it contained no void itself and was therefore an indivisible unity"[144]. Democritus' particular version of atomic theory, however, rejected this reduction of the dyad; for Democritus, the universe could be divided into atoms (seen as real things), and void, (considered not real or "nothing"), but this latter category was conceived as thoroughly distinct from absolute non-existence (hence the quotation cited by Beckett - "naught is more real than

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[141]Cyril Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 112.
[142]*Ibid.*, 122.
[143]See *Ibid.*, 192.
[144]Sylvie Henning, "The Guffaw of the Abderite: Murphy and the Democritean Universe," *Journal of Beckett Studies* X (1985), 7.

nothing"[145] - which draws attention to the concept of an "un-real" but definitely existent void[146]).

Democritus was the first philosopher to posit the existence of quite such a void[147], and his importance to Beckett presumably lies not only in his benignly apathetic attitude but also in the designation of this sphere of nothingness, beyond sense experience but distinct from absolute non-existence[148]. As Henning points out, the distinction between such explicitly monistic philosophies as those of Spinoza and Leibniz (amongst others) and many apparently dualistic systems (including those of Descartes and the Occasionalists), is effectively more a difference of terms than of actual content

> since the latter, like the former, posits as its ultimate goal self-identity. This may be attained in two basic ways. The two elements of the dyad may be considered complementary so that they form a basic, unified totality.... This is the case in the Hegelian dialectical process. Alternatively, one element may dominate to the total exclusion or elimination of the other. In this way, both the Platonic and the Cartesian dualisms, for example, come to privilege mind, in one form or another, over matter[149].

Thus Democritus stands alone amongst the philosophers evoked in *Murphy* in that his Atomic theory is the only system to resist the reduction to both an all-encompassing unity and, by implication, absolute self-knowledge. Similarly, as Henning shows, Murphy clearly aspires to a monistic unity - "Murphy would like to be a mental plenum, mere mind unencumbered by body"[150] - but the figure of Democritus remains in the background, guffawing at the vanity of such attempts to eschew worldly distractions in favour of a life in the mind[151].

Democritus' attitude towards the importance of sense experience and the difficulty of establishing its relationship to mental impressions is also reflected in *Murphy*. In his *Confirmations*, Sextus writes of Democritus, "although he had

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[145]See Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 138.

[146]The importance of both Democritus and Geulincx with regard to Beckett's texts is suggested by his comments in a 1967 letter to Sighle Kennedy: "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". Sighle Kennedy, *Murphy's Bed: A Study of Real Sources and Sur-Real Associations in Samuel Beckett's First Novel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1971), 300.

[147]W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy Vol. 2: The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 397. Guthrie states that earlier thinkers had never clearly conceived of a vacuum; only Pythagoras had spoken of void and the concept was misunderstood, identified with air which the universe could breathe in.

[148]Beckett also refers to Democritus (both explicitly and indirectly) in other works. *Enueg I* alludes to the philosopher and, as has been pointed out, Beckett's depiction of other characters at times evokes parallels with Democritus' life. See Kenneth and Alice Hamilton, *op. cit.*, 63-4.

[149]Sylvie Henning, *op. cit.*, 5-6.

[150]*Ibid.*, 8.

[151]The narrator of *Murphy* refers to the "guffaw of the Abderite". Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 138.

promised to assign the power of conviction to the senses, he is nevertheless found condemning them, for he says 'In reality we know nothing for certain, but what shifts according to the conditions of the body and of the things which enter and press upon it'"[152]. Democritus' *Canons* implies a less pessimistic attitude, suggesting a distinction between sensual and intellectual knowledge and characterising the former as bastard but the latter as legitimate knowledge[153]; overall, the impression given is that while Democritus attempts to clarify the matter by establishing a distinction, the fact of a connection between the two cannot be denied, and thus the philosopher is left advocating a position somewhere between absolute identity and absolute difference. Again, therefore, as in his Atomic theory, the philosopher resists the reduction of the terms into a higher unity.

For Democritus, knowledge is only (if ever) arrived at only through the gentle motion of the soul's atoms[154]; this image suggests a correspondence with the tendency for Beckett's characters to find consolation in motion back and forth (a motif that recurs throughout the works, from the specific rocking back and forth in *Murphy* and *Rockaby*, to the more general description of movement between fixed or roughly fixed points in the later prose). The Democritean positing of a dynamic relationship both between atom and void and within atoms or their groups implies that reality lies in the recognition of existence as a state of flux, an "in-betweenness" or a permanent becoming. In this way knowledge and self-identity can only ever be partial. Democritean theory suggests an acceptance of the chaos of existence, hence his position in *Murphy*, emerging to mock the vain but inevitable efforts to synthesise experience into a coherent unity by imitation of Descartes, Geulincx, Spinoza, and so on.

Democritus' depiction of a state of dynamic flux, therefore, seems to correspond to Belacqua's delineation of reality as unamenable to full comprehension, existence and characters being too chaotic and unpredictable ever to be truly known. Similarly, the imagery surrounding Belacqua's retreat into the "wombtomb" of his mind is cast in terms evocative of the Atomist's conception of the flux between atom and void. Thus the Democritean void seems presented so as to correspond to the notion of the "Beethoven pause", and in this sense the background figure of Democritus in *Murphy* forms a parallel with the Beethovenian musical model for literature in the early works; both signify the futility of a quest for absolute knowledge and posit the alternative acceptance of otherness, of an irrational and chaotic aspect to existence. This, however, is an alternative which neither Beckett nor his characters are

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[152]W. K. C. Guthrie, *op. cit.*, 458.

[153]See Cyril Bailey, *op. cit.*, 180.

[154]Kenneth and Alice Hamilton, *op. cit.*, 71.

yet ready to confront, hence the experimentation with various philosophical systems and the correspondent process of stylistic refinement. Watt, following the implications of this, pushes rational systematisation to the limits at which it collapses, while increasingly (if covertly) privileging the irrational in its place (as will be explored in the following chapter). Only once these directions have been explored and one by one discarded, leaving the protagonist alone to face the question of his or her existence and its linguistic expression (as in *The Unnamable*), can the crisis of representation really be faced and the deconstruction of knowledge, constituted in language, begin.

The works up to *The Unnamable*, therefore, effect a gradual purgation in the course of exploring different apparent paths to self-knowledge and its linguistic expression. The dualisms of these texts, however, collapse with the problem of verification - the difficulty of objectively confirming the selfhood known only subjectively (the difficulty which Descartes and Geulincx overcome only by means of circular argument and the invocation of the existence of God). Once such dualistic structures have been discarded, the characters can begin to develop a more provisional, shade-like existence through a non-designative language of "disintegrated surface", a language which seeks to reflect the incoherence of subjectivity and the chaos of existence by means of its relative freedom from concrete reference and its location "between the terms". In this way, the "in-betweenness" of the figures of the later short prose (figures which may be indeterminate in terms of gender, location, motivation, and so on) is prefigured in the very earliest works by the use of the Beethovenian musical model and its association with desexualised, genderless existence. By means of this model and its association with the image of the Democritean void, Beckett covertly deconstructs his dualistic structures at the same time as he apparently posits their stability. Thus the clear indication that Murphy's methods of self-exploration are doomed corresponds to the narrator of *Dream* bemoaning his characters' lack of consistency, their non-coincidence with the Proustian literary model (inspired by Vinteuil's music), and the inappropriateness of the grotesque women as inspirational muses. Simultaneously, however, the more authentic musical model of *Dream* and *More Pricks Than Kicks* effects the undoing of binary oppositions through its demonstration that meaning is not reducible to that which is "sayable" any more than music is reducible to a position of irrational and meaningless otherness. In this way, the presence of the model and the consequent evocation of the Democritean void in *Murphy* reveal the inadequacy of traditionally male, logocentric rationality, thereby positing a literature that will truly reflect reality by means of the destruction of surface referentiality, and which correspondingly takes the genderless figure as muse.

CHAPTER FOUR
"...great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport"[1]:
The Search for Significance in Beckett and Music Theory.

Summary:

   Beckett's works from Murphy *to* The Unnamable - *their tendency to omit obvious symbolic reference while maintaining the obscure sense of an unfulfilled symbolism - such terms as evocative of Susanne Langer's theory of musical expression - the relevance of this to the perceived musicality of Beckett's texts, and also to the relationship between music and language and attempts to account for the significance of music.*

   Langer's theory of music as an "unconsummated" symbol of the emotive life - Beckett's later works as generating a sense of obscure significance through the actual mode of composition, their musicality resulting from both their sounding qualities and their construction according to the implications of the smallest compositional units - the resultant creation of a dynamic ebb and flow which implies symbolic meaning (hence the correspondence to Langer's theories).

   The various criticisms of Langer's work - these as effectively highlighting problems with Langer's terminology - influences upon Langer's ideas, her innovations and their importance to recent work in music cognition - the value of the breadth and non-specificity of Langer's theory and its refusal either to deny the ineffable or to resort to transcendentalism.

   The limited nature of progress since Langer - the suggestion that the positivistic nature of most music theory has hardly aided our understanding of the unique significance of music - Nicholas Cook's exploration of the divergence between actual musical experience and its musicological rationalisation - the relationship between Cook's ideas and those of Langer - the further correspondences to be found in Peter Kivy's Music Alone *(despite the different concerns) - Kivy's exploration of expressive qualities that are formally articulated but not fully explicable - the related, though very different, approach of Diana Raffman - Raffman's attempt to develop a cognitivist explanation of musical ineffability (structural, "feeling", and nuance ineffability) by examining instances of musical knowledge that cannot be described verbally - Cook's valorisation of the usually discounted negative term of the rational-irrational dialectic, compared to Raffman's exposing of the interdependency of rational and irrational elements in musical experience.*

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[1]Samuel Beckett, *Watt, op. cit.*, 71.

Beckett's similar opposition of what can and cannot be said - Watt's attempt to account for experience by elaborating complex permutational systems within which all elements can be placed - John J. Mood's analysis of these systems - the discovery that they contain mistakes which are obviously intentional yet easily pass unnoticed - Mood's suggestion that Beckett deliberately elaborates a faulty personal system, thereby emphasising his "fidelity to failure".

The relationship between Mood's discoveries and Heath Lees' examination of the obscure imagery of tuning in Watt *- Beckett's use of the Western rationalisation of the harmonic series through equal temperament as a symbol for Watt's attempts to systematise events - the deployment of the frog-song and of vague singing as an alternative, "natural" manifestation of music -* Watt *as extending Beckett's use of music to explore the rational-irrational dialectic.*

Beckett as therefore expressing the same need to pay attention to the ineffable as is apparent in the work of Langer, Cook and Raffman - Watt, *like music theory, as elaborating complex positivistic rationalisations which are ultimately limited - Langer's work as helping to explain the perception of Beckett's texts as increasingly musical - Beckett's examination of the structures of linguistic meaning as corresponding in many ways to attempts to account for musical meaning.*

In Beckett's works from *Murphy* to *The Unnamable* the phenomena of experience are studied in the hope that their essential nature will become apparent - the circumference is examined repeatedly, without ever finding the centrepoint which must be contained therein[2]. Once released from the words, the reader cannot deny their expressiveness, but how can the voice with no owner and nothing to say have spoken? It seems that while it is "likely that Beckett's use of language is designed to devalue language as vehicle for conceptual thought, his continued use of language must, paradoxically, be regarded as an attempt to communicate the incommunicable"[3]. Even here, however, Beckett inevitably wins, for within this sphere of (non-)experience, any claims to have experienced meaningful expression can be dismissed as mere instances of the need to impose interpretation upon anything with which we come into contact. To believe in the absolute meaninglessness of our established modes of expression - the fundamentals upon which everyday existence is based - is impossible: this is Beckett's subject, its effect, and, ironically, the reason for its effectiveness.

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[2]*Ibid.*, 126-7.

[3]James Eliopulos, *Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 9.

This integration of the apparently incompatible stems perhaps from the mutual origin of both the creative process and its reception in two of Beckett's favourite quotations: "nothing is more real than nothing" (Democritus), and "all art consists of creating something out of nothing" (Racine). Opposites, in this way, dissolve into nothingness, and this is effected through the presentation of characters without any explanation of their situations.

Beckett here seems to echo Wittgenstein's assertion that "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"[4] (though this is a dictum that Beckett's protagonists would themselves never be able to accept, for fear of the ensuing existential instability), and it was the confrontation of similar metaphysical problems that resulted in the differences between Wittgenstein and the Vienna school of Logical Positivists. Rather than rejecting metaphysics outright, Wittgenstein conceded that if metaphysical insights could be stated in language, then they would be real insights, not just incoherent confusions of feeling. Several of Beckett's characters (particularly in the earlier prose, and especially in *Watt*) behave in the manner of Wittgenstein students, attempting to define objects, people and relationships through concise logical propositions[5].

Their failure to do so is both predictable and disappointing for, following Wittgenstein, the need for the idea of the metaphysical - or at least of something beyond logically expressible relations - can never be denied. From *Murphy*, right through to the later plays and short prose, the characters have the sense that "the experience of any moment has its horizon ... and on that horizon new experience is always appearing"[6]. The horizon is never quite within reach, the characters can never quite define themselves or their situations, for the gap between their words as signifiers and that which they intend to signify is too wide. The natural separation between a word and that which it denotes could, hypothetically, provide the distance necessary for the objective contemplation of the self. Simultaneously, however, this very separation divorces the self from the immediacy of the sense experiences which seem to provide the only direct knowledge of things. In this way, the existence of language as a set of signifiers which is usable and re-usable within different contexts, but always related in some arbitrary sense to fixed definitions, precludes any attempt at true expression. As the Unnamable says, considering the culinary skills of the proprietress of a chop-house, "I learnt that her turnips in gravy are not so good as they used to be, but that on the other hand her carrots, equally in gravy, are even better than

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[4]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), 27.

[5]See, for example, Samuel Beckett, *Watt, op. cit.*, 78. Also, for further discussion of the links between *Watt* and Wittgenstein, see Jacqueline Hoefer, "*Watt*," *Perspective* XI (Autumn 1959), 166-182.

[6]C. Delisle Burns, "The Sense of the Horizon," *Philosophy* VIII (1933), 301.

formerly. The gravy has not varied. This is the kind of language I can almost understand, these the kind of clear and simple notions on which it is possible for me to build. I ask for no other spiritual nourishment"[7].

All writers of prose and poetry aim, in different ways and to varying degrees, to overlay the mundanity of everyday words with metaphor and symbolism. Similarly, Beckett's protagonists - sometimes writers themselves - attempt to provide their creator with a symbolic meaning for his words. Often the ambiguity of the narrative perspective is such that, even when a definite point of view appears to have been established, the reader becomes aware of a change having occurred, sometimes subtly, sometimes suddenly. In *Mercier and Camier,* for example, the couple "entered an inn. Wrong address said the man. This is Messrs. Clappe and Sons, Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Suppliers"[8]. This is perhaps the crudest example of a narrative perspective subject to fluctuation such that the authorship of the words, or, more importantly, of any sense of significance beyond the banal, is put into question.

A tension of variable bias is therefore generated between Beckett's stated belief in the meaninglessness of language, the attempts of his protagonists to find meaning in language, and the language that faces the reader of the printed page. The responsibility for the last is refused by Beckett, and the denial becomes more adamant the more determined is the characters' attempt to account for anything beyond the most basic observations. While Beckett's early subjects are presented without interpretation or explanation, they themselves can do nothing but interpret and explain as far as they are able. The limits of this ability are, however, contracted inwards: while Watt ponders his pots or the visit of the Galls, the Unnamable can ponder nothing but himself. Thus Beckett seems to suggest that the hypothetical imperative that drives his characters to ever more feverish self-examination is an unavoidable effect of language, rather than a result of his own manipulation of characters and events. His words apparently signify nothing: anything beyond this, any accusation of symbolism, must result from the reader's own need to interpret the protagonists' search for meaning.

Despite this, Beckett's presentation of the physical condition and location of his subjects gives the impression of symbolism. Characters often embark upon journeys or quests, though their aim is generally unclear. It is rare that a protagonist is not physically decrepit (increasingly so), dressed in boots, a shabby overcoat, and a hat (often tied on with string). The bicycle appears repeatedly as a mode of transport[9] (even for Molloy, with his crutches either side of the handlebars), and we frequently see characters lying in ditches or crawling through muddy undergrowth. Other unremarkable items - pots, turnips, dogs, policemen, and mental hospitals, for

[7]Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable," *op. cit.,* 302.

[8]_____, *Mercier and Camier, op. cit.,* 42.

[9]For a discussion of the significance of the bicycle in Beckett see Hugh Kenner, *op. cit.,* 117-132.

example - appear with remarkable regularity for writing otherwise relatively empty of objects and events. The effect is of a suggested symbolism, but one which is not fully developed and perhaps not even intended. The objects and situations are clearly significant, yet they seem to be devoid of functional meaning. While the objects and events appear meaningful through their appropriate situation within the "action", at the same time, the narrative code seeks to negate such apparent significance; this, of course, is at the higher level, where the narrative would ordinarily seek to extend its field of reference beyond the mundane and into the realm of symbolism. Thus meaning is very clearly a function, not a property, of terms, existing only for the telling and re-telling of "no stories but mine no silence but the silence I must break when I can bear it no more it's with that I have to last"[10].

The narrative structure therefore appears as both the cause and the effect of the relationship between Beckett (as narrator) and his characters. Beckett distances himself from the quest for true insight through language, suspecting the unavoidable failure of such a search. Yet he cannot help but provide his protagonists with the materials required, joining them in their hopeless optimism, laughing both at them and, through the correspondence of their ventures and his own, at himself. Responsibility for the characters and their words is simultaneously denied and accepted; language must be used, and yet to move beyond banal denotation involves misunderstanding, imprecision, and, ultimately, disingenuousness. The metaphysical horizon can be recognised but never reached ("the sky is further away than you think, is it not, mama?[11]), and a symbolism is articulated while the meaning remains unfulfilled: "above is the light, the elements, a kind of light, sufficient to see by, the living find their ways, without too much trouble, seek with their eyes, close their eyes, halting, without halting, among the elements, the living"[12].

Within this, there lies something like the literary equivalent of Barthes' concept of the "third meaning" or the "obscure meaning". Considering a scene from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, Barthes isolates three semantic levels: the factitious reference, the intended - and expected - symbolic meaning (that "obvious meaning" which "is taken from a kind of common, general lexicon of symbols; it is a meaning which seeks me out"[13]), and a third, final "supplement that my intellect cannot succeed in absorbing"[14], which intimates a significance that is without a signified, "indifferent to the story and to the obvious meaning"[15]. The semantic of the "obtuse meaning"

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[10]Samuel Beckett, *How It Is, op. cit.*, 14.
[11]_____, "Malone Dies," *op. cit.*, 246.
[12]_____, *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967), 81.
[13]Roland Barthes, *Image - Music - Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1971), 54.
[14]*Ibid.*
[15]*Ibid.*, 61.

could be seen as corresponding to the unfulfilled half-symbolism of Beckett's prose. However, while in the Eisenstein film the third meaning is reliant upon the existence of the obvious meaning even for the merest suggestion of its presence, Beckett bypasses the second level of symbolism (that which would effect an expressible meaning for the words beyond their obvious frames of reference). The third meaning is distanced into the hypothetical and apparently unintentional, such that its very existence becomes doubtful (increasingly so, the more it is sought out: "but even as he looked it was effaced, not abruptly, no, and not gently either, but by a firm unhurried hand, wiped away. Then Watt did not know what to think"[16]). We are shown that "the pursuit of the self thus becomes the endless, hopeless task of pursuing an endlessly receding *something* which - resisting definition and being inseparable from what surrounds it - has the characteristics of *nothing*"[17].

Discussing Beckett in these terms evokes Susanne Langer's assertion in *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) that "the more barren and indifferent the symbol, the greater its semantic power"[18]. Langer's aim, however, is by first examining the nature and origins of symbolic language, to attempt to develop a theory of *music*. Proceeding from this initial correspondence, then, this chapter examines the perceived relationship between certain attempts to account for the significance of music and Beckett's investigation of the constitution of meaning. Starting with Langer, the chapter explores the relevance of this theory (and its limitations), before moving into an extended discussion of recent work which, whether explicitly or not, seems to return to and develop Langer's ideas in order to provide new perspectives on the question of quite what musical knowledge comprises. Much of this involves the exploration of the extent to which musical experience is ineffable, and whether this necessarily implies that it is also irrational. Returning to Beckett, it is found that similar processes are taking place, particularly in *Watt*. Having established in his early fiction various binary oppositions by means of which the limits of self-knowledge and reason can be explored, in *Watt* Beckett extends the covert undermining of those dualisms, increasingly emphasising the importance of that which cannot be assimilated into logical linguistic structures. Not surprisingly, given its deployment in those early works, it is music which seems to inspire this process, and thus not only does much of Beckett's exploration of meaning correspond to that of music theory, but Beckett uses the model of music within that exploration.

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[16] Samuel Beckett, *Watt op. cit.*, 63.

[17] Ross Chambers "Beckett's Brinkmanship" in Martin Esslin (ed.), *op. cit.*, 154.

[18] Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), 75.

Music, for Langer, is a kind of significant form, in which the significance is explicit but not fixed and hence the function of meaning remains unfulfilled due to the transience of the content. Her theory ultimately - and perhaps inevitably - falls short of a full account of the semantics of musical expression and of the emotional and intellectual effectiveness of music as an art-form. Nevertheless, Langer provides important developments beyond the limits of previous arguments (proposed by Hanslick) for the formal congruence of the articulation of musical material and emotive experience, pushing the comparison into the area of content. Music, according to Langer, *"is an unconsummated symbol.* Articulation is its life, but not assertion; expressiveness, not expression ... the assignment of one rather than another possible meaning to each form is never explicitly made"[19], and this follows exactly the mode of variable interplay between sign, symbol, meaning and lack of meaning which is effected through Beckett's use of language.

From the first, the congruence of Langer's arguments with Beckett's deployment of words is apparent. Symbolic language relies not just on the relationship between subject and object, for this partnership is that which constitutes the concept of a sign, but on the introduction of an aspect of connotation. The relationship between the subjects and objects of signification is that of denotation, and this Beckett's characters can cope with as long as they restrict themselves to that level - consider, for example, Malone's determination to make an inventory of his possessions[20]. To develop such relations into the realms of symbolism, however, is to set the subject and object at one remove from each other, such that it is the *interpretation* of their relationship that is essential to the determination of meaning. Beckett maintains this effect of distance, and will even concede the possibility of higher meaning while still denying the viability of symbolic explanation: the narrator of "First Love", for example, opens by stating, "I associate, rightly or wrongly, my marriage with the death of my father, *in time* [my italics]. That other links exist, on other levels, between these two affairs, is not impossible. I have enough trouble as it is in trying to say what I think I know"[21].

Just as Schopenhauer defined the artistic vision as contemplation independent of reason, Beckett, following Proust, "calls for a presenting of what is seen rather than what 'ought' to be seen, ... offers a preference for statement of, rather than explanation of, characters"[22]. Additionally, the more desperate the characters' search for the apparent connotative interrelation of people and objects, the less they can affirm

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[19]*Ibid.*, 240.

[20]Samuel Beckett, "Malone Dies," *op. cit.*, 226-230.

[21]_____, "First Love," *op. cit.*, 9.

[22]Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, *Testament of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 71.

about the solidity of the items themselves. This is effected, in its most simplistic form, in several ways: through the exploitation of the dual meanings of words ("in the beginning was the pun. And so on"[23]), through an increasing distrust of the significance of proper names, and through the negation of the descriptive power of adjectives, such as when Wylie speaks of Murphy's attractiveness to women:

> 'It is his ...', stopping for the want of the right word. There seemed to be, for once, a right word.
> 'His what?' said Neary.
> They went a little further 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.[24]

In this way, the characters exemplify Langer's assertion that language developed primarily not as a means of communication, but as an effect of the human need to view reality symbolically (this conclusion having been taken from Edward Sapir's studies of autistic, deaf, and animal-reared children[25]). Symbolic language, in these terms, is an attempt to reconcile the realisation that "our primary world of reality *is* a verbal one. Without words our imagination cannot retain distinct objects and their relations"[26], with the unavoidable fact that, due to the separation between the word and that which it denotes, ultimately, "words are obscuring"[27].

According to Langer, in moving from symbolic language to the consideration of music as a potentially symbolic form, it is found that music has certain properties which recommend themselves for symbolic use. Most especially, music is composed of many separable units which "in themselves play no important role which would overshadow their semantic function"[28], and which lend themselves easily to self-modification when in combination with one another. Additionally, Langer follows Jean D'Udine's establishing of a clear resemblance between musical structure and the dynamics of human experience[29]; Langer extends this congruence into the field of the musical materials themselves, refusing to allow the fact that musical meaning cannot

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[23]Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 41.

[24]*Ibid.*, 39.

[25]Langer quotes Edward Sapir on this: "he autistic speech of children seems to show that the purely communicative aspect of language has been exaggerated. It is best to admit that language is primarily a vocal actualisation of the tendency to see reality symbolically, that it is precisely this quality which renders it a fit instrument for communication" Susanne K. Langer, *op. cit.*, 109. Langer is equally influenced by Ernst Cassirer's similar determination that a symbol is a function of perception rather than communication (and Langer's view of the congruence between formal and affective properties is also found in Cassirer). See Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. S. K. Langer (New York: Dover, 1946). For further comments, also see Raymond Monelle, "Symbolic Models in Musical Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics* XIX (1979), 24-37.

[26]Susanne K. Langer, *op. cit.*, 126.

[27]*Ibid.*, 243.

[28]*Ibid.*, 228.

[29]Langer refers to Jean D'Udine, *L'art et le Geste* (Paris, 1910).

be expressed precisely in terms of individual feelings to disavow the possibility of such a correspondence, and thereby concluding that "what music can actually reflect is only the morphology of feeling"[30]. It is the unconsummated nature of the symbolic aspect of music (in Langer's terms) which leads to its isomorphism and consequently to its superiority over symbolic language as a mode of expression.

Returning to Beckett, we find that, as with music as defined by Langer, his writing has all the earmarks of symbolism except for the designation of specific connotation. Peter Brook, for example, describes *Happy Days* as "not *telling*, not *dictating*, symbolic without symbolism. For Beckett's symbols are powerful just because we cannot quite grasp them"[31]. While Beckett's earlier texts frequently make explicit the sense of an unspecifiable significance (through both the words of characters and the presentation of objects and events), the tendency of later works is towards the generation of a correspondent effect through the actual composition. The further Beckett breaks down traditional grammatical and narrative structures, the less his characters grapple explicitly with the problem of linguistic expression and the more the search is effected through the actual process of textual construction. This can perhaps be demonstrated by examining the opening of *Worstward Ho*:

> On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow
> on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on.
>
> Say for be said. Missaid. From now
> say for be missaid.
>
> Say a body. Where none. No mind.
> Where none. That at least. A place.
> Where none. For the body. To be in.
> Move in. Out of. Back into. No. No out.
> No back. Only in. Stay in. On in. Still.[32]

The reader understands the words not from the reference to any explanatory context, for nothing of substance is apparent, but rather from a knowledge of their conventional meanings, individually and within their tiny groups. The sense of forward propulsion and a certain timelessness are contained within the first word as much as in the rest of the passage. We are presented with a repetitive structure of assertion, followed by the statement of the necessity of this assertion, despite the knowledge - itself activated by the repetition of small formal units - of that which will immediately follow: the negation of the viability of that assertion. The narrator's presence seems accidental: the flow of words must originate from somewhere, but is

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[30]Susanne K. Langer, *op. cit.*, 238.

[31]Peter Brook, "Happy Days and Marienbad" in Charles Marowitz, Tom Milne, and Owen Hale (eds.), *Encore Reader: A Chronicle of the New Drama* (London: Methuen, 1965), 165.

[32]Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1983), 7.

directed towards nobody. The absence of subjects or objects (except for "place", "body" and "mind", which are denied substance as soon as they are introduced), and the lack of sentences or of any truly discursive structure, preclude the possibility of symbolism in terms of an obvious meaning (which would ordinarily be developed by the textual demand for interpretation). Nevertheless, we are aware of a ritualistic searching effected by means of the choice and combination of words. The construction is extremely pedantic, moving through a slow process of transformation: one word is added to the last, the sense is altered by a change of tense, attempted statement is followed by denial, and throughout all of this, the words are very closely related to each other either by their function either as (often prepositional) signs ("out of", "into", and "in"; "move" and "back"; "somehow" and "nohow"; "say" and "said"; "no", "only", and "none", for example), as sounds ("Till" and "Still"; "Still" and "Stay"; "Only" and "On"; "On" and "None"; "On" and "No"), or by a combination of the two.

The methodical composition achieves, ironically, a sensual flow, and we are confronted with a highly developed kind of imitative form in which the use of tiny formal elements and the apparent simplicity actually lead to construction of extreme sophistication. The narrator seems to be working through simple combinations of linguistic units, as if searching for a specific permutation of words or even syllables. Yet we have no more idea than the character has of what he or she is looking for; the reader, denied of the usual grammatical pointers, is actively involved in the same search for meaning as the "protagonist": as Judith Dearlove comments with regard to all of Beckett's *Residua*, "by thrusting on us the burden of creating order and meaning, the residua demand a new critical response"[33]. The infinitely fluctuating effect of progressive and regressive word-flow within repetitive structures suggests that the process is never-ending. Such construction reeks of symbolism, but without reference to subjects, objects, or their connotative relationship, the significance of the symbolism remains unfulfilled: Beckett has found a "syntax of weakness that operates on our sensibilities by intimation not assertion"[34]. The narrator attempts, but unavoidably fails, to find within the simplest linguistic terms something with which to replace the need for metaphysics - to find Wittgenstein's true insights through the precise evocation of the human condition - and thus the obscure meaning remains a mere intimation: the symbolism remains unconsummated. Without ever explaining its own existence the text effects an ebb and flow of assertion and denial, of construction and deconstruction, which relates to Langer's isomorphism, articulating a comparable "unconsummated symbolism".

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[33]Judith Dearlove, *Accommodating the Chaos: Samuel Beckett's non-relational art* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1982), 118.
[34]James Knowlson and John Pilling, *op. cit.*, 178.

The application of Langer's theory to the general perception of musical sound as opposed to actual themes or phrases increases its degree of success. This aspect is dependent upon Schopenhauer's belief that "music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind *themselves*"[35]. Similarly, the avoidance of any reference to specific emotions, concentrating upon a more abstract isomorphism rather than having to approach the question of subjective interpretation, relates to Beckett's attempts to circumvent the ordinary denotative and connotative functions of words. Just as, for Schopenhauer, music "reproduces all the emotions of our innermost being, entirely without reality and remote from its pain"[36], so the direction taken by his work suggests that, for Beckett, the greatest abstraction yields the greatest truth. Thus, by the end of *The Unnamable*, the prose reaches a state of extreme disintegration in which subjects, objects, and their relationships have no real place: there is "nothing ever but lifeless words"[37].

Nevertheless, the negation of the properties of language is a very different thing to the actual composition of music; Beckett is more concerned with exploring the hypothetical imperative which propels his characters through their doomed search for linguistic self-expression. The incessant chatter is vital for the assertion of existence. Thought becomes language, and "I think therefore I am" becomes "I speak therefore I am", as is apparent in *How It Is*: "the voice extorted a few words of life because of cry that's the proof good and deep no more is needed a little cry all is not dead"[38]. In this way, the linguistic sensuality of many of the later works achieves its musical effect not through direct intention, but as a result of the exploration of the simplest linguistic units and their closest relatives. Despite this, the musicality which is achieved in turn aids the obfuscation of semantics, and hence a complete circularity of cause and effect is apparent: the negation of referentiality in favour of the tendency towards a state of music both drives and is driven by Beckett's hypothetical imperative.

Beckett's generation of sensual streams of syllables might seem to be related to that of *Finnegans Wake*, and given the Joycean influence upon Beckett's earlier works, this conclusion would at first glance appear understandable. Certainly the sense of timeless continuity and the obscuring of meaning beneath the sounding effect of the words are common to both, but the two writers are, in fact, working from opposite ends of the spectrum. While Beckett pares language down to the minimum, eventually using mainly mono-syllabic or di-syllabic words, Joyce constructs syllabic conglomerations designed to generate manifold references. A word of Joycean prose

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[35]Arthur Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, I, 261.
[36]*Ibid.*, 264.
[37]Samuel Beckett, *Stories and Texts for Nothing, op. cit.*, 135.
[38]_____, *How It Is, op. cit.*, 133.

can have several meanings as a result of the origins of its various components -
"boudeloire", for example, not only distorts the word "boudoir", but also incorporates
associations with Baudelaire and with the French words "bouder" (to pout), "Loire"
(the omnipresent river theme), and "boue" (mud). Each syllable is important in its own
right, and the consequent onomatopoeia and alliteration add to the effect of the
multifarious generation of semantics. This results in an "ebullience and form-building
energy"[39] which positively asserts a belief in the power of words as infinitely
meaningful *because* of the ambiguity of reference, *because* of the gap between
signifier and signified (the very gap which disables Beckett's characters).

Even in the name of Finnegan, "we finish (*fin, fine*, finn) and we start egan or
again"[40], and this suggestion of growth and re-growth, examination and re-
examination is increasingly fulfilling, developing a complex web of symbolism and an
expanding field of reference. Tim Finnegan is all heroes (Finn MacCool, Thor,
Prometheus, Osiris, Buddha, Tristan ...), his fall is symbolic of the fall of any man
(or of man) at any time, and it is the narrative composition which brings this into
effect. The positive exuberance of meaning is directly antithetical to the desperation of
Beckett's characters; Joyce's language becomes musical through construction,
Beckett's by disintegration, and they meet somewhere in between with a superficial
similarity of sensual effect. Essentially, the musical effect of Joyce's work comprises
an intensification of that which is evident in any poetic language. On the other hand,
the particular sense of vital import in Beckett's works motivates the breakdown of
traditional structures in search of a more effective form of expression, negating
referential meaning and increasingly effecting a more fundamental musicality wherein
the content is virtually indistinguishable from the dynamics of the composition. Thus
Beckett's circumvention of the obvious qualities of symbolic language (the qualities
upon which Joyce is heavily dependent), suggests an aesthetic conception which,
again, can be linked to the isomorphism of music described by Langer.

In one of the rare moments in which he chose to comment, albeit briefly, on
his work, Beckett wrote "my work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke
intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else"[41].
The relevance of this to the increasing austerity of his language is obvious. What is
more interesting, however, is to consider in the light of this statement the significance
of the presentation of non-linguistic sound, musical and non-musical, and its possible
relation to the unconsummated symbolism. As suggested in the previous discussion of
Beckett's early depiction of non-referential sounds, it is in a sense these which activate

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[39]Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), 364.

[40]Anthony Burgess, *Here Comes Everybody* (Middlesex: Hamlyn, 1982), 194.

[41]Samuel Beckett, letter to Alan Schneider (December 29, 1957) quoted in Deirdre Bair, *op. cit.*, 497.

the hypothetical imperative which, in turn, provides the instigation for Beckett's writing; the search for true insight within language must lead to the attempted negation of restrictive semantics and hence to a state of unfulfilled symbolism, yet this is driven only by the presence of murmurs, humming, and nonsensical songs.

From this point of view, there is an element of tautology in each work: the inexplicit meaningfulness which is endlessly sought is, on occasions, evident within the texts themselves. Ironically, while the reduction of language towards a state of extreme and pedantic austerity achieves the musical effect of a stream of insensible sound, the process by which this is effected draws the characters further into their own words and away from external sound. Thus it is as if the two fundamentals of music - non-referential sound and its organisation into significant, but linguistically untranslatable form - are being pulled apart by the obsession with meaning.

The repetitive effect of the closer and closer examination of the same ideas within a gradually contracting frame of reference is deliberately stifling, almost hysterical, and yet at the same time increasingly liberating. The unconsummated symbolism refers outwards, beyond the page or the stage, circumventing the obvious levels of signification and connotative meaning, such that its very presence seems doubtful and certainly accidental. Thus the integration of reader, character and narrator/author is complete; all three enact the same search for meaning within the corresponding frameworks of restrictive language, of the human need for interpretation, and of the eternally optimistic belief in a meaning beyond the definable. In this way, Beckett's writing transcends any ordinary kind of imitative form and his "fundamental sounds" provide the source of origination for all: ultimately, the greater the contraction, the greater the possibility of expansion as a result of the congruence with the unrestricted and unfulfilled meaning of musical expressivity.

The correspondence between Beckett's attitude to and manipulation of *language*, and Langer's theory of *music* is, therefore, quite precise. In this sense, Langer's terminology may help to explain the perception of Beckett's texts as musical. However, this is only viable if Langer's theory is at least a partially satisfactory account of musical expression. After all, the substance of her theory was developed over fifty years ago (at roughly the same time as Beckett was writing his first mature works), and since that time work has proliferated in the fields of musical aesthetics, theory, and analysis. It therefore becomes necessary to examine in detail the appropriateness of the theory, its influence, and whether any real developments have subsequently taken place. Additionally, if the contended correspondence between Beckett's and Langer's explorations of meaning holds any substance, then not only should this prove instructive with regard to the musicality of Beckett's texts, but it should also imply that any investigation of the significance of music may therefore have relevance to Beckett criticism and even, perhaps, to critical theory as a whole.

There are certainly problems with Langer's account of musical expression. Critics have objected to her arguments on various grounds, though many have simply followed the line taken in the first major review, that by Ernest Nagel (which appeared in 1943). Nagel raises two main points, the first of which concerns Langer's assertion that "the pattern in which a proposition combines names for things and actions must be somehow analogous to the pattern in which the items named are combined"[42]. Clearly, this assertion is fundamental to the development of a theory of the congruence of music and the emotive life, yet, as Nagel points out, many examples can be chosen which do not conform to such a pattern: "consider, for example, the pattern established in the trigonometric formula 'y=sin x' on the one hand, and on the other hand the pattern exhibited in the sinuous curve which that formula is employed to represent. Where, precisely, is the analogy between these patterns?"[43]. This objection does not, of course, prove that Langer's assertion is wrong for all cases - and it does nothing to disprove the assertion with respect to the particular uses to which it is put by Langer - but Nagel's point reveals the absence of full logical proof in Langer's argument: "it is one thing to show that there are no *a priori* grounds *against* her view; it is quite another thing to show that the evidence *confirms* that view"[44].

Nagel's second objection is perhaps more far-reaching and relates closely to the conclusions of many other commentators. Langer distinguishes between discursive and presentational symbols; discursive symbols are those which have a fixed vocabulary and syntax and therefore facilitate translation: language is the obvious case. Langer states, however, that there exists another category of symbol which communicates experience without following the discursive scheme - this category is that of presentational symbols, which do not comprise units with fixed connotations (hence the inclusion of both visual forms and music in this category). However, Nagel questions the sense in which these are symbols at all: "what object is symbolised when in ordering sense experience, sense forms are apprehended?"[45]. In the case of music, for example, Langer's assertion that music can reflect the general morphology of feeling, rather than specific emotional qualities, leads Nagel to find Langer "dangerously near to the position that music simply presents musical forms which are themselves not *representative* at all"[46]. From this, Nagel quickly concludes that all Langer is suggesting is a kind of "copy theory" of music, wherein

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[42]Ernest Nagel, "Book Reviews: *Philosophy in a New Key*, Susanne K. Langer," *Journal of Philosophy* XL (1943), 324.
[43]*Ibid.*
[44]*Ibid.*, 327.
[45]*Ibid.*, 326.
[46]*Ibid.*, 327.

the primary function of music is to *represent* patterns of emotional tension, which are presumably simply 'given' to and apprehended by the composer in some form or other.... If so, what recorded cases are there of a deepened understanding of human emotions as a consequence of exposure to music? To the present reviewer, at any rate, the evidence appears to be entirely negative.[47]

Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of the validity of Nagel's objections, we find these arguments developed by other critics. Reviewing one of Langer's later books, *Problems of Art*, Berel Lang asserts that "the whole of her aesthetic theory depends finally on the question of whether and in what sense the term 'symbol' can be legitimately applied to the art work"[48]; unfortunately, as far as Lang is concerned, Langer undermines her own argument by stating not only that a symbol must involve an analogy between it and the thing symbolised, but that the precise nature of that analogy should be recognisable: "an index of correlation between analogous points in the two entities must be available, as evidence of the supposed resemblance between art's virtual form and the semblance of feeling and emotion"[49]. Langer, of course, cannot provide such evidence - the congruence of the dynamics of feeling with those of the art work is seen by Langer as self-evident, and this intuition is, in her view, enough for the basis of a symbolic theory. Lang seems to echo Nagel, writing that "there is a difference between asserting a relation and arguing for its existence"[50]. His conclusion is that Langer's theory is effectively not that of a symbolism, but rather that of a symbol that has been "collapsed" back into a sign (in that the question of the precise correlation between the symbol and its object cannot be addressed). If Langer cannot provide more specific details of connotation and if no reference points can be established, then for Lang "the art work and its 'meaning' are not to be distinguished; the art work no longer symbolises"[51].

The problem, according to both Nagel and Lang, seems to be that Langer wishes to describe art as symbolic of the emotive life without having to specify the precise emotions being symbolised. Langer believes the effectiveness of music to lie in its relationship to the emotive life - this, she asserts, must be the reason for its ability to move us (or even for our mere sense of its significance as an art-form), given that its abstract nature allows for no other reference points. Simultaneously, however, Langer realises that while music can, at times, evoke specific emotions or categories of emotion, it does not always do so, and often it is impossible to identify even the *kind* of emotion being evoked. Thus the object of Langer's symbolism becomes the

[47]*Ibid.*, 328.
[48]Berel Lang, "Langer's Arabesque and the Collapse of the Symbol," *Review of Metaphysics* XVI (1962), 349.
[49]*Ibid.*, 356.
[50]*Ibid.*
[51]*Ibid.*, 362.

dynamic ebb and flow of the emotive life in a more general sense: the object can rarely, at any specific moment, be named, hence the use of the phrase "unconsummated symbolism". If, however, this is the case, how can a proof of such a theory ever be presented - in what sense can Langer talk about the "meaningfulness" of music?

As far as Lang and Nagel are concerned, she cannot, for "meaning" or symbolisation must, it would seem, be nameable. Nagel asks for proof that exposure to music can cause an increased understanding of human emotions; he clearly expects this proof to be verbally articulated, but in Langer's terms such proof could not be given precisely *because* the symbolic experience of music is of a different order to that expressible in language. If this were not the case - if music simply re-articulated ideas that could be stated equally well in language - why should music have any unique significance?

Thus, while the critics' objections are valid in terms of logical proof, they do, to an extent, misrepresent Langer's intentions in their apparent inability to comprehend the notion of non-linguistic meaning. This is undoubtedly Langer's own fault - she attempts to present a logically argued system which is in fact based upon an unverifiable intuition. Similarly, perhaps the use of the term "symbol" is unhelpful, strictly speaking, since the object of the symbolism cannot be located. Yet the inability to pin down an object does not prove its absence; Nagel and Lang suggest that Langer's view of presentational symbols reduces them almost to self-referential objects, yet Langer's view is predicated on the notion, again based in intuition, that music must relate to something beyond itself, however indefinable, as it would not otherwise achieve the same sense of significance. The reference points may be unlocatable, and the art therefore effectively non-referential, but Langer suggests that this does not disprove a *congruence* with the dynamics of emotion, a view supported by music's ability to move us in the apparent absence of subject matter. Thus Langer's use of the term "symbol" is understandable, if not strictly or logically correct.

In the development from *Philosophy in a New Key* to *Feeling and Form*, Langer does, in a sense, acknowledge something of Nagel's criticism, substituting the phrase "vital import" for the term "meaning" with respect to the significance of music. She thereby avoids the confusion generated by critics' assertions that "meaning" must be definable and explicable[52], but this does nothing to change the actual substance of the theory, and we therefore reach an impasse wherein Langer's views can neither be proved nor disproved, due to the nature of both her terms and her subject matter.

Other reviewers have had other complaints. Hans Tischler effectively argues that whatever the worth of Langer's philosophy, it is of no use to critics in that it

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[52]Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed From Philosophy in a New Key* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 31.

cannot account for the determination of one piece of music as better than any other[53].
Yet Langer's theory does not attempt to concern itself with such specifics - she does
not wish it to. A discussion of that kind would not be able to avoid questions of
compositional skill within a certain style, but Langer is not interested in trying to
account for the specific significant qualities of a particular work or style, but rather
with the differential quality of music as a whole, attempting to understand the extent to
which all musics share certain unique ways of meaning. Angelo Bertocci, in a review
of *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, seems to fall into a similar trap, complaining
that: "Mrs. Langer's reduction of qualities to patterns of biological activity which can
be abstracted and perceived intuitively cuts off a sufficient appreciation of moral and
metaphysical quality in literature"[54]; again, though, Langer's philosophy does not
deny the possibility of art having a moral or even a metaphysical function. Instead, she
simply asserts that art *can* be significant without didactic intent, and it is this
fundamental function with which she is concerned.

It has been argued that Langer does not leave *enough* room for more specific
cases of musical reference. In perhaps the most relevant criticism of Langer, Peter
Kivy asserts that because of her determination to prove a case for music as a symbolic
mode, Langer can include only non-specific expression and must conclude that music
can reflect only the *morphology* of feeling: in Langer's terms, for a musical phrase to
be expressive of any one emotion, "there must be some semantic rule or dictionary
definition to the effect that themes of this sort 'mean' this or that"[55]. Kivy suggests
that, within certain limits, it is possible for music to be expressive of individual
feelings; while there will always be disagreement over the precise understanding of a
musical emotion, this is insufficient for the absolute denial of any common
understanding of the emotional character of a work. Kivy writes: "that critics should
worry about whether a theme is expressive of 'noble grief' or 'abject sorrow' does not
worry me much. It no more shows that the theme is not expressive of a specifiable
emotion than would a dispute over whether a swatch were cerulean or aquamarine
prove that it wasn't blue"[56]. In this way, it is possible to posit, with some credibility,
the possibility of using emotive terms in writings about music that otherwise attempt to
maintain an objective stance.

The shortcomings of Langer's conclusions, in Kivy's terms, originate from
her belief that the expressivity of music is essentially determined by its symbolic

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[53]Hans Tischler, "A Proposal for a Multi-Relational Aesthetics," *International Review of the
Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* III/2 (Dec. 1972), 141-159.

[54]Angelo Bertocci "Review Article: Susanne Langer, or the Symbol Abstracted," *Philological
Quarterly* XLVIII (1969), 271.

[55] Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* (Princeton, New Jersey:
Princeton University Press, 1980), 48.

[56]*Ibid.*, 47.

nature: "and when music emerged as such a symbol, it could only be a ... pale ghost of the emotions: symbolic of them but not of any one of them"[57]. Ultimately this symbolism deals only with the idea of sound itself - with the *concept* of music - and ignores the fact of an immediate emotive effect. It is possible to suggest, however, that this non-specificity is the precise reason for the more general relevance of Langer's work. While Kivy's comments are clearly significant, Langer's theory does not deny the possibility of a more direct relationship between music and the emotions in certain works, but simply chooses not to discuss the means by which such cases manifest themselves. The avoidance of this discussion broadens the application of the theory, enabling it to encompass music which does not aim primarily to evoke an emotional response. Additionally, Langer's concentration on the relationship between music and the general morphology of the emotive life is also responsible for the congruence of Langer's conception of music and Beckett's "syntax of weakness". It is even possible to suggest that Langer's writings are more appropriate as an account of Beckett's negative half-symbolism than of any specific musical work; the fact that Beckett can never fully eschew semantics provides the ebb and flow of the language with a basic referential grounding which many of Langer's critics seem to wish upon her conception of music.

Finally, Malcolm Budd, in a thorough examination of the implications of Langer's theory, isolates a problem similar to that which Nagel identified in his initial objection. While Nagel questioned Langer's assumption that a symbol should have a similar structure to that which it symbolises, Budd demonstrates that this assertion, which Langer attributed to Wittgenstein[58], is actually based on a faulty understanding. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein defines a symbol as a "picture" of a fact and a fact as the existence or non-existence of a state of affairs which, in turn, is seen as a combination of "objects". The connection of the objects in a state of affairs forms the potential structure of that state: "the form is the possibility of the structure"[59]. The relationship between the elements of a picture is the structure of the picture, and the possibility of this structure is the pictorial form. In order for a picture to be able to depict a fact, it must have the same form as the fact. However, Budd points out,

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[57]*Ibid.*, 62.

[58]It is interesting to note the common influence of Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein on both Beckett and Langer; each is clearly indebted to Schopenhauer's philosophy of music (though both are interested only to the extent that the ideas can be adapted to their own ends). Beckett claimed not to have read Wittgenstein until later in his life (indeed, he also claimed never to read philosophy in general as he was unable to understand it, a strange statement given the number of clearly identifiable philosophical references in his texts - see Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (eds.), *op. cit.*, 217). However, Watt's investigation of logical relationships in particular suggests, at the very least, a strong affinity with Wittgenstein's project.

[59]Ludwig Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, 37.

although Langer takes over Wittgenstein's terminology, she does not use his terms of art 'fact', 'state of affairs', 'object', 'structure', and 'form' in the same way. For Wittgenstein, an object is both simple (non-composite) and unalterable. But Langer uses the term 'object' in such a loose fashion that anything at all can be called an object.[60]

Thus the basis of the logic from which her theory of formal congruence is developed is shown to be faulty. Again, however, it is possible to argue that this is actually irrelevant to Langer's theory; if the specifics of the symbolic relationship can never be identified, due to their intuitive basis, then it can hardly matter if the logical foundations of the theory are shown to involve false assumptions. If the theory is actually based on the intuitive sense of significance, then Langer's attempt to justify her work in logical terms is redundant, as are the mistakes in that justification, but this still does not prove the invalidity (or the validity) of the theory.

Through the examination of these discussions of Langer's work, we seem to be reaching a stage where the criticisms can generally be dismissed as irrelevant to her central contentions. This inevitably leads to the question of whether or not we are left with anything of insight. The contention seems to be that if Langer's work has any value, it lies in her interpretation of the "sense of significance" that is gleaned from works of art but which cannot be named; Langer's view seems to correspond to an opinion set forth by Beckett in his mock piece *Le Concentrisme*: as James Knowlson and John Pilling note, "the greatest art, Beckett claimed in the serious conclusion to a spoof lecture, is both 'perfectly intelligible' and 'perfectly inexplicable'"[61]. Langer's theory cannot effectively be proved or disproved, and any response must concentrate on evaluating the extent to which we trust her account; the theory can be verified only by comparison with one's own reactions and the consideration of common elements of experience. This appears to be a wholly illogical and irrational basis for a theory, yet, at the same time, one of the innovative aspects of Langer's work is the recognition that the emotions of which art can be expressive are not held up for enjoyment but for perception.

Discussion of the significance of music has long involved arguments between those who believe that music has the power to arouse specific emotions directly within the listener - that the importance of music lies in its ability to make us sad, happy, and so on - and those who believe that, while this may on occasion be the case, more significant is the cognitive process by which any such emotion is recognised as an expressive property. The former position has led to such extreme cases as Deryck

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[60]Malcolm Budd, *Music and the Emotions: The Philosophical Theories* (London: Routledge, 1985), 111.
[61]James Knowlson and John Pilling, *op. cit.*, 242.

Cooke's attempt to classify the terms of musical "language" according to the specific emotional effect of individual tonal intervals and phrases; Cooke aimed to make it "ultimately possible to understand and assess a composer's work as a report on human experience, just as we do that of a literary artist"[62]. Leaving aside the question of whether or not we consider it appropriate to treat even literary works in such a manner any more, such an attempt raises manifold objections not only to the reductive nature of the terms, but also to the question of how musics outside the Western tonal tradition could ever have gained currency. More than one hundred years before this, Hanslick had already shown such a simplistic response to be invalid, invoking Winterfield's examples of ambivalent emotional character in various Handel arias and Boyé's similar comments regarding Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*[63].

Cooke is not far from either the stimulus-response models based on Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*, or from the *Affektenlehre* of Baroque theorists (although, in many respects, Cooke's theory is even less sophisticated, the earlier theories allowing for greater ambiguity within the terms of reference). For Descartes, the stimulation of the senses throws the "animal spirits" into a pleasurable state of arousal, which in turn produces a further pleasure by exciting the emotions[64]. Such theories clearly limit music to a condition of raw feeling without intellectual appeal, but nevertheless have the advantage of eschewing the notion of music having a specifiable content, denying that it refers to concrete objects beyond itself[65]. Indeed, it has been suggested that one such theorist developed this notion into a more sophisticated view in many ways commensurate with that of Langer. Johannes Mattheson, composer, friend of Handel, and one of the best known music theorists of the time, seems, as Peter Kivy has pointed out, to have suggested developments beyond the stimulus-response theory: examining the sense in which a piece of music can evoke the feeling of joy, "Mattheson does *not* say that joy is an expansion of our vital spirits: he says that joy is experienced as a result of or because of (*durch*) the expansion of the vital spirits"[66]. The joy is therefore experienced at one remove, and this suggests that it is actually recognised as such, rather than merely aroused - the music is *expressive of* joy. Whether or not Mattheson realised the implications of his terms, it seems that he was, in 1739, moving towards the position developed by Langer in the mid-twentieth century.

[62]Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), xii.
[63]Eduard Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, trans. Gustav Cohen (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 48.
[64]René Descartes, "Passions of the Soul" in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes Vol.1*, op. cit., 332-428.
[65]See Peter Kivy, *Music Alone* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 66.
[66]Peter Kivy, "What Mattheson Said," *Music Review* XXXIV/1 (Feb. 1973), 135.

Langer's development, from this perspective, is to view music as presenting information about the emotive life which can be ordered by the intellect by some kind of rational process, yet which does not need to be formulated in terms of concrete references. Thus Langer takes those aspects of the stimulus model which Kivy identifies as positive and combines them with the referentialists' belief in music as an object for mental cognition. The influence of Schopenhauer is clear, yet idealist metaphysics are, effectively if not explicitly, denied. Despite an adherence to a sense of music as unnameable, as significant in a sense that is qualitatively different to other art-forms, Langer tempers any tendency towards metaphysics (perhaps as a result of the influence of her teacher, Whitehead, whose positivistic view of symbolism asserted that both the symbol and its meaning must be apprehensible apart from the process of symbolisation, even if the resultant knowledge is not necessarily amenable to verbal articulation).

Effectively, Langer paves the way for recent developments in cognitive theories of music. Particularly in the last twenty years, much research has examined the manner in which musical information is processed by the brain. Often, this work has made use of linguistic theory (though not, at least in the more successful studies, by attempting to find musical equivalents of linguistic terms), producing musical versions of the elements of Chomskyan generative grammar in an attempt to understand the sense in which music and language can be seen as different instances of comparable cognitive processes, effecting similar correlations of structural rules[67]. Following such models, musical syntax can, it is suggested, be examined as cognitive information, from which can be elaborated a grammar that is understood to different degrees by different subjects. It then becomes possible "to regard music as a network of relations embodying musical functions that are both structural and signifying, and which extend not only throughout the various levels of musical discourse, but also beyond to the mediating networks of human culture"[68].

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[67]Much of this work has been inspired by Leonard Bernstein's *The Unanswered Question* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), which was developed from his 1973 Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University. Bernstein's recognition of the relevance of Chomskyan generative grammar to the study of music is perceptive and has led to much useful work (most notably that of Lerdahl and Jackendoff discussed below). However, he falls into the trap of unthinkingly transferring terms from linguistics to music, and this causes particular problems when dealing with such specifically defined Chomskyan terms as "competence", "performance", and "deletion". Additionally, Bernstein's use of Chomsky's concept of competence leads not only to problems with his theory of musical structure, but also (more worryingly) to the elaboration of the idea that the perception of tonal structures is innate. Bernstein develops this theory from his supposition that the tonal system is both natural and universal due to its basis in the overtone series (a view which not only distorts acoustic fact, but which also has disturbing implications of superiority over the music of other cultures). For further discussion of Bernstein, see Allan Keiler, "Bernstein's *The Unanswered Question* and the Problem of Musical Competence," *Musical Quarterly* LXIV/2 (April 1978), 195-222; Ray Jackendoff, "Review Article: *The Unanswered Question* by Leonard Bernstein," *Language* LIII/4 (1977), 883-894.

[68]Eric F. Clarke, "Issues in language and music," *Contemporary Music Review* IV (1989), 21.

The suggestion seems to be that an ability to follow such processes corresponds to the sense of a piece of music as meaningful, and here lies the link to aesthetic theory. Such work, like all music analysis, constantly encounters the difficulty of delineating structural levels and establishing phrase divisions; such difficulties are not faced to the same extent in the structural analysis of language, as a result of its double articulation at the levels of both the differential phoneme and the semantically-coherent morpheme or word. Musical equivalents to the phoneme, the morpheme, the word, the sentence, and so on, are not identifiable, and a defence of the chosen subdivisions must precede the study of their interrelationship. There is, therefore, an aspect of commonality with the positivistic pursuits of the musical semioticians (the basis of which will be explored further in the following chapter); following the model of Nicholas Ruwet, musical semiotics attempts to unravel syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations between phrase units, not in order to provide insights, but rather to establish a more scientific basis from which analysis and interpretation can proceed (a basis which attempts to avoid the usual problem that, due to the non-referential nature of music, an analyst can often exploit ambiguity in order to prove a particular thesis)[69].

Grammar-based models of music perception have undoubtedly achieved a great deal. Perhaps the most thorough example of such research (to date) is Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff's *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (1983). This theory satisfactorily transfers aspects of Chomskyan generative grammar into a musical context, redefining the terms and deriving hierarchical "trees" from the analysis of grouping (by section, phrase, or motif), metre, time-span reduction and prolongational reduction. The latter two function by comparing the relative importance of pitch events within a certain time span and by linking harmonically or motivically related pitch events. Beyond this, Lerdahl and Jackendoff develop "well-formedness" rules, which state the general properties of all possible analyses of a piece, and "preference rules" which attempt to establish which of the possible descriptions of musical events are recognised by experienced listeners. The incorporation of these preferences (which have no correspondent function in linguistics) is justified by the fact that in music, due to the lack of specifiable meaning, "grammaticality per se plays a far less important role [than in linguistics], since almost any passage is potentially vastly ambiguous - it is much easier to construe music in a multiplicity of ways"[70].

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[69]See Raymond Monelle, *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 125. David Osmond-Smith's theory of formal iconism also has elements in common with the semioticians' paradigmatic analyses, examining the iconic relationships of phrasal units as a possible means of accounting for their relative significance. See David Osmond-Smith, "The Iconic Process in Musical Communication," *VS* III (1973), 31-42; "Formal Iconism in Music," *VS* V (1974), 43-54.

[70]Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M. I. T. Press, 1983), 9.

The necessity of such rules, however, admits an element of aesthetic judgement into the process - the theory is otherwise incapable of coping with musical ambiguity. This is a general problem with such analysis, but one which might be more effectively circumvented by developments in artificial intelligence. Such concepts as Marvin Minsky's "agents" (independent modules which work together so as to develop an understanding of data from multiple viewpoints) have begun to play a significant role in recent developments, and it has been suggested that such systems may provide a means of building cognitive models which are not dependent on a single paradigm[71].

One of the limitations of such research is that it has focused almost exclusively on the music of the Western tonal tradition, confining itself to the structures most familiar to those carrying out the investigations. Certainly some other work has taken place - elements of transformational grammar have been adapted for use in the analysis of North Indian tabla drumming, for example[72] - but the cognitivists' problems become more acute when examining music that does not conform to fairly easily perceptible structures. The problem is,

> it has been taken for granted that a defining feature of music is that it is structured. Almost without exception, theories of music are theories of musical structure.... However, it has proved difficult to pin down what is meant by structure as applied to music. An examination of the musicological literature suggests two main usages. In one sense of the word, structure is an attribute of all objects and events: it is the way that these may be decomposed into subunits and the relationship between them. In another sense it is an attribute which objects or events may have to differing degrees.[73]

Thus any piece of music has structure by virtue of comprising a sequence of sounding elements - even a single note has a shape - but the problem for most cognitivists is that while certain musical styles can be perceived as functioning grammatically, others, such as serialism, may be highly structured by the composer while the relationships are actually rarely perceived by the listener (at least not consciously, and certainly not to the degree usually apparent in tonal music). Free improvisation can sometimes (though not always) employ far looser notions of structure than have traditionally been acceptable, while in some aleatoric music any pre-composed structure may have little apparent relevance to the sounding result. Nevertheless, people do choose to listen to all these kinds of music. The extent to which and means by which music may be structured varies enormously, but cognitive theory has not yet managed to take

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[71]See Tim Hodgson, "Cognitive Grammars of Music and Other Representations" (unpublished, 1994), 23.

[72]See Jim Kippen and Bernard Bel, "Formal Language Representation in the Bol Processor" in Alan Marsden and Anthony Pople (eds.), *Computer Representations and Models in Music* (London and San Diego: Academic Press, 1992), 207-38.

[73]Robert West, Peter Howell and Ian Cross (eds.), *Representing Musical Structure* (London: Academic Press, 1991), 1-2.

account of this. An attempt has been made to study the cognition of atonal music[74], but such work is in its very earliest stages.

While cognitive theories of structure may be enlightening with regard to certain works or a certain style, they cannot account for our sense of the importance of music as a whole. Even within a single style, ambiguity of structural intention often leads to the need for preference rules along the lines of those of Lerdahl and Jackendoff, and in this sense, such theories are limited to giving information about little more than a particular instantiation of a piece. While the basis of this information may apparently be more scientifically determined than in more traditional analysis (and may also establish more strongly the link between compositional choices and the listener's perception), the theories effectively amount to little more than the insightful examination of numerous individual cases which may or may not be related. This is not to suggest failure - how could any theory of music perception encompass all musical styles and various degrees of musical structuring? Nevertheless, we are left to accept that even the most scientific studies are still dependent upon an element of aesthetic value judgement: we have progressed no further with the question of the significance of music in general.

Perhaps the question is invalid; do we ever really think of music as a whole genre, as an art-form with specific characteristics to which we respond in a qualitatively different manner? The answer must surely be that we do - however music is structured and however it is perceived, it seems that all music can be grouped by virtue of our recognition of its difference from the other arts. This may not be the case with programme music, film music, or music which involves word-setting, but absolute music of all styles and cultures has in common its abstract patterning of sound, however produced, and is listened to as such, whether or not the patterns can be analysed syntactically.

David Osmond-Smith has tackled this question, expressing a certain uneasiness with the increasing application of syntactic models as a result of his sense that they evade the challenge "of trying to understand where music is wholly unlike anything else"[75]. With reference to Fred Lerdahl's attempt to construct prolongational trees for atonal music, Osmond-Smith points out that the system pays no attention to such immediately perceived sound-qualities as timbre and texture, despite their having (especially in recent composition) achieved a parametric status almost equal to that of pitch and rhythm. Clearly, syntactic theory cannot satisfactorily account for music in which probabilistic rules form only the basic scaffolding, if that: Osmond-Smith cites the savouring of an atonal chord "for its own individual 'color' - in which pitch

[74]Fred Lerdahl, "Atonal Prolongational Structure," *Contemporary Music Review* IV (1989), 65-87.
[75]David Osmond-Smith, "Between music and language: A view from the bridge," *ibid.*, 95.

content and spacing play equal roles"[76], pointing out that, beyond this, such techniques are by no means restricted to atonal music. Finally, Osmond-Smith criticises the obsession with repetition and variation that is found in both traditional analysis and the paradigms of semiotics: "out of a faculty for detecting similarity that is fundamental to man's survival, we have abstracted a mechanism for flooding perception with significance so powerful that many of us can't live without it"[77]. From this point of view, those strains of twentieth-century music which eschew repetition and variation techniques serve to clarify the limitations of grammar-based models, reminding the syntactic cognitivists of the dangers of generalisation.

In the light of all this, and in contrast to syntactic theory, the value of Langer's theory of musical significance lies in its breadth and its non-specificity. The initial premise - that our sense of music's significance arises from a congruence with the dynamics of emotion - is one in which most people seem to recognise some truth. It provides a basis for the possibility that music may move us, yet works at a distance from over-simplistic theories of arousal, acknowledging that any response is primarily cognitive. Thus, while at certain times music may be expressive of a certain identifiable emotion and its primary function at that point may be to move us in a certain way, at other times no such purpose is discernible; if any intention is recognisable, it may comprise the entirely disinterested contemplation of or through sound. In attempting to establish Langer's writings as broadly relevant, however, one final area of difficulty is encountered: when considering musical styles such as those based upon indeterminacy, in what sense could the theory be any more appropriate than syntactic theory?

Ramona Cormier has suggested that indeterminate music poses a particular problem for Langer's work, as indeterminacy generally involves the rejection of the autonomy of the artist and the disruption of the direct line from the composer, through the work, to the respondent. Cormier is correct, in that Langer's assumption that the creative process must follow this pattern precludes discussion of the implications of potentially multiple versions of an indeterminate work. It does not occur to Langer to question her basically "quasi-Kantian [and Schopenhauerian] view of the 'telic directedness of creation without practical purpose'"[78], and thus she is unable to acknowledge cases wherein "the work is no longer a single actualisation of a formed feeling but a generalised symbol with many instantiations, each instantiation being a different instance of a formed feeling"[79]. Similarly, Langer (like many musical

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[76]*Ibid.,* 91.

[77]*Ibid.,* 96.

[78]Peter A. Bertocci, "Susanne K. Langer's Theory of Feeling and Mind," *Review of Metaphysics* XXIII (1970), 540.

[79]Ramona Cormier "Indeterminacy and Aesthetic Theory," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* XXXIII (Spring 1975), 290.

philosophers, theorists and analysts) assumes the universal relevance of the concept of the autonomous musical work, ignoring the historical and cultural limits of this concept[80]. Yet Langer's theory is broad enough to cope with this, even if it does not explicitly set out the conditions for doing so; the theory is solely concerned with the sense of the significance of music, and while the process of a work's conception and perception is assumed to follow the above pattern, this does not mean that the work is seen as *communicating* a composer's thoughts. Indeed, Langer's belief, following Sapir and Cassirer, that both language and the arts developed from a need to view the world symbolically, rather than from a desire to communicate, specifically disavows such an interpretation. It is only the fact of a work's instantiation which matters - each manifestation of that work is apprehended as a sounding event and can thus be accepted as an individual articulation of a dynamic pattern which relates to that of the emotive life.

Of course, such music is not intended as "emotional" or "symbolic" in the usual senses of these terms, yet even the contemplation of a single sound can be related to Langer's theory. Any sound or sequence of sounds which arrests the attention is usually accepted as interesting due to its congruence with the dynamics of self-expression through speech, non-verbal utterance, physical gesture, and so on. We recognise the similarity of patterns, the morphology of expression, rather than any emotive content itself, and this relationship accounts for our interest (although, in certain cases, a specific emotion may be evoked through its identity with patterns of expression that are recognisable as significant within a given culture). Usually, music is composed such that this basic shape is conditioned by the composer's intentions, and this may or may not lead to a more didactic and subjective effect. In indeterminate music, such artistic intervention is eschewed - all the composer may wish to do is to set up the conditions for the contemplation of sound - and a more objective effect is achieved. Even here, however, it could be argued that the interest lies in the congruence of patterns of expression. The problem with such an assertion is that the term "expression" has become so loaded that it tends to be construed as always referring to the direct arousal of individual emotions (this is particularly the case in the context of musical aesthetics as a result of the influence of Romantic thought). Langer's refusal to stray into the grounds of specificity is, however, her strength; the theory outlines reasons, both intellectual and emotional, for our interest in music of any kind, stopping at the point at which further detail would begin to exclude certain

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[80]As Lydia Goehr has shown, music theory and analysis have too often presupposed the universality of the concept of the autonomous musical work, failing to acknowledge its essentially post-1800 ascendancy and its cultural specificity. Thus, "the limitations of analysis stem from a pervasive belief (not always explicitly acknowledged) that one can arrive at an adequate philosophical understanding of what musical works are, without necessarily appealing to knowledge of how the work-concept has actually functioned in practice". Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 5.

musical styles. The theory attempts the encompassing of both the irrational and the rational, correlating aspects of the stimulus-response model with the recognition of music's fundamentally cognitive nature. Above all, Langer leaves room for the ineffable, unsayable side of music without resorting to transcendental metaphysics - for Langer, meaning and knowledge do not need to be verbal in order to exist.

Perhaps most surprising is that little real progress has been made beyond the ideas of Langer. Aside from the more specific work of analysis, semiotics, and information-processing, books have certainly appeared which offer explanations of the significance of music. However, most have taken the form either of subjective selections from and amalgamations of various available philosophical theories, interspersed with comments regarding the author's personal musically significant experiences, or of highly personal tracts on the emotive or spiritual substance of music, making little progress beyond similar ideas expressed in different terms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries[81]. On the other hand, Peter Kivy's books have proved particularly important; Kivy explores different modes of musical expression, covering the possible relationships between words and music in opera and other settings, as well as exploring the sense in which absolute music can be meaningful. As is clear from the above, Kivy has provided probably the most pertinent criticisms of Langer, refusing to be drawn into merely criticising the shaky logical foundations of her theory. Kivy develops from Langer a view of music not as directly expressing feelings, but as "expressive of" particular feelings within certain limits. Kivy believes Langer's theory to be too general; for him, "expressive qualities are genuine 'objective' qualities of music and there are objective criteria for expressing these terms"[82], hence his preference for the term "resemblance" for this relationship, as opposed to Langer's more scientifically rigorous but less specific "isomorphism". Kivy formulates a distinction between those emotions of which music can and cannot be expressive, suggesting that while music cannot be expressive of those "Platonic attitudes" which require an object (pride, respect, and so on), "the contour of instrumental music 'fits' that of those broad emotions in life which as feeling-states can be independent of particular emotions"[83].

Kivy's writings probably represent the most interesting recent developments in this area. However, all but Kivy's most recent work is marred by the assumption that

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[81]See, for example, Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (London: HarperCollins, 1992). Despite its insights, this book is primarily a personal exploration of past ideas on the subject.

[82] Peter Kivy, *The Corded Shell, op. cit.,* 60. This book forms the basis of Kivy's exploration of musical meaning, working from Baroque and early Classical theory. Most of Kivy's other writings are also relevant, but tend not to focus on absolute music. *Music Alone,* however, develops further the ideas explored in *The Corded Shell* (and this work is discussed later in this chapter).

[83]_____, *Music Alone, op. cit.,* 176.

such specific resemblances must be central to the experience of music, and that the worth of a work is accounted for by its possession of such qualities: "the relation between possessing an expressive property and musical value is direct, with the value increasing as the degree of the expressive property"[84]. Like many writers on the subject, Kivy is really only concerned with the Western tradition of functionally tonal music. He fails to consider the degree to which his ideas are relevant to other music (much of which does not regard such expressive features as primary), and in this way these developments narrow the field of reference by failing to recognise their limitations. As will later be explored, however, Kivy's more recent book, *Music Alone*, while not actually refuting the earlier work, contains much interesting discussion which, at times, suggests a broader point of view; aspects of these arguments may provide an indication of a way forward from Langer that avoids restricting the relevance of the work.

Another widely influential theory is found in Leonard B. Meyer's attempts to combine elements from both the formalist and expressionist viewpoints. Meyer develops a theory of music as "embodied meaning", this being the meaning a listener finds in the relationship between a musical structure and their unfolding expectations. Meyer produces a useful account of the difference between those instances wherein feelings are depicted by a piece of music (which he labels designative meaning), and those wherein feelings are actually aroused. Meyer's view of the latter, embodied meaning, is based on a version of John Dewey's conflict theory of emotion which asserts that "emotions or affect are aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested or inhibited"[85]. Meyer writes,

> embodied musical meaning is ... a product of expectation. If, on the basis of past experience, a present stimulus leads us to expect a more or less definite consequent musical event, then that stimulus has meaning. From this it follows that a stimulus or gesture that does not point to or arouse expectations of a subsequent musical event or consequent is meaningless. Because expectation is largely a product of stylistic experience, music in a style with which we are totally unfamiliar is meaningless.[86]

Such a theory is unsatisfactory, however, for several reasons. Most importantly, as Peter Kivy has pointed out, there are many cases "in which affect is raised in the complete absence of an arrested or inhibited tendency to respond (I am overjoyed and elated by my advances finding no resistance at all)"[87].

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[84] _____, *The Corded Shell, op. cit.*, 130.

[85] Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 14.

[86] *Ibid.*, 35.

[87] Peter Kivy, *Music Alone, op. cit.*, 156.

Beyond this lies the question of how, following Meyer, we could ever appreciate a musical style with which we were unfamiliar. Even if it were the case that we follow music in a known style in the information theory-based manner which Meyer suggests (which is in itself doubtful), the idea that "an American must learn to understand Japanese music just as he must learn to understand the spoken language of Japan"[88] belies the experience of the many people who enjoy the music of another culture without necessarily knowing anything of its structures. Possibly (but not necessarily), appreciation may be enhanced by informed expectations, but such knowledge is clearly not a condition either of enjoyment or of the sense of having gleaned something of significance from the listening process. Additionally, Meyer's thesis would seem to invalidate even music of a familiar culture if it is not based upon gestalt structures perceptible in the manner he describes; as with syntactic cognitive theories, we encounter the problem of how to account for the appreciation of indeterminate or even atonal music. Indeed, in another article Meyer seems to suggest that music and language are by nature both syntactic and governed by teleology and a desire for closure, the implication being that any literature or music which does not conform to such structures is merely aberrant: "if we are to defend our beliefs - our faith in a world of purpose and causality, time and prediction, choice and control, communication and morality - we must ask the most fundamental questions that can be asked"[89]. From this perspective, such deviant art has a purpose, but one that is thoroughly regressive, merely challenging us to re-affirm more strongly and explicitly the grounds of traditional beliefs and structures.

Effectively, Meyer's work realises the implications of L. A. Reid's criticism of Langer, which accuses her of ignoring the place of actual embodied emotions felt in the appreciation of art. Reid recognises the importance of Langer's view of artistic content as presented for perception rather than necessarily and solely for enjoyment, but believes that "if there is thinking about 'ideas' of feeling, it is 'thinking' which cannot exist except through feeling"[90]. His contention is that Langer makes too definite a distinction between aesthetic experience and the life of feeling as embodied in art. However, Reid's view of music, like Meyer's, seems to deny the viability of a music which is not based on the actual embodiment of feelings but, instead, functions at one remove, as material for the understanding. Langer's theory does accept the possible embodiment of emotions in music, but asserts that this is not necessarily fundamental to musical experience. While Reid's view effectively reduces music to raw feeling,

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[88]*Ibid.*, 62.

[89]Leonard B. Meyer, "The End of the Renaissance: Notes on the Radical Empiricism of the Avant-Garde," *Hudson Review* XVI/2 (Summer 1963), 186.

[90]Louis Arnaud Reid, "A New Theory on Art," *Diogenes* VI (1954), 109.

Langer allows music the status of a true art-form, able to impart knowledge (even if that knowledge cannot be precisely verbalised).

It could be suggested, then, that since Langer, neither aesthetic theory nor the undoubtedly useful work in the fields of cognition, syntactic or semiotic theory has really extended our understanding of why music holds any significance for us[91]. Attempts at universal theories of musical meaning are usually found to be reductive and exclusive, while the more informative studies tend to be those which attempt to understand the workings of a single piece or, at most, a particular compositional style. In general, the force of analytical work has for many years seemed to push aesthetic speculation into the background, the supposedly more scientific fields of cognition, psychology, and even analysis being seen as somehow more instructive with regard to musical significance than the apparently old-fashioned and certainly speculative disciplines of philosophy and aesthetics. However, certain recent publications have taken the controversial step of suggesting that while progress may have been made within the limits of specific areas, such positivistic study has brought us hardly any nearer to understanding the unique significance of music and, additionally, has too often remained in a world far removed from the non-specialist's enjoyment and understanding of the art-form.

One such book is Nicholas Cook's *Music, Imagination, and Culture,* the conclusions of which are all the more notable considering Cook's work as a music analyst. Cook is concerned to examine the divergence between the ways in which people think or talk about music and their actual experience of it. His starting point is that

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[91]Jonathan Dunsby makes a similar claim both for the ideas expressed in Edmund Gurney's *The Power of Sound* (1880) and those of Hanslick: "what Gurney wrote is, in the main, still incontestable; no one has had anything fundamentally new to say on the subject during the subsequent hundred-or-so years. Equally, in my view, it would be difficult to sustain an argument that Eduard Hanslick's deliberations on *The Beautiful in Music* of 1854 have effectively been superseded in their account of experiencing pre-twentieth-century music". Jonathan Dunsby, "Music Analysis: Commentaries" in John Paynter, Tim Howell, Richard Orton and Peter Seymour (eds.), *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought Vol. 2* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 636.

Hanslick's relevance to Langer is clear from comments made earlier in this chapter. Additionally, many of Langer's comments echo, albeit inexplicitly, Gurney's determination that the emotional and aesthetic impact of music cannot be specifically related to anything outside the music. However, it could be argued that Gurney's theory is actually more radical than Langer's, asserting music's absolute abstraction from extra-musical phenomena where Langer maintains the relationship but defends its ineffability. See Edmund Gurney, *The Power of Sound* (New York: Basic Books, 1966). For a useful discussion of Gurney, see Malcolm Budd, *op. cit.*

Despite the above assertion of the durability of Langer's work, it is important to recognise the impact of the ideas of Nelson Goodman, in particular. Although its focus is rather different, Goodman's work on the arts relates to that of Langer; his refutation of the notion that the arts resemble reality is based upon a symbolic theory wherein the symbol is defined very generally as covering all kinds of models, elements of language and pictures. See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

> what I find perplexing, and stimulating, about music is the way in which people -
> most people - can gain intense enjoyment from it even though they know little or
> nothing about it in technical terms. To write music, to understand its technique,
> or even to play an instrument requires time, application, and specialised
> knowledge. But when music is heard, the results of all this are somehow
> synthesised into an immediate and intrinsically rewarding experience that does
> not, as a precondition, depend upon the listener having any trained understanding
> of what he hears.[92]

Cook is at pains to stress that he does not deny the validity of specialist study, but through detailed discussion of such well-worn subjects as the status of a score, of what it means to be a musician or a musicologist, and of how this relates (or does not relate) to the actual experience of listening to music, Cook suggests that "if one sees the thinking of musical theorists - and indeed of musicians in general - as an intrinsic part of a musical culture, then the divergence between the way in which music is thought about and the way in which it is experienced turns out not to be a failing, but rather a defining attribute of musical culture"[93].

Cook has himself conducted experiments into the ability to follow tonal structures, with striking results. Music theory has always placed great emphasis on the importance of harmonic closure for the coherence of tonal works, and aural training encourages the ability to recognise such processes. However, Cook's tests showed that altering pieces of music of between thirty seconds and six minutes in length, such that they did not end in their original keys, did not, as might have been expected, result in listeners feeling the pieces to be incomplete or unsatisfactory. In certain cases a small majority preferred the original version of a piece to the altered version, but in other instances the opposite was true:

> there was, for example, a general preference for a version of Brahms' *Intermezzo*
> Op.117 No.3 in which the final section of the piece (from the upbeat to bar 76)
> had been transposed up a minor second from the composer's original score!
> Such a result is unlikely to indicate any preference for lack of tonal closure as
> such; more probably it is to be explained in terms of the local effect of the two
> versions of bars 76-7, or of ordering effects (there was a tendency for listeners to
> prefer whichever version of a piece they heard second...)[94].

Thus the concept of tonal closure was seen to lack psychological reality for the listener, leading to the conclusion that the ability to keep track of form cannot be fundamental to most listeners' appreciation of music, even if some people do have such skills. Additionally, if such results were found with simple tonal structures, then structural understanding certainly cannot form the basis of the appreciation of atonal music, wherein the "grammar" is even less obvious.

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[92]Nicholas Cook, *Music, Imagination, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 1-2.
[93]*Ibid.*, 70.
[94]*Ibid.*, 53-4.

Cook also found that even those people who are able to follow tonal processes do not always choose to exercise the skill, unless they have some reason for doing so or are specifically asked to[95]. It could, of course, be argued that a listener who fails to recognise the important structural features of a piece is not listening properly, but Cook's response to this is to argue that this assumes a prescriptive approach to what constitutes "listening properly" - in what sense should any one experience of a piece be seen as more or less "correct"? Similarly, it could be argued (following Carl Dahlhaus[96]) that the understanding of musical structure is not necessarily a conscious activity, but that we respond to such structures subconsciously, effecting a mode of understanding that manifests itself consciously as the awareness of the impression of logical relations. However, as Cook says, "the impression of logic is just an impression of logic, not a subconscious perception of logical structure. It is, in other words, not a matter of structure but of style"[97]. This leads Cook to conclude that "listening to music for the purpose of establishing facts or formulating theories and listening to it for the purpose of direct aesthetic gratification are two essentially different things"[98]: the former can be considered musicological and the latter musical. Central to this is the "drastic asymmetry between productional and receptive capacity"[99]; whereas in language a degree of compositional competence is generally assumed of a listener, the average listener to Beethoven, to use Cook's example, cannot compose in anything like the same manner. This is similarly the case with performance; Cook uses the example of a pianist carefully working out the fingering most appropriate to the execution of a piece as an example of knowledge embodied in the production of music but hardly recognised in its perception[100].

The result of this discussion is the conclusion that the essential characteristic of music is precisely the gap between its experience and the means by which we attempt its rationalisation. Thus, for Cook, a listener's experience of music is, rather than being mysterious and problematic, the one thing of which we can feel sure[101]. Subsequently (and contrary to the tendency of some analysts and other theorists), attempts to rationalise the musical experience, while useful, should be recognised as individual "ways-of-seeing"; descriptions of related pitch-contents, intervals, and so on, do not correspond directly to any psychoacoustical reality, but effect a metaphorical comparison between the musical perception of the moment and the

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[95]*Ibid.*, 3.
[96]See Carl Dahlhaus, *Analysis and Value Judgement*, trans. S. Levarie (New York: Pendragon Press, 1983).
[97]Nicholas Cook, *op. cit.*, 230n.
[98]*Ibid.*, 152.
[99]*Ibid.*, 74.
[100]*Ibid.*, 83.
[101]*Ibid.*, 230.

categorisations that would be made if the individual parts could be separately examined. Cook writes that a formal model of music "should be valued in the same way as any other metaphorical construction: for its usefulness, for its heuristic value, and perhaps for the intellectual satisfaction it affords, but not for its truth"[102].

In many senses, Cook seems to echo David Osmond-Smith's uneasiness with cognitive syntactic models, extending this into the wish that all rationalisations of musical experience should realise their limitations. Thus Cook (rather dramatically) valorises the ineffable immediacy of music: in the end, "the very concept of 'really understanding' music becomes vacuous; there is only reading it, memorising it, performing it, composing it, and listening to it - in short, loving it"[103]. Like Langer (and despite the different focus), Cook admits the possibility of a range of approaches to the analysis of music, but simultaneously asserts a refusal to deny the ineffable. Cook criticises theoreticians for their tendency to reject the aesthetic significance of the irrational elements of cultural experience. In many ways his project is far removed from Langer's work, but in certain important respects the thesis returns to the position reached by Langer, asserting the qualitative difference of music as significant in a manner which cannot, fundamentally, be pinned down: both admit the importance of the ineffable aspect of musical meaning, without appealing to transcendentalism. Such a thesis may seem old-fashioned, but in many ways it makes a necessary step forward; individual theories of music need to recognise their limitations before attempting to proceed, for without this there is a tendency to assume a false universal relevance.

In his review of *Music, Imagination, and Culture*, Lawrence Kramer sympathises with Cook's argument with strict musical formalism. However, for Kramer, Cook's solution is invalid in that it fails to recognise that the fundamental problem lies in the restrictions of traditional binary oppositional thought: "irrationalism and hyperrationalism are merely two sides of the same coin.... The same hierarchy of emotion and thought, intuition and reason, spontaneity and meditation, underwrites each position.... The only difference concerns which end of the seesaw is up"[104]. As Kramer discusses, such post-Cartesian dualism has traditionally provided art with the means to override the secondary discursive reflection supposedly derived from the primary immediacy of experience, in order to make possible the concept of art as redemptive. Cook, however, is either unaware of the recent theory which aims to deconstruct these foundations (though this is unlikely), or else he simply finds it irrelevant. Either way, "a populist insistence on the spontaneous pleasures of just listening is no different from an elitist insistence on musical erudition as a prerequisite

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[102]*Ibid.*, 235-6.
[103]*Ibid.*, 186.
[104]Lawrence Kramer, "The Politics and Poetics of Listening," *Current Musicology* L (1992), 64.

of true listening"[105]; Kramer's solution is to avoid aesthetic terms in favour of attempting to understand music as a cultural process conditioned by the historical and cultural situation of its production and reception.

To an extent such criticisms are valid; despite citing the ability to respond to music of an unfamiliar culture as a validation of the immediacy of musical experience, Cook does prefer to see cultural musicology simply as an alternative branch of rationalism to analytic theory. Perhaps he is simply working from too deep within the area under consideration: the book "sets itself squarely against the malaise that increasingly bedevils the culture of Western art music, but is itself a symptom of that malaise"[106]. Perhaps, though, this is rather harsh, for in his determination that music theory has too often set itself up as a purveyor of almost scientific truths, rather than of a series of possible "metaphoric" pictures of events, Cook perhaps points back towards the direction rightly required by Kramer. This is to suggest that if music theory and analysis could take account of their limitations, accepting the validity of ineffable experience *as a part* of the description rather than as its "other", then steps could be taken towards the deconstruction of categories and Cook's dualism of musical and musicological thought might no longer be necessary.

Cook's book is in different respects both regressive and progressive, and the positively forward-looking aspects of his work have an affinity both with Langer and with the anti-foundationalist, post-structuralist thought that Kramer accuses him of ignoring; Cook's view of analysis as presenting different "ways of seeing", none of which is more truthful than any other, stems from the same attitude as Langer's refusal to impose closure on the "symbolism" of music by locating the precise reference points demanded by Nagel and other critics. Ironically, while both writers avoid metaphysical conclusions, the predominantly positivistic nature of most recent music theory leads to Cook's need to reaffirm the irrational, and he must, therefore, remain working within such binary structures for the time being. In contrast, Langer is in a sense able to move closer to contemporary thinking by avoiding the rational-irrational dialectic; her refusal to "consummate" the symbolism corresponds in certain ways to the post-structuralist infinite deferral of meaning (as will be explored in the following chapter), effecting the integration of the rational and irrational aspects of musical experience and recognising the interdependence of these terms within music's ultimate ineffability. Additionally, in this sense Cook and Langer could be seen as attempting to follow a non-reductionist path without moving too close to literary theory, retaining the fundamental difference of the abstraction of music in a manner which Kramer perhaps cannot.

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[105]*Ibid.*
[106]*Ibid.*, 67.

Cook's validation of the non-specialist's response to music finds correspondences in Peter Kivy's *Music Alone*. Kivy's work is, in other respects, quite different to that of Cook. However, he is similarly concerned to explore the appreciation of music at various different levels, suggesting that while an untrained listener will extract different musical representations to those of a specialist, these are differences of kind, rather than (necessarily) of quality. The non-musician's picture of musical processes may be verbally articulated in terms which are technically less precise, but the gap between sounding events and their musicological description is such that this does not render their version any less relevant. Additionally, Kivy suggests, "musical understanding always increases musical appreciation. But increases in musical appreciation, in any individual cases, may sometimes increase, sometimes decrease musical enjoyment"[107].

Beyond this, Kivy develops his earlier work on musical expression, suggesting that while on certain occasions expressive properties are recognised as prominent features of a work, this need not be fundamental to our being moved. Using the example of complex polyphony, Kivy suggests that it is the recognition of the craftsmanship involved that causes us to be moved, and that this is the case whether appreciated at a precise technical level or in a more general sense. Kivy suggests that this process actually instigates emotional excitement: we are moved by formal qualities, and the object of our emotions becomes more complex. Considering the *Goldberg Variations*, Kivy writes that if a composer chooses descending chromatic notes as a fugue subject, he or she cannot but invoke a slight melancholy quality, but "this choice does not mean that the composer was the least bit interested in that melancholy quality or that it plays any significant aesthetic role in his composition"[108]. Rather, the composer simply wanted to work out the implications of his chosen material:

> thus if you were to ask me what aesthetic role that melancholy quality plays in the fugue, I would reply, 'None at all'..., that it came merely as a necessary concomitant of what is aesthetically operative, namely, the descending chromatic theme in whole notes. And if, finally, you were to press me for a method by which to tell when an expressive property is aesthetically operative in a work of pure instrumental music, I could but reply that there is no hard-and-fast rule, no formula. One does it case by case.[109]

While the emotional effectiveness - not just the technical expertise - of the fugue can therefore be described without reference to the quality of melancholy, in other works the expressive qualities may be more prominent, playing a less extraneous

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[107]Peter Kivy, *Music Alone, op. cit.*, 117.
[108]*Ibid.*, 183.
[109]*Ibid.*

role. Thus "the function of an expressive quality in a work of pure instrumental music is no different from the function of any other *musical* property of such a work - the chromaticism (say) of that fugue subject"[110]: "some expressive properties serve to highlight musical structure, as color might be used by the painter to emphasise contour or mass. Other expressive properties serve as structural properties in their own right"[111]. There is, therefore, no need to account for these expressive properties in extramusical terms any more than for other musical properties. Additionally, with regard to the argument that expressive properties are qualitatively different in that they actually tell us something about the emotions, Kivy asserts, "there is no more reason to infer that sad music must be about sadness than to infer that quiet music must be about quietness"[112]: just because the adjective "sad" can refer not only to music but to a conscious state, it does not follow that the music must be about that state.

Kivy's move away from his previous insistence on the centrality of relatively specific emotional qualities, towards the recognition of the possible priority of different elements, increases the relevance of his work. Effectively, this breadth of approach parallels that of Langer's theories, the recognition of formal qualities as fundamental to expression corresponding to the generality of Langer's delineation of a morphology that does not necessarily evoke specific correspondences. Kivy's examination of the actual techniques involved, however, points a way forward from Langer's more abstracted position. The acknowledgement of expressive properties that are formally articulated but not fully explicable leads, as with Cook, to the delineation of a gap between the identification of technical and/or affective features and the ultimate ineffability of the experience, a gap which can only be recuperated in the actual experience of listening.

Taking a different but related approach is a final example of recent developments in this area, Diana Raffman's *Language, Music, and Mind*. Raffman's background is in music psychology, yet she is again concerned to examine the uniqueness of the musical experience and the idea that knowledge and meaning can be apprehended independently of verbalisation. Raffman's starting point is the territory of Langer and of others, especially Stanley Cavell, who suggest that in coming to know artistic works we gain an understanding which cannot be put into words. Despite the different context of his writing, Cavell comes close to Langer in examining the idea that knowledge of an art-work - in this case a piece of music - must involve its experience: one explanation, suggests Cavell, is that "such objects are only *known by feeling*, or *in* feeling. This is not the same as saying that the object expresses feeling,

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[110]*Ibid.*, 185.

[111]*Ibid.*, 196.

[112]*Ibid.*, 194.

or that the aesthetic response consists in a feeling of some sort"[113]. This leads firstly to the question of how this knowledge manifests itself, to which Cavell responds that the receiver now knows something that they did not before, and secondly to the idea that the basis of a claim to knowledge is

> that feeling functions as a touchstone: the mark left on the stone is out of the sight of others, but the result is one of knowledge, or has the form of knowledge - it is directed to an object, the object has been tested, the result is one of conviction. This seems to me to suggest why one is anxious to communicate the experience of such objects. It is not merely that I want to tell you how it is with me, how I feel, in order to find sympathy or to be left alone, or for any other of the reasons for which one reveals one's feelings. It's rather that I want to tell you something I've seen, or heard, or realised, or come to understand, for the reasons for which such things are communicated (because it is news, about a world we share, or could). Only I find that I can't *tell* you; and that makes it all the more urgent to tell you.[114]

Raffman initially contends - as this chapter has done - that ideas such as Langer's and Cavell's "strike a deep truth about music - we find ourselves there, as the saying goes. At the same time, they leave something to be desired. Like much 'traditional' philosophical writing on the subject, it seems to me, these works *describe* our ineffable knowledge but do not adequately *explain* it"[115]. Thus Raffman aims to develop a cognitivist explanation of musical ineffability on the basis that ineffable knowledge, like any kind of musical knowledge, is ultimately perceptual and that, once recognised as such, it can be illuminated by the use of recent cognitive theory. Raffman identifies three levels of ineffability. "Structural ineffability" stems from the fact that a listener cannot always describe a musical structure, despite the fact that the content of the underlying representation is apparent in the conscious experience of the music. "Feeling ineffability", on the other hand, "derives from the sensory-perceptual or 'felt' character of musical knowledge. Here the familiar thought is that musical knowledge requires (actual, occurrent) sense-perception of musical stimuli at some point in its etiology and is to that extent ineffable: it cannot be communicated entirely by language"[116]. Lastly, "nuance ineffability" (the aspect to which Raffman pays most attention), results from our unawareness of certain structures in the early apprehension of musical signals, suggesting that "certain features of the music, often called 'nuances', are likely to be recovered so early in the representational process that they

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[113]Stanley Cavell, "Music Discomposed" in W. H. Capitan and D. D. Merill (eds.), *Art, Mind and Religion: Proceedings of the 1965 Oberlin Colloquium in Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967), 79.

[114]*Ibid.*, 79-80.

[115]Diana Raffman, *Language, Music, and Mind* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: M.I.T. Press, 1993), 2.

[116]*Ibid.*, 4.

fail to be mentally categorised or type-identified in the manner thought necessary for verbal report"[117].

Regarding the first category, Raffman suggests that a performer's compulsion to play a passage in a certain manner (in terms of dynamic or speed changes, for example) is an example of unconscious structural representations "making themselves felt". With respect to the perception of structure, our attempts to report global features, unlike responses to local structures, are usually subject to huge variation: even the same person listening to the same piece may assign different phrasings on different hearings, and this can be affected by training and listening history, as well as by the inflections imposed by a particular performer. The suggestion is that with "sufficient explicit knowledge of the M[usical]-grammatical rules and enough practice at matching the geography with the introspective - that is, with enough knowledge of what kinds of musical structures give rise to what kinds of conscious experience - the listener will get very good at reporting the contents of his structural descriptions of the music"[118]. At the global level, however, the variability of structures is such that the effort to learn to recognise various patterns is severely hampered. Here, the underlying structural representation can simply "make itself felt", and the listener therefore has conscious but ineffable knowledge of it.

While such a conclusion is fairly speculative, its use lies in suggesting that while cognitive theory may be basically accurate, it could never describe sufficient representations to explain the experience of music in full. Additionally, such a theory leaves room for the understanding of non-tonal music (although Raffman does not refer to this); in allowing for ineffability, the theory opens up the possibility that structural relations might follow patterns, such as relations of timbre or texture, other than the syntaxes of pitch and interval usually recognised by cognitivist theory. In this way it becomes possible to appreciate the relevance of cognitive theory without accepting its more reductive implications, while, similarly, the ineffable aspect of music is allowed for without resorting to metaphysics. This aspect of Raffman's work, therefore, both corresponds to Langer's assertion of the perceptual basis of even those aspects of music which cannot be verbally described, and at the same time points a non-reductive way forward.

With regard to "feeling ineffability", Raffman develops an argument comparing linguistic and musical meaning in order to identify a class of peculiarly musical feelings which play the same role in musical structure as do semantics in linguistic structure. In linguistics, "the grasp of meaning is the *explanandum* of the linguistic theory. Specifically, the linguist postulates unconscious assignments of

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[117]*Ibid.*
[118]*Ibid.*, 34.

grammatical structure in order to explain how speaker-hearers understand the sentences of their language"[119]. Often, in cases where a speaker does not use correct grammar, the listener is able to determine the intended meaning not only through the ability to rearrange grammatical elements into a satisfactory structure, but also through semantic knowledge (by recognition of the referential meanings involved in the subject under discussion). Constructing an analogy with music, the explanandum of a musical grammar can be identified as musical understanding, but Raffman questions quite what this is: "Lerdahl and Jackendoff have told us that musical understanding consists in having in your head a maximally coherent structural description of the music", but this "is what their theory *postulates*, not what it explains.... Specifically, the unconscious structural description is proposed in order to explain something *observed* - namely, musical understanding. So the question is: what do we observe and seek to explain by postulating a structural description? The answer must be: the way music sounds (to an experienced listener). We want to explain the having of conscious musical experience, musical feelings"[120]: in Raffman's tonal context these feelings are identified as those of beat strength, tension, stability, and so on.

Clearly there are strong differences between music and language here; Raffman points out, for example, that the difference between hearing a foreign language which you do not understand and one that you do is huge, and it is therefore very difficult to say anything about the phenomenology of hearing without considering the question of understanding. In contrast, if understanding music consists in hearing it in a certain way, then it is pre-eminently phenomenological. Nevertheless, the congruence is equally striking and, as in linguistics, we find that the theorist's knowledge of the explanandum (in the case of music, the musical feelings) is what guides the building of grammatical theory; Raffman cites Lerdahl and Jackendoff as an example of this[121] since, here, feelings of beat strength (for example) are translated into a theory of metrical hierarchy, and the impression of tension and relaxation into the prolongational reduction theory. This, as Raffman is at pains to emphasise, is not to suggest that the grammatical rules need to mention the feelings in question - the structure can be considered entirely independently - but rather that the musical feelings act in a quasi-semantic manner: "there is a roughly delimited class of peculiarly musical feelings (feelings of beat strength, metrical stress, prolongational tension, and so forth) that play the same explanatory and guiding roles with respect to the theoretical assignment of musical structure that the linguistic meanings play with respect to the assignment of linguistic structure"[122]. This class of musical feelings is therefore clearly differentiated

[119]*Ibid.*, 46.
[120]*Ibid.*, 49.
[121]*Ibid.*, 51.
[122]*Ibid.*, 53.

from ordinary classes of emotions. The two are related, but at one remove, such that no precise identification can be established: "there is doubtless an intimate tie between our musical and affective lives, but the tie is not, in the sense envisioned, a *meaningful* one"[123]. In these terms, this approach therefore relates to Peter Kivy's idea of the expressive effect of musical craftsmanship (despite the different terms of the argument).

Again, as with Raffman's concept of structural ineffability, there is here a clear link to Langer and beyond. The identification of peculiarly musical feelings which may lead to the construction of grammars, and which undoubtedly correspond at some non-specific level to the emotive life in general, establishes a cognitive basis for a theory which approximates to Langer's notion of music as an unconsummated symbol. Raffman's development is to cite the specifically musical feelings as the locus of meaning, thereby moving away from the attempt to establish direct links between music and our everyday categories of emotion. Like Langer - but with a more consistent theoretical grounding - Raffman allows for the power of music to move us, while circumventing expressivist notions. Even in her categorisation of musical feelings, she is at pains to point out their complex relationship to the actuality of music production: "our musical feelings, unlike the emotional properties or effects of the music, are firmly lodged in a framework in which genuine dispute can and does occur. Musicians argue about phrasings and dynamics and resolutions. They do *not* argue about the emotions they feel or otherwise ascribe to the music"[124]. Thus, while the musical structure leads us to expect a semantic, we instead perceive the ineffable musical feelings of beat strength, tonicity, and so on, and the experience of these constitutes our conscious but ineffable knowledge of the music.

Such a theory might appear to be limited to functionally tonal music, and Raffman certainly confines her discussion to this. Yet the theory does not *depend* on the elaboration of a grammatical structure, nor on the musical feelings necessarily taking the forms she specifies; it could be argued that in listening to any music, we experience qualities comparable to the "musical feelings" delineated by Raffman. In some atonal music, for example, the tensions and resolutions of tonal harmony may be replaced with non-tonal harmonic tensions, or may be avoided altogether, while other elements (rhythmic stresses, tension generated by texture, or the use of microtones and so on) may be retained and can even take priority. In certain musics - indeterminacy, for example - these elements are not usually discussed in terms of "feelings", but we are equally swayed by comparable factors; for example, in appreciating the weighting of a chord, whether in isolation or in relation to others,

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[123]*Ibid.*, 44.
[124]*Ibid.*, 59.

similar effects are involved. Thus "feeling ineffability" may or may not result in the construction of a grammar, and neither the inability to perceive a grammar nor the absolute absence of grammatical structure precludes the possibility of understanding through feeling ineffability.

Raffman's third instance of musical ineffability, and the area to which she pays most attention, concerns the non-structural features of music. Whereas structural features can in certain cases and to a certain extent be communicated by language (as long as the correct systems have been established), the non-structural "nuance level" cannot, and is therefore considered "more" ineffable. Raffman examines the fact that, in listening to a piece of tonal music, we effect a mental recovery of the score as an input to the musical grammar (although we do not consciously think of it or (necessarily) describe it as such). Thus the grammatical rules are not established from the bottom level, but rather the mental representation is directly transduced from the incoming pitch events on the shallow level. Yet this is not the most shallow level of representation for the listener: "if that were so there would be no way to explain how we consciously hear 'within-category' phenomena such as vibrato, slides, out-of-tune intervals, and the myriad shades of pitch coloration that distinguish one performance from another"[125]. These features are all aspects which can be manipulated by the performer, independent of the score. This suggests that the "mental score" is inferred from a shallow level of representation which is apprehended before the construction of the grammar; from the transduced representation of the aural stimulation is

> inferred a representation of the signal as instantiating a sequence of N[uance]-pitches and N[uance]-intervals - namely a N[uance]-level. From the N[uance]-level in turn is inferred a mental score, at which point the rules of the M[usic]-grammar are engaged and a structural description is assigned. Thus the mental score - the shallowest *grammatical* level of representation - is already an abstraction from a still shallower level at which the non-structural nuance values are recovered.[126]

Little attention has been paid to such nuances and, according to Raffman, this is mainly because experiments have shown the perception of intervals to be dependent upon the comparison of categories: under high levels of stimulus, trained listeners tend not to realise that intervals are out of tune, but instead recognise them by their approximation to the appropriate category. Raffman points out that such experiments tend to ignore the context within which such events are normally heard, and that expectation increases the awareness of deviation; while categorical perception may account for certain responses, such as the ability to recognise a melody even if played out of tune, it cannot account for the perception of intervallic nuances, such as the

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125*Ibid.*, 65.
126*Ibid.*, 67.

reaction to poor intonation or to a particular performer's precise inflections. Thus Raffman suggests that we map the nuance level onto a chromatic-interval schema within which microtonal inflections can be discriminated, if not precisely type-identified. This accounts for the fact that, in general, out-of-tune intervals are heard as just that (although we may be able to identify whether the tuning is sharp- or flat-wards): "it is overwhelmingly unlikely that we could acquire interval schemas as fine-grained as the pitch and interval discriminations we can make"[127].

Raffman therefore considers the nuance level to be an instance of ineffable musical knowledge, provoking the question of the sense in which nuance-perception can be considered as knowledge if it cannot be type-identified. Raffman's answer is that in hearing nuances, knowledge is at least gained in that the listener "has a sensory-perceptual mental representation of them, *you know how they sound*"[128]. For some people, that such knowledge cannot be expressed verbally will disqualify it from the category of knowledge[129], yet it is clear that if the nuance level is not an instance of musical knowledge, then neither is the determination of pitch or interval. This latter idea collapses immediately, since while some people will always be able to name these elements, others will not but will nevertheless be able to prove their understanding of them by singing or by other means. Even for those with musical training, the circumstances of music reception often cause difficulties, particularly in that "the vicissitudes of real-time perception are likely to pose certain obstacles to full verbal disclosure, especially of some of the more global levels of analysis"[130].

This leads back to Cavell's assertion that the full communication of knowledge of art is only, if ever, possible by ostension: the other person must experience the work for themselves. Similarly, Raffman asserts that an additional importance of the nuance level lies in the fact that the nuances cannot usually be precisely recalled - a fact that leads us to revisit a piece, to know it again and again in different instances. In this sense the nuance level is vital to musical experience, and this relates closely to Nicholas Cook's contention that music is uniquely characterised precisely by the gap between musical and musicological knowledge, by the difference between the actual

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[127]*Ibid.*, 84.

[128]*Ibid.*, 88.

[129]In particular, cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett has constantly reiterated his belief that consciousness is fundamentally propositional, consisting of a sequence of "intentions-to-say-that-p" which are fully expressible in language. For example, Dennett has written that if "we say what we mean to say, if we have committed no errors or infelicities of expression, then our actual utterances cannot fail to be expressions of the content of our semantic intentions, cannot fail to do justice to the access we have to our own inner lives": in the end, "we simply *can say* what it is we are experiencing". Daniel C. Dennett, *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), 170-1. Also see Daniel C. Dennett, "Quining Qualia" in A. J. Marcel and E. Bisiach (eds.), *Consciousness in Contemporary Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 42-77.

[130]Diana Raffman, *op. cit.*, 31.

experience of listening and the subsequent rationalisation of the experience. Additionally, while Raffman's analysis is confined to nuance of pitch, there is no reason why it should not be extended to rhythm, timbre, texture, and so forth; it could in fact be argued that it is easier to apply her elaboration of nuance ineffability to the parameters of timbre and texture as these are primary examples of cognised musical elements which undoubtedly affect appreciation, but which have much vaguer systems of type-identification. From this point of view, also, there is no need to restrict Raffman's theory of the nuance level to tonal music; while the types of recognisable nuance may vary from one music to another, it is simply the focus that changes, not the existence of nuance recognition.

Raffman's theory, as it stands, certainly has its limitations, chiefly because for it to have any real impact, its modification and extension into areas of non-tonal music is needed (though this should, as has been suggested, be possible). However, the book, like Nicholas Cook's, is important in asserting a need to re-examine the ineffable aspects of music, and Raffman's account is of further interest for its attempt to account for the ineffable by actual comparison with other modes of musical meaning in production and reception. Both Cook and Raffman re-assert the important difference of music as an art-form, but even Raffman's account is rooted in cognition, attempting to establish the interdependency of rational and irrational elements. Cook's delineation of the gap between musical and musicological understanding could be seen as a preliminary manoeuvre, necessary for the validation of the immediacy of music in the face of over-positivistic analysis and grammatical theory. Effectively, he valorises the usually discounted opposite term, as a step prior to Raffman's attempt to undermine the rational-irrational dualism by exposing the interdependency of the terms in the actual act of cognition; structural and feeling ineffability are inextricably linked to attempts, at whatever level, to extract a describable structure, and the nuance level, similarly, is interwoven with the recognition of pitch, interval and so on. Additionally, different musics, different pieces, and even different performances of the same piece, will configure the effable and ineffable elements in different ways, such that the process of cognition will be different each time.

In effect, therefore, Cook and Raffman renew Langer's valorisation of the ineffable but non-metaphysical aspect of music, seeming to echo her emphasis on the relationship between the sense of significance and the dynamic form of feeling. In this way Langer's writings are surprisingly contemporary, finding a path between the emotivists and formalists before many of the arguments had even taken place. Additionally, these recent writings suggest a way forwards that validates the more "scientific" work of grammatical and other structural representations, but combines this with the acknowledgement of the limits of such ventures.

From this position, we reach a modified version of Cook's contention that the experience of music is characterised by the gap between actual musical experience and the attempt to rationalise it: in an attempt to undo the opposition, the interdependence of the two aspects must be recognised. Returning (at last) to Beckett, we find that, up until the later works, there is a similar opposition of what can and cannot be said. As is by now clear, the attempt to establish quite what can be put into words is a major preoccupation of Beckett. The positivistic accounting for experience is repeatedly attempted but usually abandoned, and it is in *Watt* that this is most apparent. At times, page after page explores the possibilities of a situation and the combination of its elements - the relationships of the Lynch family, for example, or the positioning of Knott's furniture. However, when it comes to examining the nature of an object or event as opposed to its relative position in combination with others, Watt is immediately flawed by his inability to grasp its essence (the most obvious example being his attempt to examine his pot[131]). Thus we seem to be presented with a dualism of rational and irrational thought, Watt finding his apparent reality of immediate experience to be unamenable to reason and ratio; he is, for example, instructed to empty Mr. Knott's slops on the garden or the dunghill, rather than on the first-floor as would be convenient, yet "Watt was not so foolish as to suppose that this was the real reason why Mr. Knott's slops were not emptied away on the first-floor, as they could have been. This was merely the reason offered to the understanding"[132].

This suspicion of rationalism is, of course, merely a more explicit formulation of ideas present in earlier works; as Laurence Harvey points out, even in the early poetry "the fragmentation of form into discrete particles ... is on the one hand a resolution of 'no confidence' in the logical order of grammar and beyond this in the order of human rationality itself, and on the other an effort to transmit an experience of relative chaos perceived as more real"[133]. Undoubtedly this is itself heavily influenced by the Proustian notion of involuntary memory as the irrational purveyor of true insight, but it is in *Watt* that Beckett makes most explicit the conflict between this intuition and the comfort initially found in the safety of logical, if contrived, relationships. Effectively, Watt gives up trying to grasp the reality of situations, and instead seeks solace in elaborating rational systems within which he can place all the relevant parts : "that - and no more - will be quite sufficient for him, in all cases remembering that it matters not if such explanation provides 'real' and 'true' information"[134]. As long as words can be used to explain situations, thereby providing

131Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, *op. cit.*, 80-1.
132*Ibid.*, 64-5.
133Laurence Harvey, *op. cit.*, 168.
134John J. Mood, "'The Personal System' - Samuel Beckett's *Watt*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* LXXXVI/2 (March 1971), 256.

the required "semantic succour"[135], Watt can exorcise their problematic nature from his mind.

The numerous (and sometimes very long) passages in which Watt elaborates these systems are usually interpreted as comedies of exhaustion, boring to read and absurd to include in a novel, but necessary to the demonstration of Watt's obsession with linguistic meaning. The passages certainly function in this manner, conveying Watt's increasing distrust of the ability of language to provide a satisfactory account of experience. However, as John J. Mood has discovered by actually analysing the contents of the passages, the lists of combinations are in fact full of mistakes. The first instance, for example, is that of the voices heard by Watt on the train journey to Knott's house. The voices either sing, cry, state, or murmur, or else combine all or some of these, and Watt apparently lists all possible combinations[136]. Mood points out that this should result in fifteen possibilities, but Watt gives only fourteen, omitting the combination of singing, stating and murmuring. This immediately begs the question of the ownership of the oversight: is it an accident on the part of Beckett (an accident that passed unnoticed by the proof-reader), and if not, is the mistake Watt's or Sam's? Examining each instance of combinatorial or permutational listing in turn, Mood finds that out of thirty-seven items, twelve contain miscalculations (and this does not count examples in which mistakes are made but are noticed and pointed out either by Sam or by the character involved). This number seems too great for the miscalculations to have been unintentional, and the mistakes are generally of a very specific nature, several times omitting a single possibility when the number involved is not large. As Mood shows, Beckett's notebooks for other texts reveal him to have used charts for working out combinations (as would make sense, given the complicated calculations involved in certain cases), thus making it highly unlikely that the mistakes were not planned. In addition, Mood draws attention to the hiatuses in Sam's narration, to the inclusion of incomplete or contradictory material in the addenda, and to various other mistakes (including textual contradictions, the broken promise that a supposition about the picture in Erskine's room will be "strikingly confirmed"[137], and miscalculations (some recognised and some not) in the numbers given in the committee's examination of Mr. Nackybal[138]).

Considering these errors collectively, Mood suggests that Beckett deliberately establishes a faulty personal system: "if Beckett is truly working with the incompetence he said he was, if his people were truly falling to pieces, then it follows that a portrayal of a personal system, of a closed logical set or a series of such sets,

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135Samuel Beckett, *Watt, op. cit.*, 79.

136*Ibid.*, 27.

137*Ibid.*, 129.

138*Ibid.*, 182-7.

must, if the form is to be one with the content, be faulty"[139]. The irregularities must be noticeable, hence the inclusion both of mistakes pointed out by Watt or Sam and those which pass unnoticed by the characters but will be noticed by the reader (the hiatuses). More bizarre, however, is the inclusion of errors which Beckett must have expected to remain unrecognised, especially considering the boredom of reading the combinatorial passages:

> to be even more incompetently incompetent, there must be unnoticed faultiness. In short, all trustworthiness, credibility, verisimilitude, and plausibility must be shattered.... One can be quite certain that Beckett knows of, indeed carefully planned, most of the mistakes listed. And one can suspect, or imagine, that he in some way composed in such a manner so that some mistakes would escape his own notice as well.[140]

If this was not the case, then Beckett's claims to helplessness would be insincere, and "if there is anything Beckett *is* serious about, will *not* be disingenuous about, will *not* dissemble, it is this matter of helplessness.... Thus, we conclude that Beckett is not just competently expressing incompetence, but that he has also done it incompetently, i.e., by including mistakes of which he was not aware, at least at that time"[141]. We are presented with an extremely effective instance of Beckett's denial of authority; the invention of such a "marvellously and meticulously flawed form"[142] ingeniously circumvents the accusation that his claim to impotence and ignorance is disavowed at the level of the texts themselves. Watt abandons external reality for an inner system which provides apparent comfort, but which is flawed both in itself and its reporting, suggesting that the concept of pure rationalism is an impossible self-delusion, that true understanding cannot be achieved at any level since not even the author is in control.

It is revealing to combine Mood's findings with those of an article by Heath Lees. Lees is concerned with the imagery of tuning and mis-tuning that recurs throughout *Watt*. As has earlier been suggested, the music that Watt hears when lying in ditches provides some relief from the search for the essential meaning of objects and events: non-referential sound seems to act as a sanctuary from words. However, Watt's ability to hear such sounds diminishes the more obsessed he becomes with linguistic meaning; this is perhaps the reason for the addenda's inclusion of the descant heard on the way back to the station (an event which is not mentioned in the main text, suggesting that Watt was unable to register its presence)[143]. Beyond this, however, Lees examines other specifically musical references in the text and uncovers a web of hidden meanings surrounding the imagery of intonation.

139John J. Mood, *op. cit.*, 263.
140*Ibid.*
141*Ibid.*
142*Ibid.*, 264.
143Samuel Beckett, *Watt, op. cit.*, 254.

These references are often obscure. The addenda description of the second picture in Erskine's room shows a naked man seated at the piano, with manuscript paper resting on his lap:

> with his right hand he sustains a chord which Watt has no difficulty in identifying as that of C major in its second inversion, while with the other he prolongs pavilion of left ear. His right foot, assisted from above by its fellow, depresses with force the sustaining pedal.... The bust was bowed over the keyboard and the face, turned slightly towards the spectator, wore expression of man about to be delivered, after many days, of particularly hard stool... illustrating extraordinary effect produced on musical nature by faint cacophony of remote harmonics stealing over dying accord.[144]

Lees' examination of earlier drafts of *Watt* shows that the man in the picture was originally identified as Knott's father, who apparently holds a music degree from a university in Kentucky. More importantly, the drafts show Beckett to have originally described the chord as held in its first inversion - he later scored out the word "first" and substituted "second". The position of the chord must therefore be significant; the second inversion of the chord (G, C, E) gives the arrangement which corresponds to the generation of overtones from the fundamental C, and thus the image is of the pianist using the sustaining pedal in order to hear more clearly the natural decay of these overtones.

The reason for Beckett's insistence on the presentation of the notes in the order of the overtones becomes more clear when examined in relation to the other musical references. The description of Knott's music room identifies two objects besides the piano: a bust of Buxtehude and a ravanastron. The reason for the choice of these objects is obscure - most critics have, understandably, found no significance in their presence - but Lees' research suggests that the importance of both lies in their relation to the imagery of intonation.

Buxtehude was the most well-known of the seventeenth-century North German organists active in the development of tempered tuning. The ravanastron, according to Lees' research, is an ancient non-Western instrument of one string stretched over a long neck, with a tuning peg at one end and a rounded sounding-board at the other. Lees finds the instrument listed in Groves' dictionary as a member of the banjo family, in use in India since at least one thousand years before the Christian era (a fact that perhaps explains the original reference to Knott's father as a graduate of Kentucky, where the banjo tradition is still alive). Similar instruments were also used in Africa, Asia, and Egypt, but Lees is more interested in the fact that

> the existence of such an instrument testifies to the expertise of 'those who knew how to stretch strings over sounding-boards of whatever kind and how to determine the required intervals by varying the required lengths of the string'.

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[144]*Ibid.*, 254.

> One may be at liberty, therefore, to conclude that the ravanastron, or something
> much resembling it, was the basis for the Pythagorean experiments in tuning.[145]

Whether or not this supposition is valid, the instrument certainly seems to symbolise the natural acoustic properties represented by a single string - the object used in early Greek investigations of acoustics.

As such, the ravanastron is set in contrast to the piano's falsification of natural acoustics, and the bust of Buxtehude lies between these, representing the development of the tempered system of tuning (i.e. the system to be used by the Galls). As Lees suggests with reference to the visit of the Galls,

> the objects in the music-room are connected with stages in man's acoustic
> exploration. The tuners represent the ability to impose an acoustic system upon
> natural sound, yet the state of the piano renders this impossible [as only nine
> dampers and nine hammers remain, and only one of each of these form a pair],
> and the incident itself throws out an insuperable challenge to Watt's
> systematically grounded powers of reasoning.[146]

Thus the combined references to musical temperament seem to symbolise Watt's attempts to systematise events, and it therefore seems highly pertinent that the visit of the piano tuners should be one of the incidents which causes Watt most confusion: "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 care what had happened, as that nothing had happened, that a thing that was nothing had happened, with the utmost formal distinctness"[147]. Watt's attempts to rationalise his experiences therefore correspond to the rationalisation of the natural harmonic series into an elaborate system of key relationships. The small distortions of the equally-tempered scale usually pass unnoticed, allowing the operation of the tonal system with modulations through the circle of fifths without the instruments sounding more out of tune the more remote the key. Similarly, Watt is prepared to ignore his distortion of events into personal, logical systems, but however comforting the neatness of these systems, his underlying awareness of their falsity undermines the satisfaction. The increasingly desperate search for more "truthful" systems leads to the dismantling of their linguistic terms, but even this yields no sense of true experience. Thus the same distortive rationalism as is obscurely symbolised by Beckett's presentation of the Western system of tuning is responsible for Watt's breakdown.

Ironically, the same intervals as those which form the tonic chord (and which must be most severely adjusted within the octave for equal temperament) are used for the lateral distribution of the croaks in the frog song which Watt remembers having

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145Heath Lees, "*Watt*: Music, Tuning and Tonality," *Journal of Beckett Studies* IX (1984), 18.
146*Ibid.*
147Samuel Beckett, *Watt, op. cit.*, 73.

heard when lying in a ditch one summer night. The frogs croak together on the first beat, and from then on the third frog croaks "Krik!" every third beat, the second frog croaks "Krek!" every fifth beat, and the first frog croaks "Krak!" every eighth beat[148]. The song, as given, represents one full cycle of one hundred and twenty beats, this being the lowest common denominator of three, five and eight. Thus while the Western musical system bases itself on the tonic chord of the first, third, fifth and eighth notes, tempering the fifth within the octave, the third within the fifth, and then making fine adjustments to the surrounding notes, in order to produce an elaborate system of distortions, Beckett presents a group of frogs producing a song rhythmically arranged at these same intervals, giving a naturally repeatable enclosed system. The link to the obscure imagery of intonation effects a joke at the expense of pedantically rational humanity and the contrast is surely meant to be heightened by the association of the name "Gall" with the English use of the nickname "frog" for the French. This relation of music, nature and number also extends the tendency (identified in the previous chapter) towards Leibnizian philosophy, in which the natural (and at that time untempered) harmony of music corresponds to that of both numerical relationships and the elements of nature: the inclusion of the frog song and the nonsense songs can be seen as related to Leibniz's view of music as "an unconscious counting or a felt relationship of numbers arranged in pleasing intervals and tonal patterns"[149].

The Western musical system thus provides the perfect symbol for Watt's attempts to devise a personal system: concordance relies not on truth but on distortion. Beckett therefore sets up a dual instantiation of music: in the first, music provides relief from the problems of meaning and reason, taking the form of vague singing usually heard when lying in ditches. In its alternative manifestation, however, music is used in the notions of mis-tuning presented in the symbol of equal temperament[150]. That the former comprises unaccompanied singing is central to its ability to comfort, for an unaccompanied choir would tune itself by just rather than tempered intervals. This, combined with its appearance while Watt lies in ditches (i.e. close to nature) and in addition to the manifestation of one song as a frog song and another with nonsense words and irrational numbers, suggests that this non-rational music is somehow more

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[148]*Ibid.*, 135-7.

[149]Julius Portnoy, *The Philosopher and Music: A Historical Outline* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), 149.

[150] An earlier instance of the imagery of mis-tuning occurs in *Murphy* with the description of the protagonist's birth: "his troubles had begun early. To go back no further than the vagitus, it had not been the proper A of international concert pitch, with 435 double vibrations per second, but the double flat of this. How he winced, the honest obstetrician, a devout member of the Dublin Orchestral Society and an amateur flautist of some merit. With what sorrow he recorded that of all the millions of little larynges cursing in unison at that particular moment, the infant Murphy's alone was off the note". See Samuel Beckett, *Murphy, op. cit.*, 44.

pure and natural than the artificial system of which the Galls are perpetrators. Such music can perhaps provide Watt with comfort and with a sanctuary from the rationalisation of his experiences into logical systems.

Watt thereby extends, in a different form, the use of music as symbol in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, continuing its employment in the delineation of the rational-irrational dialectic and its association with related oppositional terms. In both the musical symbolism and the lists of combinations, the irrational term seems to be privileged; the mistakes in the combinatorial systems correspond to the artificial imposition of equal temperament upon natural acoustic phenomena, and both are revealed as inadequate and distortive. Each is extended to a further level; usually the author would control such devices, but Beckett's building of incompetence into his systems denies his own rationalism. The omission from the main text of any mention of the descant heard by Watt on the way to the station implies the author's further incompetence and, similarly, the obscurity of the references to tuning and temperament corresponds to the fact that the combinatorial mistakes would normally pass unnoticed. That Beckett clearly removed from his drafts those passages which would have explained his thought processes suggests a final attempt to reject his own symbolism and to deny the choice of objects and real significance.

The overall effect of all this is the assertion of a need to pay attention to the irrational. The ineffable aspect of experience always undermines attempts at full rationalisation, and the effect of this intuition is that, in the following works, Beckett will gradually break down the structures of language and narrative, attempting the eradication of conventional relations and semantics as far as is possible while still using words. At the same time, however, the ineffable cannot fully take over the privileged position as words can never be abandoned: thus the valorising of the irrational in the form of "natural" music is at the same time satirical (in that the music is presented by frogs). *Watt* is used to demonstrate the failure to eradicate chaos; from this point on, Beckett will endeavour more completely to "accommodate the mess", rather than attempting its regularisation or elimination.

Watt therefore sets up the rational-irrational dialectic in order to validate the second term in the opposition - that which is usually derided in logical structures of thought - and this effects the disintegration towards a state of music, a process which gradually undermines binary structures through the deconstruction of the idea of transcendental significance. It is therefore highly relevant that music should be employed as a symbol of the dualism, and we seem to find Beckett expressing the same need to pay attention to the ineffable as is apparent in the work of Langer, Cook and Raffman. *Watt*, like music theory, elaborates a complicated positivistic system which attempts to explain our experience and rationalise the relations between its

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constituent parts, but the process is unsatisfactory and leads inescapably back to the ineffable aspect of experience. Thus while characters in *Watt* and other of Beckett's earlier fiction *express* the sense of having experienced something inexplicably meaningful, the gradual disintegration and the attempt to purge language of reference actually *embodies* this feeling. Here the sense of vital import arises precisely from the dynamic ebb and flow of the words, which are distributed as far as possible according to their simplest elements (their dictionary definitions and their sounding qualities), rather than through the elaboration of complex symbolism. Hence the perception of these texts as musical is, *pace* Langer's definition of music, a consequence of this non-referential ebb and flow. Similarly, as in Cook and Raffman's theories of music, the nuances of this sense of significance remain ineffable to a greater extent than in other poetic writing.

Later Beckett texts such as *Worstward Ho, Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Neither* undo the early dualisms, revealing the interdependency of terms. As Carla Locatelli has written, the words of Beckett's later texts are "not totally 'divorced from referents', even though the issue of reference remains problematic in them. In fact, an exact reference is often indeterminable, because of the intrinsic dynamism of the referents themselves, which keep changing in time, and thus really represent the dynamism of experience"[151]. This process parallels the movement from Cook (who re-valorises the irrational side of experience, revealing the inadequacy of reason in terms of the gap between musical and musicological knowledge), towards Raffman's examination of the integration of the rational and irrational elements of musical understanding.

This suggests that not only can Langer's theory help to explain the perception of Beckett's texts as increasingly musical, but that Beckett's examination of the structures of linguistic meaning in many ways follows that of the attempt to account for musical meaning. Similarly, the extent to which commentators have, more than with almost any other author, felt compelled to account for the effectiveness of Beckett's work in terms of one philosophical, spiritual, or even religious theory or another is revealing, especially in comparison with the correspondent range of attempts to explore the significance of music.

The relevance of Langer's model, despite (or perhaps due to) its misguided presentation as logically determined, lies in its openness and its ability to maintain the unique nature of the musical experience without excluding certain modes of composition or appreciation. The effect is of Langer's work having lain in the background of recent musical thought, during the emotivist and formalist battles for supremacy, ready to be developed further in more contemporary terms. In this sense, the work of Cook and Raffman provides a *context* for other analytical and cognitive

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[151]Carla Locatelli, *op. cit.*, 25-6.

work. At the same time, Beckett works in the opposite direction, examining the nature of signification through language itself but, like Langer, articulating the sense that meaningful experience is neither fully denotable in linguistic terms nor able to be dismissed as merely irrational.

CHAPTER FIVE
"no symbols where none intended"[1]: Postmodern Perspectives

Summary:

Recent Beckett criticism and its acknowledgement of the relevance of postmodern theory - these ideas as central to the perception of Beckett's texts as musical - the lack of consensus regarding the nature of postmodernism - this problem as rooted in the question of whether postmodernism is necessarily conservative, or whether it provides an opportunity for re-evaluating the relationship between culture, ethics and politics - parallel positions in literary theory - Beckett's work as central to this discourse - the suggestion that the question of Beckett's postmodernism should be cast in terms of his problematisation of the relationship between language, meaning and experience.

Different aspects of postmodern literary theory - the relevance to Beckett's gradual rejection of closed structures of knowledge - the specific relevance of deconstruction and post-structuralism - the origins of these developments in Saussurean linguistics and, subsequently, structuralism and semiotics - the correspondence between Saussure's re-assessment of language as relational and Beckett's treatment of language - the parallels with music as a system within which elements are similarly organised into self-referential structures - the subsequent relationship between structuralism, semiotics and music theory - post-structural developments - the Derridean concept of language as différance and its relevance to Beckett's exploration of knowledge and subjectivity.

Contemporary allegorical theory - its relationship to the structure of irony - the articulation of the fundamental structures of allegory and irony in Beckett's late short prose - the relationship to Langer's concept of music - the false assumption of symbolic unity that has formed the basis of most music theory - allegorical theory, on the other hand, as examining musical structures in terms of the tension between the deployment of "rhetorical" strategies in the striving towards transcendent unity and the simultaneous resistance to that impulse - the allegorical context as revealing a "linguistic moment" in music - Beckett's late work as exemplifying this relationship - these late texts as therefore realising the implications of the more covert musical model of Dream, rejecting the Proustian aesthetic of totalising and transcendental unity.

Julia Kristeva's revision of Lacanian psychoanalysis - her concepts of the semiotic, of revolutionary poetic language, and of the subject-in-process - Kristeva's

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[1] Samuel Beckett, *Watt, op. cit.*, 255.

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description of the "music" of the semiotic and the interdependency of the semiotic and the symbolic in signification - the correspondence between these ideas, Beckett's treatment of language, subjectivity and gender, and the perception of his texts as musical.

Beckett's approach to signification as therefore instructive with regard to the political and ethical vitality of postmodern and deconstructionist thought - his work as demonstrating that a crisis of representation does not necessarily lead to a loss of meaning and value - Beckett as opening up new spaces of discourse and subjectivity, showing that meaning is not wholly dependent upon nameable content - Beckett's texts, like postmodern theory, as essentially concerned with the question of how to account for significance beyond the nameable without resorting to assumptions of metaphysical transcendence - Beckett's work as demonstrating music's fundamental relevance to these questions.

Critical accounts of Beckett's work have proceeded along many different lines; indeed, the more one reads about Beckett, the more it begins to seem that parallels can, if required, be drawn between his work and almost any artistic or philosophical trend. The scope for critical contrivance is huge, but this situation arises partly as a result of Beckett's astonishing ability to absorb influences and to re-formulate the ideas of others within his own texts. Literary quotation, artistic images, and philosophical propositions drawn from a lifetime of serious study are deeply embedded in the writing, whether in the more explicit citations of the earlier work or their distillation into often almost iconic allusion in the later pieces.

Despite the wealth of critical positions, however, David Watson is probably right to suggest that until recently most Beckett criticism fell into one of two camps[2]. The first, that of literary high modernism, accounts for the breakdown of traditional structures of language as an attack on an "alienating discourse", and offers an alternative, inauthentic representation of the self as a means of opening up a new space for the imagination - the most obvious example of this approach is Martin Esslin's concept of the Theatre of the Absurd[3]. The second approach tends to view Beckett's work in terms of the existential exploration of the gap between language and being, and the consequent inability of language to grasp the true nature of things. Obviously, as Watson recognises, both approaches are of relevance, and yet more recent work has tended to depart from such ideas, recognising that while the former approach presents a reductive view of Beckett's writing and ignores its ambiguities,

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[2]See David Watson, *Paradox and Desire in Samuel Beckett's Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 7-8.

[3]See Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968).

the second approach simply locates the work within a new teleology, that of a drive towards absolute silence[4], again simplifying the complexities and paradoxes involved (especially those of the later work). Of course, some of the criticism of both camps appeared too early to take full account of the range of Beckett's output, therefore tending to focus on the longer plays and the earlier novels. Nevertheless, the influence of the two positions has been maintained beyond this period, arguably to detrimental effect.

Perhaps in reaction to these critical positions, more recent work has often turned towards aspects of postmodern theory, in particular finding parallels between Beckett's approach to language and post-structuralist and/or deconstructionist theory. Much deconstructionist criticism is also of great relevance to questions of musical meaning, particularly in its problematisation of the relationship between language and representation. Until very recently, surprisingly little attention has been paid to music in such theory : as Andrew Bowie has written, "the present intensive discussion of the question of modernity and post-modernity has tended to give music a rather subordinate role"[5]. However, certain aspects of postmodern and deconstructionist thought have relevance to the question of meaning in Beckett's texts and in music, and the exploration of these areas can begin to provide new perspectives on the ways in which we account for the significance of both. Similarly, this can perhaps also shed a different light upon the tendency to discuss Beckett's work in musical terms.

Criticism which explores the correspondence between Beckett's texts and deconstruction has now become extremely prevalent, but no real agreement has been reached; instead, the discussion has provided a new focus for the arguments over Beckett's relationship to modernist or postmodernist ideas. This argument is one that has long been conducted and which still re-emerges frequently. However, an overview of the discussion seems to suggest that it is less concerned with the attempt adequately to account for Beckett's output and more with the terms within which the concept of postmodernism is framed.

The use of the term "postmodernism" has always been contentious. Certain factors have attained the status of widely accepted tenets; the origins of postmodernism are widely seen as lying in a disenchantment with the Enlightenment

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[4]Ihab Hassan has been one of the most influential proponents of this approach, interpreting Beckett's work as leading inexorably towards silence. Raymond Federman, on the other hand, proposes the different but related teleology of a "journey to chaos". See Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towards a Postmodern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Raymond Federman, *Journey to Chaos: Samuel Beckett's Early Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965).

[5]Andrew Bowie, "Music, Language and Modernity" in Andrew Benjamin (ed.), *Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin* (London: Routledge, 1989), 67.

ideal of civilisation and culture being founded upon freedom and the demystification of superstition through the power of reason. This disenchantment developed, thanks to the work of Adorno and Horkheimer[6], as a result of the acknowledgement of the tendency for reason to become translated into a formal category, and to be employed as power through the domination of nature by technology and the oppressive abuse of those less familiar with the dominant language of Western rationalism. This critique has led to the development of much theory which associates the cultural and the political in a general scepticism of universals, hierarchies and certainty, in favour of the recognition of difference and the play of categories. It is fairly safe to suggest that this critique has now been sanctified in a range of accepted definitions of postmodernism: these include Lyotard's distrust of universal grand metanarratives[7]; Jameson's focus on the collapse of a distinction between high and popular culture and the preference for pastiche over satiric parody[8]; Charles Jencks' concept of double-coding (within which modern ideas are combined with something else, usually from an established tradition, in order to reposition those ideas within a different frame)[9]; Baudrillard's examination of the decreasing stability of the real in the face of simulacra[10]; and Vattimo's exploration of postmodernism as an attempt to be free of the logic of development and innovation[11]. However, the conclusions drawn from such formulations differ widely; arguments persist over the status of postmodernism in relation to modernism, some critics maintaining that postmodernism comprises a break with modernist ideas, while others assert that it is predicated upon the extension of those same ideas beyond their previously acknowledged limits.

Inseparable from this discussion is the question of whether postmodernism can be seen as a distinct historical period or as a change of mood involving an orientation towards the future: as Thomas Docherty points out, there is a tension between

> on the one hand thinking of the postmodern as a chiliastic historical period
> which, 'after modernity', we either have entered or are about to enter, while on
> the other realising that we are condemned to live in a present, and adopting a

[6]Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cumming (London: Verso, 1986).

[7]See, in particular, Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?," trans. Régis Durand, in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 71-82.

[8]See Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1993), 111-126.

[9]See Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1986), 14.

[10]For a succinct version of some of Baudrillard's views, see Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication" in Hal Foster (ed.), *op. cit.*, 126-134.

[11]See Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity*, trans. J. R. Snyder (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988).

> specific ... mood as a result of acknowledging that this present is characterised by struggle or contradiction and incoherence[12].

In this sense, while modernity may have come to recognise the incoherence and fragmentary nature of the world, modernism assumes the possibility of transcending this even while reflecting its condition. In Lyotard's terms, for example, modernist aesthetics can hold out for the satisfaction of the desire for nostalgia and the "solace of good forms"[13], while postmodernism denies itself this act of recuperation.

As Steven Connor suggests, given that postmodernism is generally characterised by the difficulty of achieving consensus, it would be surprising to find any real agreement as to its precise nature[14] (and even the paradox of this statement, with its appeal to the notion of consensus regarding the impossibility of consensus, can be subsumed into the general ironies of the postmodern condition). Nevertheless, recent texts generally agree about the basis from which postmodernism developed (even if it is possible for Jürgen Habermas to continue to assert that the project of modernity remains incomplete[15]). Instead, the differences seem to lie in the interpretation of this condition, and here the basic conflict seems to be between those for whom postmodernism is necessarily conservative, and those who interpret the postmodern condition as providing an opportunity for the re-evaluation of the relationship between ethics and politics. The former position involves the assumption that value judgements have become obsolete and that, consequently, to take up a political position which seeks to challenge the capitalist logic of reproduction and consumption is futile. This view develops from Baudrillard's assertion that the explosion of media and image reproduction is such that signs have now lost all connection with the world to which they would appear to refer; according to Baudrillard, we have entered a state of hyperreality in which manufactured objects and simulated experiences have taken over from "reality", producing a simulacrum within which contradiction becomes a game and the question of value disappears into a state of political paralysis.

The opposite position, however, attempts to employ the distrust of objective universalism in the positive search for non-oppressive values which recognise difference[16]. Taking this standpoint, it becomes possible to assert that acknowledging that no value judgement is objectively more valid than any other

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[12]Thomas Docherty, "Postmodernism: An Introduction" in Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: A Reader* (Hemel Hempstead, Herts.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 3.

[13]Jean-François Lyotard, *op. cit.*, 81.

[14]Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 10.

[15]For a concise version of this argument see Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, *New German Critique* (Winter 1981), 3-14.

[16]See, for example, Judith Squires (ed.), *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993).

does not deny the possibility of making meaningful judgements[17]. Additionally, Baudrillard's assertion of the impossibility of value and the preference for pure "play" can be seen as itself colluding with the Enlightenment desire for universal absolutes as its reverse side; as Stuart Hall suggests, the tendency has been for those in agreement with this celebratory mode of postmodernism to become involved "not simply in identifying new trends and tendencies, new cultural configurations, but in learning to love them. I think they collapse these two steps - analysis and prescription - into one"[18]. As a result, both anti-postmodernists and those who subscribe to Baudrillard's view of postmodernism conspire in simplifying the situation into a binary choice: "we are caught between two unacceptable choices: Habermas's defensive position in relation to the old Enlightenment project and Lyotard's Euro-centred celebration of the postmodern collapse"[19]. This choice merely reduces the cultural complexity of postmodernism, ignoring other possible interpretations of the situation.

Ultimately, both those who celebrate postmodernism as a liberation from value and those who employ its terms as the basis for the problematisation of ethical questions can equally interpret the postmodern condition as either a break with modernist aesthetics or as the ultimate extension of their implications (or even as a combination of the two, the break resulting from the extension). Thus the importance of this relationship recedes behind that of the implications of the current situation. This point also highlights the short-sightedness of those who question even the existence of a state of postmodernism by claiming that its concerns are basically those of modernism, for this attitude ignores the fact of the relative importance of different elements within different cultural climates: as Frederic Jameson has written, "radical breaks between periods do not generally involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuration of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features that had been dominant again become secondary"[20]. In this

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[17]Steven Connor, for example, discusses the possibility that in rejecting the modernist assessment of aesthetic value as intrinsic to itself, critical theory could be seen as turning away from an "unacceptably narrow" perspective in favour of a position that is actually more potent politically: "the most sophisticated and political objections to this notion of aesthetic value argue not so much that this notion is inaccurate as that it masks and perpetuates certain very definite relations of power, that the notion of pure and non-negotiable aesthetic value always has a non-aesthetic exchange-value in political and economic terms. The resulting critique of aesthetic ideology is therefore, strictly speaking, not a critique of the notion of value, or a denial of the possibility of evaluation in general, but a rejection of the unjustly limiting forms which aesthetic evaluation has taken". Steven Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 13.

[18]Lawrence Grossberg (ed.), "On postmodernism and articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall" in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 131.

[19]*Ibid.*, 132.

[20]Frederic Jameson, *op. cit.*, 123. Jameson's use of the term "structuration" and his notion of the complex relationship between structural elements seems to evoke the work of social theorist Anthony

way, the problems of representation and of the incoherence of experience that form only a part of the modernist picture come to the forefront in postmodernism, their transcendence coming to seem hugely problematic. Similarly, since both interpretations of postmodernism are predicated on the problematisation of value (even if the former position asserts the obsolescence of the very notion of value), they are equally predicated upon a change of direction from "the event of knowing to the act of knowledge"[21]; as Docherty points out, in postmodernism, "rather than knowing the stable essence of a thing, we begin to tell the story of the event of judging it, and to enact the narrative of how it changes consciousness and thus produces a new knowledge"[22]. Thus Baudrillard may use this focus in order to explore the act by which we attempt to form what is in his terms an illusion of knowledge. Simultaneously, however, the second approach to postmodernism uses the same means to examine the process by which value judgements are formed, and hence to elaborate a range of possible new positions which may avoid traditional assumptions.

These approaches to questions of knowledge are obviously central to literary theory, and it is therefore hardly surprising that critical positions have evolved which parallel those of postmodern theory in general. Again, disagreements seem less concerned with the content of the literature than with the implications for the apparent crisis of meaning and representation. While the focus on the infinite continuation of the signifying process in the face of the impossibility of

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Giddens. Previous to its appropriation by Giddens, the term "structuration" had sometimes been used in French, but rarely in English. Giddens' theory of structuration is based upon his "concern to develop an ontological framework for the study of human social activities" through the "conceptual investigation of the nature of human action, social institutions and the interrelations between actions and institutions". Giddens emphasises the complex and unstable nature of class relations in society: "classes, I thought, had too often been thought of as entities or groups; a more apt way of understanding class, it seemed to me, was to analyse the ways in which class relations became the bases for group formation. Classes as such are neither groups nor communities, but various features of class systems can provide the 'structuring' basis of group affiliations .... I came to see that an 'ontology of social life' must supply a detailed understanding of the nature of action, together with what in post-structuralism is described as a 'theory of the subject' .... According to the structurationist approach, social theory does not 'begin' with either the individual or with society, both of which are notions that need to be reconstructed through other concepts. In structuration theory, the core concern of the social sciences is with recurrent social practices and their transformations". See Anthony Giddens, "Structuration theory: past, present and future" in Christopher G. A. Bryant and David Jary (eds.), *Giddens' Theory of Structuration: A critical appreciation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 201-3.

From these arguments, Giddens suggests that postmodernity is a yet-to-be-realised condition that arises from recognising that any assumption about modern society is open to challenge. However, as several critics have commented, it is therefore surprising that Giddens has not paid greater attention to the postmodern critique of the relationship between past and future and its implications for the reassessment of historic and social meta-narratives. See John Urry, "Time and space in Giddens' social theory" in *ibid.*, 169-170.

[21]Thomas Docherty (ed.), *op. cit.*, 25.
[22]*Ibid.*

transcendental redemption again forms the backdrop, interpretations vary from those for whom such developments reduce literature to an absolutely meaningless play of terms, to those for whom the problematisation of representation may open up new approaches to the question of meaning. Most media commentary has focused upon the more pessimistic former approach, citing the end of history and the collapse of representation as the inevitable consequences of incessant image reproduction. As Nicholas Zurbrugg points out, however, this is merely the result of "overliteral and undercritical responses"[23] to certain postmodern artists and theorists. Zurbrugg suggests that this negative aspect of postmodern culture (which he labels the "B-effect" after the surname initial of those who have become identified as its protagonists - Baudrillard, Barthes, Bourdieu, Benjamin, Beckett) needs to be complemented by the acknowledgement of a "C-effect" postmodernism (named after John Cage) which exemplifies a more positive perspective, exploring new modes of artistic experience, often in the form of multi-media work. For Zurbrugg, these "C-effect" artists do not share with other postmodernists the horror of giving up artistic control, but instead attain the status of "antitheorists" who, often by incorporating chance procedures, simply "let things happen"[24].

Beckett can be seen as central to these discussions, especially given the nature of the arguments concerning his position within modernism or postmodernism. To an extent, the disagreement again seems less a result of differences of opinion regarding the content of the work than of the implications of the association with postmodern ideas; those who object to Beckett's being labelled a postmodernist seem less concerned by the idea that his treatment of language and narrative might fall into this category than by the implied view of the texts as eschewing meaning and value. It is as if, for such critics, the only interpretation of the postmodern condition is one that leads to an absolute loss of meaning and to the empty play of signifiers. For these critics, therefore, to cast Beckett as a postmodernist is to reduce his work to nothing[25]. While this may be the effect of

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[23]Nicholas Zurbrugg, *The Parameters of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1993), xi.
[24]See *ibid.*, 1.
[25]P. J. Murphy, for example, takes the postmodernist position to task for reducing Beckett's texts to "a series of only stylistic and formalistic adjustments Beckett has supposedly made in order to carry on writing after the 'impasse' of *The Unnamable*'s final 'I can't go on, I'll go on'". In his fascinating study of Beckett's language, Christopher Ricks ascribes similar tendencies to deconstructionist critics ("They *make nothing* of his art"), while Andrew Kennedy takes a different tack, suggesting that Beckett's concern with aesthetic form is thoroughly unpostmodern. All of these criticisms are perhaps relevant to certain critics and to the celebratory mode of postmodernism, but beyond this display a simplification of the terms of the postmodern debate. See P. J. Murphy, *Reconstructing Beckett: Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction, op. cit.*, xiii; Christopher Ricks, *Beckett's Dying Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 148 (also see, 199-200); Andrew Kennedy, "Beckett and the Suffering Language Animal: Beyond the Modernist/Postmodernist Limits" (unpublished paper given at the 1996 University of Strasbourg symposium, "Samuel Beckett: L'Oeuvre Carrefour, L'Oeuvre Limite").

certain postmodern interpretations of Beckett, I would suggest that very few readings actually reach such a conclusion. Nevertheless, much recent Beckett criticism seems to have forked into two paths; the first denies any affinity between Beckett and postmodern ideas, while the second takes this affinity as read, effectively dismissing the need to justify the specifics of that relationship and assuming the association to be widely accepted. Nobody seems to have pointed out that these positions are not necessarily in opposition if the discussion of Beckett's postmodernism is cast in terms of the questioning of structures of language and meaning and their problematic relationship to experience. Such a position does not deny the possibility of new artistic worlds, nor the possibility of literary significance as dependent upon more than its poetic symbolism, but instead requires the very question of meaning to be posited in different terms.

The various points of focus of much recent literary criticism can help to clarify the question of Beckett's relationship to postmodernism. Beyond a general scepticism towards both absolutist assumptions and the desire for transcendence (which Beckett's later work certainly seems to share, but which does not necessarily indicate more than a very superficial affinity with the general climate of postmodernism), recent literary theory reveals the predominant tendency of postmodern works to explore their own status as fiction. Linda Hutcheon, for example, defines such work as "historiographic metafiction"[26], wherein narrators are generally either provisional or undermine their own omniscience such that the perceiving subject can no longer be assumed to be a coherent entity fully present at any level of the text. Hutcheon suggests that in exploring the fundamentals of narrative, representation and subjectivity, such texts effectively problematise the distinction between history and fiction[27].

Applying this approach to Beckett, it is clear that while even the early work refuses the narrators any omniscience and destabilises the origins and status of the texts, it is really only with the *Trilogy* that we begin to experience real uncertainty as to the history of the subject. The ambiguous relationships between Molloy, Moran and the author undermine our sense of narrative origins. The question of authority is permanently in doubt, not least because the worlds of the two men are in many ways very similar; the objects, events and ideas of one story are frequently repeated in a related form in the other, and even dissimilarities are often effected by the stated absence or denial of that which appeared in the other story, rather than by the actual

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[26]See Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), ix.
[27]*Ibid.*, 11.

inclusion of thoroughly different material[28]. Identity is therefore put into question, and this is extended in *Malone Dies*; internalising similar ideas through the admission that Sapo is the creation of Malone intensifies the ambiguity of authority and selfhood. As J. D. O'Hara points out, *Malone Dies* acts as a turning point for Beckett in that its focus is the actual process of writing[29], but this is also an inevitable consequence of the textual duality of *Molloy*. This explicit association of writing with the necessary but futile attempt to evolve an objective and unified history of the self becomes most unbearable in *The Unnamable*: the repeated demonstration of the impossibility of self-presence, and the resultant need continually to invent others, destabilise the coherence of subjectivity.

Despite differences of perspective, the issues explored by other writers on postmodern fiction are similarly appropriate to Beckett's work from the *Trilogy* onwards. Alan Wilde's influential theory of postmodernism sees modernism as delimiting its admittance of disorder not necessarily by resolution or overall unification, but rather by the control of binary conflicts (such as between the flesh and spirit, the rational and the irrational, and so on) through the deployment of a "disjunctive irony". For Wilde, however, this containing of disorder only marks the imminent crisis; the increase in pressure necessarily erupts into a state of postmodernism which also comprises irony, but this time a "suspensive irony", within which the awareness of incoherence is intensified to the point at which it can no longer be contained[30]. In this way, postmodernism can be seen as growing out of "modernist tantrums" into a willingness to live with uncertainty.

The relevance of this process to the development of Beckett's work is clear; as has been seen, Beckett's early texts both explicitly and more covertly deploy binary structures as an attempt to account for experience and to gain knowledge of the self. These structures are apparent both at the level of the characters themselves (who develop dualistic systems in order to categorise their experiences), and at the authorial level, where Beckett and/or his narrators impose similar distinctions upon the processes of understanding (as is apparent in the depiction of Belacqua, for example). Gradually, these distinctions are undermined from within; such methods are eventually exposed as having clarified nothing, and the absolute privileging of the rational mind over the irrational and the bodily comes to be seen as dubious. Additionally, much of both the humour and the pain of the works lies in these ironic structures and the reader's empathy with the characters' predicaments. As a result,

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[28]For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the two parts of *Molloy*, see Ludovic Janvier, "*Molloy*" in J. D. O'Hara (ed.), *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970), 46-57.

[29]J. D. O'Hara, "About Structure in *Malone Dies*" in *ibid.*, 68.

[30]See Alan Wilde, *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1981).

while the attempt to maintain such structures does persist into the *Trilogy*, the undermining of the distinction between self and other, author and character, subject and object, gradually denies their viability, leading to the crisis of knowledge in *The Unnamable*. In later texts, though, this desperation lessens; while an element of ontological anxiety never disappears, Beckett's later work undoubtedly attempts to achieve a state wherein the disorder can truly be acknowledged. Fundamental to this is a disintegration of the apparently self-contained subject and the emergence of a series of provisional, hazily-delineated figures, dependent upon their textual constitution rather than upon the assumption of locatable origins or anything beyond the text.

Here we find a parallel with the theory of postmodernist fiction espoused by Brian McHale. McHale suggests, "postmodernist fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by epistemological issues"[31]. While McHale recognises that questions of ontology and epistemology are always in some sense related, clearly one set of questions always has to be asked before the other, and his approach develops from the fact that postmodern fiction tends to foreground questions regarding the nature of the world, exploring the kinds of worlds that exist and what is to be done in them[32]. As a result, postmodern fiction often erases previously stable boundaries between the worlds of the author and the characters, between "reality" and fiction, instead projecting a plurality of new fictional worlds which are created and destroyed explicitly before the eyes of the reader. Beckett's early novels explore the world as a stable and pre-existent external structure (even if mocked) into which characters are thrown and about which they attempt to ask epistemological questions. The *Trilogy*, however, sees the gradual dissolution of this already questionable world, initially by blurring the boundaries between inside and out, between author and/or narrator and characters, and hence between "real" and fictional worlds. Following this, as McHale shows, Malone's claim to have written *Molloy* alters the status of the work, foregrounding the fictional projection of a world. *Malone Dies* then raises the question of which was "the 'more real', the world in which Malone lives and (presumably) dies, or the world which he has projected and within which the text ends"[33].

While questions of epistemology are still being asked, we are in a hesitant position somewhere between epistemology and ontology, a position McHale sees as reaching the final limits of modernism[34]. *The Unnamable*, however, moves beyond

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[31] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987), xii.
[32] *Ibid.*, 11.
[33] *Ibid.*, 12.
[34] *Ibid.*, 13.

those limits, extending Malone's projection of fictive worlds into free ontological improvisation, "constructing, revising, deconstructing, abolishing, and reconstituting his characters (Basil/ Mahood, Worm) and their worlds, apparently at will"[35], to the extent that he even imagines himself as the object of someone else's imagination. Thus, in McHale's terms, *The Unnamable* makes the archetypal postmodern move of constructing worlds and selves "under erasure"[36]; as McHale suggests, modernist fiction may have made the initial moves towards the exploration of fragmentary subject positions, but this was "typically framed as mental anticipations, wishes, or recollections of the characters, rather than left as an irresolvable paradox of the world outside the characters' minds"[37].

Clearly, then, even though various theories identify different elements as the defining factors of postmodern fiction, Beckett's work encompasses all of these. The *Trilogy* works through the very movement from modernism into postmodernism, exploring the relationship between precisely those points of focus delimited by postmodern theorists. Consequently, the *Trilogy's* contraction inwards towards a focus on nothing but the question of self-perception effects the realisation of the textual nature of that self: the crisis arises from the acknowledgement that the Unnamable has no origin, no essence, but simply exists in the form which it constructs for itself through its use of words. This writing, therefore, becomes specifically ontological as the distinction between world and fiction disappears and pure epistemology becomes impossible. Similarly, this process involves the acknowledgement that the experience of disorder can no longer be controlled by the ironic deployment of binary structures: the realisation that the fragmentation cannot neatly be contained effects the need continually to regenerate provisional worlds without absolutist pretensions.

In many ways, of course, the question of whether Beckett should be classed as a postmodernist writer is unimportant. Nevertheless, his output demonstrates the inevitability of the shift into postmodernity more effectively than any piece of literary theory. Additionally, this involves the realisation that Beckett's work is highly relevant to the questions of meaning which surround not just contemporary literature but culture as a whole. In a conversation with Lawrence Shainberg, Beckett described returning to Dublin after the war to find that his mother had developed Parkinson's Disease:

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[35]*Ibid.*

[36]McHale's use of this phrase is taken from Derrida's practice of physically cancelling a word by crossing it out but in such a way that the word can still be read beneath the cross: "Derrida's purpose in using this typographical sleight-of-hand is, of course, to remind us that certain key concepts in western metaphysics - such as, in this case, *existence* and *objecthood* - continue to be indispensable to philosophical discourse even though that same discourse demonstrates their illegitimacy. They both cannot be admitted, yet cannot be excluded; so he places them *sous rature*". See *ibid.*, 99-101.
[37]*Ibid.*, 101.

her face was like a mask, completely unrecognisable. Looking at her, I had a
sudden realisation that all the work I'd done before was on the wrong track. I
guess you'd have to call it a revelation. Strong word, I know, but so it was. I
simply understood that there was no sense adding to the store of information,
gathering knowledge. The whole attempt at knowledge, it seemed to me, had
come to nothing. It was all haywire. What I had to do was investigate not-
knowing, not-perceiving, the whole world of incompleteness[38].

As a result, Beckett began to write *Molloy*, embarking upon the most prolific period
of his life before even having left his mother's house (and the first line of *Molloy* is
"I am in my mother's room"). Here, then, Beckett seems to describe an explicit
determination to move away from questions of epistemology towards those of the
actual nature of being, a decision which comprises both a break with past ideas (as is
suggested by the use of the term "revelation"), and a sense of continuity from having
pursued those ideas to the point at which they became something else (the continued
search for self-knowledge inevitably leading to the admittance of ignorance).

This developmental process in Beckett's work encompasses the progression
from the rejection of closed structures of knowledge into the delineation of a
plurality of provisional selves, worlds and meanings, and it is perhaps in recognition
of this that Beckett has frequently been described as a postmodernist *avant la
lettre*[39]. Having established the basis of the relationship between Beckett's work and
postmodern theory, however, a new question arises - that of the relevance to certain
individual theoretical approaches usually classed as belonging to postmodernism,
most notably deconstruction. The relationship between postmodernism and
deconstruction (and, for that matter, post-structuralism) is often assumed to be one of
interchangeability; just as Beckett is often characterised as postmodern before the
existence of postmodernism, he has equally been described as a deconstructionist
before deconstruction. Criticisms of the deconstructionist approach to Beckett are as
prevalent as those of the postmodern approach in general, again developing from a
simplistic reading of the ideas involved and from an assumption that they necessarily
imply the reduction of Beckett's work to the absolute emptiness of the free play of
signs.

This reasoning seems to have developed from the fact that the origins of
deconstruction lie in Saussurean linguistics. While this area is one that has been
covered many times elsewhere, an overview of the foundations clarifies not only the
relationship between Beckett and deconstruction, but also his consequent approach

[38]Lawrence Shainberg, *op. cit.*, 106.
[39]See Helga Schwalm, "Beckett's Trilogy and the Self-Deconstruction of the Subject" (unpublished),
2. This paper was given at the 1996 University of Strasbourg symposium, "Samuel Beckett: L'Oeuvre
Carrefour, L'Oeuvre Limite".

to meaning and the particular relationship between this and the musical effect of the work. It was to some extent Saussure's eschewal of the notion of language as substantive in favour of the idea of its content as relational that led to the founding of structuralism and consequently post-structuralism. Proceeding from the contention that language should be examined not only diachronically but also synchronically, and from a distinction between *langue* (the total system of language) and *parole* (the utterances made by individual speakers of that language from day-to-day), Saussure developed the view that "language is intangible and never appears at once in its entirety but only in the incomplete performance of part of the repertoire by individual speakers"[40]. This encouraged linguists to attempt the full description of the array of possible systematised relationships between utterances.

Thus the projects of structuralism and semiotics developed from the idea that linguistic "items" derive their significance from their relationship to other items: "what makes any single item 'meaningful' is not its particular individual quality but the *difference* between this quality and that of other sounds"[41]. Saussure demonstrated that these differences are structured in terms of oppositional relationships. For example, the difference between the English words "ban" and "can" lies in the initial sounds; the linguistic structure lies in the fact of the opposition between the /b/ and the /c/ sounds, these phonemes being active in changing the meaning of the word but lacking significance of their own beyond this. The arrangement of linguistic elements is therefore seen to be systematic, but also arbitrary (in that the system of differences is in no way dependent upon the real), and thus Saussure was able to distinguish between the signifier (the sound-image of a word) and the signified (the concept of the word), the relationship between the two being wholly arbitrary. Fundamental to Saussurean linguistics, then, is the idea that "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system"[42].

Along with the separate but in many ways similar developments in the work of the Russian formalists and of the American Edward Sapir, the development of this theory and its extension into structural anthropology and the Prague and Copenhagen schools of literary structuralism has been examined in detail by several writers[43]. Fundamental to the present context, however, is that the structuralist project moves

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[40]Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 1991), 21.
[41]*Ibid.*, 22.
[42]Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: The Philosophical Library Inc., 1959), 118-121.
[43]See Terence Hawkes, *op. cit.*, 28-122.

away from traditional notions of interpretation; structuralism explicitly rejects the New Critical practice of assuming the shared, common-sense values of a community of readers as the basis for the analysis of a work's hidden meanings. Instead of approaching the content of a work as given, structuralism focuses on the processes of signification, examining the means by which an unlimited number of possible meanings can be generated: "even when linguistics is explicitly enlisted in the service of interpretation, the fundamental orientation of the discipline ... works to focus attention on structures and to identify meanings and references not as the source or truth of a work but as the effects of the play of language"[44]. In this way, structuralism manifests itself as a sequence of systematic analyses, delineating multiple levels of meaning without attempting to establish a closed level of content (and thereby effecting a quasi-scientific basis from which semiotics can proceed). Consequently, there can be no privileged standpoint from which one can lay claim to an objective view of "reality" - instead, the structure of the language system is such that in describing the world, we constantly re-invent it. Therefore, no statement can avoid being in some sense about the condition of its making: as Terence Hawkes says, "the notion that literary ideas are ultimately about language, that their medium is their message, is one of the most fruitful of structuralist ideas"[45].

Immediately, it is possible to see the potential relevance of this to Beckett. Much of the humour of the earlier, more traditionally narrative texts derives from the futile attempt to establish a substantial rather than an arbitrary relationship between signifiers and their signifieds (Watt's consideration of his pot being the most detailed single example). In these early texts, characters continually assume that their knowledge of a situation can be equated with what can be said of it. At the same time, though, the sense that the linguistic expression of ideas is inadequate becomes increasingly pressing. Gradually, the protagonists come to acknowledge the arbitrary nature of the relationship between the signifier and the signified and hence to realise the impossibility of a search for knowledge through language.

The problems encountered therefore come to be seen as bound to those of representation and as arising from the human tendency to treat language as substantive, despite its differential structure. In order to escape the restrictions of traditional structures, therefore, Beckett's texts attempt the negation of external reference and the development of a "syntax of weakness" - a syntax which evolves not according to the "strong" relationships of semantics, but rather by means of a differential process more closely bound to the infinitely regressive chain of signification described by Saussure. One consequence of this approach is the

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[44]Jonathan Culler, On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (London: Routledge, 1983), 21.

[45]Terence Hawkes, op. cit., 100.

emphasis upon the work's meta-textuality; through the minimisation of referential content, Beckett's late texts (*Worstward Ho* being the most extreme example) exemplify the structuralist conception of literary texts as foregrounding their own processes of composition.

From the same perspective, such developments in linguistic and literary theory have obvious relevance to music. The definition of language as a totality of linguistic rules organised in terms of differences, along with the re-evaluation of the relationship between signifiers and signifieds, establishes a clear basis for the structuralist analysis of the signifying process rather than of content. Despite the differences, such an approach to language highlights the parallels with music as a system within which elements are similarly organised into self-referential structures. Beyond this, Beckett's evolution of a textual practice which lies somewhere between literature and music in its exploration of differential linguistic structures can help to clarify this relationship. Music analysis, like literary New Criticism, has traditionally focused upon the work-in-itself, usually proceeding from the assumption of a communal sense of the relationships between a work's elements. Structuralism, however, has offered music analysis the chance to provide a more rigorous account of a work's layers of meaning, moving towards the elaboration of cognitive universals via the examination of their cultural manifestation.

There is not room here for a full discussion of the influence structuralism has exerted over music theory. As Patricia Tunstall has pointed out, however, two main approaches can be seen to have developed as a result, the first based upon semiology and the second developed from the structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss[46]. Musical semiology approaches music as a system of signs, beginning (in typically structuralist fashion) with the examination of the music in isolation from its social conditions, deploying a dual synchronic-diachronic axis model as a means of plotting the relations between structurally similar elements - this has generally taken the form of the paradigmatic distribution of elements according to the model developed by Nicolas Ruwet[47]. As a pioneer of musical semiology, Jean-Jacques Nattiez has attempted to reduce musicology's traditional dependence upon historical perspectives, elaborating in its place a threefold description of the "total musical fact" in terms of its conception (the poietic level), its reception (the esthesic level), and its physical and material embodiment in the form of a trace apprehended by a combination of the senses (the neutral level, the immanent properties of which can

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[46]Patricia Tunstall, "Structuralism and Musicology: An Overview," *Current Musicology* XXVII (1979), 57.
[47]See Nicolas Ruwet, "Methods of Analysis in Musicology," trans. Mark Everist *Music Analysis* VI/1-2 (March-July 1987), 3-36.

be analysed)[48]. Thus, while semiological analysis must take account of all three perspectives, following Saussure's emphasis on the initial isolation of language from its social context, for the purposes of study the focus upon the neutral level can temporarily ignore the poietic and esthesic dimensions in order to elaborate a methodologically rigorous and scientific approach to musical elements, the formal operations enacted upon them, and the structural relationships which can be elaborated as a result.

The second approach, on the other hand, develops from Levi-Strauss' idea that music, like myth, is both "intelligible but untranslatable, and while each takes specific forms in specific cultures, both have fundamental structural characteristics that particularly illuminate cognitive principles of order"[49]. For example, the work of Gilbert Chase, one of the foremost proponents of such ideas, has developed the structuralist work of Jean Piaget, analysing the relationships between a work's elements in order to understand their development and treatment in time, analysing the diachronic axis in order simultaneously to map the static synchronic axis[50]. Similarly, the work of John Blacking has sought to develop the focus of ethnomusicology away from what he saw as its tendency to outline only the social context of the music, instead moving towards the examination of musical structures as actually expressive of cultural patterns[51]. Despite wide variations in focus and methodology, therefore, structuralism has been taken up as widely relevant to musicology in its attempt to define and abstract structural universals, placing cultural activities in relation to one another in terms of their organisation rather than their content (the latter being an activity which has always proved hugely problematic for musicology).

Despite all this, many contemporary critics have come to find structuralism unsatisfactory, it having become too concerned with the production of distributive taxonomies to acknowledge the ways in which a work's significance can often in part derive from its very resistance to such categorisation. From this perspective structuralism is criticised for having fallen into precisely those positivistic practices it initially sought to avoid. In music theory this reaction has taken the form of the development of "new musicology" which, in the work of Lawrence Kramer and

[48]Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Towards a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 11-12.

[49]Patricia Tunstall, *op. cit.*, 59. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropoloy*, trans. Claire Jacobsen and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (London: Allen Lane (The Penguin Press), 1968); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Cape, 1970).

[50]See Gilbert Chase, "Review Essay," *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* (1972), 247-62.

[51]See John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973).

others[52], rejects the pseudo-neutrality of traditional music analysis in favour of a practice which explores music as part of the wider discourses of specific cultures. As such, "new musicology" owes much to post-structuralist and deconstructionist theory in general and, again, not only is most of this theory of central relevance to Beckett's later texts, but the exploration of this relationship can shed light upon that between contemporary literary and music theory.

While structuralism posits the possibility of providing an inventory of textual elements and their structuration, post-structuralism moves beyond this to examine the manner in which texts themselves subvert this process, rendering impossible any exhaustive attempt to classify meanings. This development can perhaps most easily be explored with reference to Roland Barthes' *S/Z*. In *S/Z*, Barthes, one of the major figures of structuralism, classifies the various codes upon which a classic readerly text[53] - Balzac's *Sarrasine* - is structured, providing a brilliant analysis of their relations and the conventions upon which they are dependent. At the same time, however, Barthes extends his analysis into an exploration of the manner in which *Sarrasine* actually moves beyond the apparent limitations of these codes - by way of the initially limited plurality offered by connotation - effectively presenting the text as covertly writerly. Thus *S/Z* seems to form a pivot, dependent upon the systematisation of structuralism while beginning to recognise the limits of that systematisation through the realisation that even (or perhaps especially) a classic realist text differs from itself by moving beyond the codes upon which it asserts itself to be reliant: as Barthes writes,

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[52]See Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice 1800-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). It is most particularly the work of Carolyn Abbate, Rose Rosengard Subotnik and Susan McClary, that, along with that of Kramer, has come to be described as formative in the development of "new musicology". See Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991); Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[53]In *S/Z* Barthes distinguishes between classic "readerly" texts and "writerly" texts (for which he reserves special value). The relevant passages are worth quoting at length, especially given their importance for subsequent post-structuralist and deconstructionist ideas: readerly texts are presented as products, whereas writerly texts aim "to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness - ... instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text.... The writerly text is a perpetual present ... the writerly text is *ourselves* writing.... To interpret a text is not to give it a ... meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it.... In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; ... the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language". Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 4-6.

the one text is not an (inductive) access to a Model, but an entrance into a network with a thousand entrances; to take this entrance is to aim, ultimately, not at a legal structure of norms and departures, a narrative or poetic Law, but at a perspective (of fragments, of voices from other texts, of codes), whose vanishing point is nonetheless ceaselessly pushed back, mysteriously opened: each (single) text is the very theory (and not the mere example) of this vanishing, of this difference which indefinitely returns, insubmissive.[54]

While *S/Z* displays the ambiguous relationship to inherited ideas that might be expected from any school of thought defined by the prefix "post" (in that it relies upon structuralist principles at the same time as beginning to break away from its founding tenets), the deconstructionist methods developed by Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man in particular mark a more substantial break with the structuralist attempt effectively to "tame" the meanings of a text by delineating its structural functions. As Christopher Norris puts it,

> deconstruction is avowedly 'post-structuralist' in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given or objectively 'there' in a text. Above all, it questions the assumption ... that structures of meaning correspond to some deep-laid mental 'set' or pattern of mind which determines the limits of intelligibility .... Deconstruction, on the contrary, starts out by rigorously *suspending* this assumed correspondence between mind, meaning and the concept of method which claims to unite them.[55]

Contrary to much critical opinion, therefore, deconstruction by no means devalues the meaningful content of a work, but instead asserts the text's existence as always in excess of any attempt to set out its layers of significance.

The fundamentals of Derridean deconstruction lie in a critique of the traditional structures of Western culture within which writing has always been presented as an inferior reduction or shadow of the "presence" of the voice in speech. Derrida demonstrates the ways in which Western philosophy, setting itself up as the privileged expression of rationality, has, since Plato, sought to remove the concept of writing from signification in order to maintain what is in Derrida's terms an illusory metaphysics of presence, a search for a "transcendental signified" independent of language[56]. This transcendentalism assumes the existence of an indivisible and unmediated world of essences with which we are ultimately able to make contact, thereby allowing for the redemptive idea of a final unity and the concept of Man (the male term being used deliberately) united in a common aim. However, this is dependent upon signification making reference to an established reality. Taking Saussurean linguistics, however, the arbitrary relationship between

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[54]*Ibid.*, 12.

[55]Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 3.

[56]See Alan Bass, "Introduction" to Jacques Derrida, *op. cit.*, xi.

the signifier and the signified and the differential structure of language reveals the inability of words to reflect any apparently objective external reality.

As a result, Derrida proposes the concept of language as *différance*, punning on the French for difference (in reference to language as a system of differences) and deferral (in reference to the postponement of absolute meaning that results from the infinite nature of the signifying process). From this perspective, the apparent priority of speech over writing is revealed as misleading; if language relies upon *différance*, then speech cannot be privileged as original presence over and above writing as it is itself only apparent as a result of some prior signifying process: "the philosophical tradition's repeated preference for speech over writing as a model of language's unmediated relation to meaning, truth, and subjectivity is shown in several varied readings to rely upon a submerged acknowledgement that it is the properties of writing which make speech possible"[57]. Meaning cannot absolutely precede writing, but rather "meaning is neither before nor after the act"[58]. Thus the priority of speech over writing, of philosophy over literature is undone; the sign is apparently liberated from the metaphysics of presence and it instead becomes possible to analyse literature as exploring by its very nature the activity of language, the process by which meaning is constituted, and the manifold meanings that result from the structural undecidability of a text.

At the same time, however, "even if the inherited opposition between signifier and signified can be shown to be programmed by the metaphysical desire for a transcendental, other-worldly meaning ... this does not mean that the opposition between signifier and signified can be abandoned as an historical delusion"[59]. For deconstruction does not simply aim to overturn the founding presumptions of metaphysics, but rather to radically suspend them: "deconstruction is not simply a reversal of categories which otherwise remain distinct and unaffected. It seeks to undo both a given order of priorities *and* the very system of conceptual oppositions that makes that order possible"[60]. In no way is Derrida attempting to demonstrate that writing is more fundamental than speech; rather, the whole enterprise of deconstruction aims, by means of the close interrogation of texts, to reveal the manner in which literature attempts to conceal its actual dependence upon the suppression of terms other than those privileged. The project therefore involves the use of "language against itself"[61], never attempting to move outside the text under

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[57] Derek Attridge, "Introduction" to Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 9.

[58] Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification," *op. cit.*, 11.

[59] Alan Bass, "Introduction" to Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, *op. cit.*, xi.

[60] Christopher Norris, *op. cit.*, 30.

[61] This phrase is taken from the title of Christopher Norris' chapter on Derrida in his book on deconstruction. See *ibid.*, 18-41.

consideration and "objectively" assess its operations as a self-enclosed system, but instead working closely through the text in order to locate the hidden meanings upon which the apparent meanings are covertly dependent. Thus "Derrida tries to do justice to the text as radically *situated* - written and read and re-read at particular times and places - and as possessing a singularity (each time) which can never be reduced by criticism or theoretical contemplation"[62]. The text therefore exists as an "emptying-out" of meaning which remains always meaningful, hence Derrida's additional concern to make the texts "strange", reading them at their own level of difficulty rather than reducing them to analytical constructs. As a result Derrida's work is itself literary; the attempt to respond at a level of complexity that corresponds to that of the text effects in that response a further tension between the literal and the figural, thereby undoing the distinction between literature and criticism.

In this way, deconstruction asserts itself as a textual practice which engages itself closely with a text, first examining the binary oppositions upon which the structure is dependent in order to provide a provisional strategic reversal of those oppositions, revealing the hidden dependency upon the subordinate terms. Finally, this displacement is employed as a means of liberating the terms from those oppositions, generating a field of differences. Deconstruction is therefore closely bound to the texts themselves and constantly watches over its own manoeuvres, re-working its processes in the awareness of the tendency to reduce a text's operations to a limited number of isolated strategies.

Paul de Man, like Derrida, advocates the deconstruction of a text's privileged terms, seeking out the stress-points at which rhetorical strategies are deployed so as to contain the hidden meanings, meanings which, once uncovered, can be seen to subvert the apparent logic[63]. For de Man, texts always generate alternative readings, and any critical reading will be dependent upon ignoring certain levels. Thus "critics' moments of greatest blindness with regard to their own critical assumptions are also the moments at which they achieve their greatest insights"[64]; a text can support any number of such readings which can themselves be deconstructed so as to reveal their own rhetorical strategies, but the text will never be fully demystified. Again, deconstruction here involves a close and active engagement with the text's

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[62]Derek Attridge, *op. cit.*, 15.

[63]Paul de Man is probably the U. S.-based deconstructionist closest to Derrida's determination that theory should not stray from close engagement with the actual text. There are, however, some differences in focus between the two, and these are mainly bound up with de Man's sense that a text has an implicit understanding of its own rhetorical processes - that it in some sense contains its own deconstruction - and that there is therefore a limit-point beyond which deconstruction cannot reach. For a discussion of this aspect of de Man's thinking, see Christopher Norris, *op. cit.*, 105-8.

[64]Paul de Man "The Rhetoric of Blindness" in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 109.

rhetorical strategies; the differential structure of language renders self-identity an impossibility, and thus any truly literary text will effect a continual interrogation of its own structures of meaning as a result of the tension of its rhetorical manoeuvres. The question of producing a reading cannot be taken for granted, for the text has no positive existence and "leads to no transcendental perception, intuition or knowledge but merely solicits an understanding that has to remain immanent because it poses the problem of its intelligibility in its own terms"[65]. Similarly, in "Edmund Jabès and the Question of the Book", Derrida asserts the impossibility of making readings in the traditional sense, writing of the book as a "radical illegibility" which "is not irrationality, is not despair provoking non-sense", but is rather the very possibility of the book[66].

As Christopher Norris points out, "within Derrida's writing there runs a theme of utopian longing for the textual 'free play' which would finally break with the instituted wisdom of language"[67]. Yet at the same time, Derrida seems to recognise the futility of this, always working "in the knowledge that there is no getting 'beyond' metaphysics, no language that would not be in some sense complicit with the language it seeks to deconstruct"[68]. Here we begin to establish the link back to the reception of postmodern ideas. Despite its specifically textual focus, deconstruction clearly shares with aspects of postmodern theory a critique of representation and meaning that seeks to undermine the traditional dependence upon redemptive narratives of unity and transcendence, but which at the same time remains aware of its relevance to questions of ethics[69]. As Hal Foster writes, "postmodernism is hard to conceive without continental theory, structuralism and post-structuralism in particular. Both have led us to reflect on culture as a corpus of codes and myths"[70]. Just as those who criticise the whole of postmodern theory as politically and culturally stultifying do so by conflating the problematisation of signification with its celebration, those who criticise deconstruction as valorising the endless free-play of signs and the ultimate emptiness of texts do so as a result of similarly false and over-simplistic reading, refusing to differentiate between

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[65]*Ibid.*, 107.

[66]Jacques Derrida, "Edmund Jabès and the Question of the Book" in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference, op. cit.*, 77.

[67]Christopher Norris, *op. cit.*, 49.

[68]_____, *What's Wrong With Postmodernism: Critical theory and the ends of philosophy* (Hemel Hempstead, Herts.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 200.

[69]Steven Connor points out that critics tend to ignore this fact: "although the work of Jacques Derrida is shot through with questions of value and ethics, it is striking that the deconstructive critical practices that have been developed in his name draw almost entirely upon his work on linguistic and interpretative matters, and appear to be largely ignorant of the concern with the ethical shown from the beginning of his career". Steven Connor, *Theory and Cultural Value, op. cit.*, 11-12.

[70]Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface" in Hal Foster (ed.), *op. cit.*, x.

positions[71]. As E. Ann Kaplan recognises, by avoiding the simplistic acceptance of the problematisation of representation, it is possible to "differentiate what may be called a 'utopian' postmodernism (which moves in a Derridean direction) from a commercial or 'co-opted' one (which moves in a Baudrillardian direction)"[72].

Again, Beckett's work is of central relevance to these arguments, demonstrating the importance of the very ideas addressed by deconstruction while at the same time providing evidence that a deconstructive approach to language and the subject does not necessarily lead to meaninglessness. Many critics have explored the link between Beckett and deconstruction (especially Derridean deconstruction)[73], showing how Beckett's work exposes the fundamentally arbitrary and hence untrustworthy nature of the linguistic sign, rendering impossible absolute self-presence and thereby problematising the Cartesian *Cogito* and the transcendental basis of metaphysics. At the same time, the texts demonstrate that the rhetorical structures of language effect the impossibility of renouncing the urge towards that redemptive goal, and this paradox is precisely that which is central to the project of deconstruction. For both Derrida and Beckett the transcendent rational subject is called into question - consider, for example, the fragmentation of the subject of *Company* - and Beckett's works concentrate increasingly upon their own textuality, decentering the subject position initially (in the *Trilogy*) by the continual re-invention of other selves. Such tendencies are described explicitly in Beckett's comments to Lawrence Shainberg: "he tried to describe the work he wanted to do now. 'It has to do with a fugitive "I".... It's an embarrassment of pronouns. I'm

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[71] As Christopher Norris shows, such criticisms are often more applicable to the great deal of theory that has developed in the name of deconstruction, but which actually departs significantly from the central contentions of Derrida and de Man (see Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong With Postmodernism op. cit.*, 55-6). As Norris suggests, "the zeal for deconstruction has not ... always gone along with the kind of argumentative rigour Derrida calls for.... Indeed, its appeal for some critics rests very largely on the promise of an open-ended free play of style and speculative thought" (see Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice, op. cit.*, 91). Geoffrey Hartman, for example, is a prominent exponent of this "dizzy, exuberant" deconstruction. Critics of Derrida often conflate these positions or base their readings upon selected passages taken out of context. Derrida expressed most cogently to John Searle his determination that deconstruction should not be considered a license for critical free-play without value judgements: "this definition of the deconstructionist is *false* (that's right: false, not true) and feeble: it supposes a bad (that's right: not good) and feeble reading of numerous texts, first of all mine, which therefore must finally be read or re-read" (*ibid.*, 158).

[72] E. Ann Kaplan, "Introduction" to E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Postmodernism and its Discontents* (London: Verso, 1988), 2.

[73] Amongst many other texts, see David Watson, *op. cit.*; Floyd Merrell, *Deconstruction Reframed* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1985); Thomas Trezise, *Into the Breach: Samuel Beckett and the Ends of Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990); Herbert Blau, "The Bloody Show and the Eye of Prey: Beckett and Deconstruction," *Theatre Journal* (March 1987), 5-19. For a different perspective, see Iain Wright, "What matter who's speaking?: Beckett, the authorial subject, and contemporary critical theory," *Comparative Criticism* V (1983), 59-83.

searching for the non-pronounial"[74]. As Gabrielle Schwab has shown, with *The Unnamable* Beckett reaches a point where it is no longer possible for the protagonist unquestioningly to assume the central subject position:

> since the Unnamable takes it for granted that he can neither be silent nor attain self-presence in speech, he performs a paradoxical act of speaking against language. This seems to be the only way of speaking while avoiding any manifestation of the subject within speech. In order to speak against language, he tries to empty language of its semantic content.[75]

As the Unnamable says, the texts can proceed only "by aporia"[76]. This term is also used frequently by Derrida, and as Leslie Hill suggests, for both Beckett and Derrida aporia acts as a figure of "indifference", typically taking the form of "a dualistic relation stated and then effaced or, conversely, of unity posed and then divided against itself"[77] (as is the case with the two travellers of *Molloy,* who are depicted so as to be both identified with one another and yet different). Thus Beckett's work constantly seems to move towards meanings which vanish from view, and from the perspective of deconstruction this corresponds to the fundamental effect of the language system: as Shainberg suggests, although Beckett "has often said that his real work began when he 'gave up hope for meaning,' he hates hopelessness and longs for meaning as much as anyone who has never read *Molloy* or seen *Endgame*"[78].

From the subject in crisis of *The Unnamable,* Beckett's later work extends the critique of signification by means of a process which gradually distils away some of the anxiety of the earlier texts. As Herbert Blau says, Beckett's late writing explores precisely Derrida's question of how to negotiate "some navigable common ground between absence and presence, the irreducible difference between the exile from origins and affirmation of play"[79], and this manifests itself in the form of partial subjects negotiating their way through worlds which exist as texts in the process of creation. Due to the nature of the linguistic sign, then, Beckett's subjects and their worlds exist in states akin to the Derridean concept of "sous rature" (under erasure), as traces which are the "mark of the absence of a presence, an already

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[74]Lawrence Shainberg, *op. cit.,* 134.

[75]Gabrielle Schwab, *Subjects Without Selves: Transitional Texts in Modern Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 156.

[76]Samuel Beckett, "The Unnamable," *op. cit.,* 267. "Aporia" is Greek for an "unpassable path" and a term for a rhetorical impasse, a site of doubt and paradoxical indeterminacy within which distinctions are unsettled and suspended. In a recent article, Anna Smith explores in detail the relevance of the term to *Worstward Ho.* See "Proceeding by Aporia: Perception and Poetic Language in Samuel Beckett's *Worstward Ho,*" *Journal of Beckett Studies* III/1 (Autumn 1993), 21-37.

[77]Leslie Hill, *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 65.

[78]Lawrence Shainberg, *op. cit.,* 109.

[79]Herbert Blau, *op. cit.,* 12.

always absent presence, of the lack of origin that is the condition of thought and expression"[80]. Thus it is hardly surprising that when Derrida was asked why he had never written about Beckett, he replied he felt too close to the work: "precisely because of this proximity, it is too hard for me, too easy and too hard. I have perhaps avoided him a bit because of this identification.... How could I write in French in the wake of or 'with' someone who does operations on this language which seem so strong and so necessary, but which must remain idiomatic"[81]. Similarly, when asked if he considered Beckett's writing to be already so deconstructive that it left little to say, Derrida replied that this was undoubtedly true, adding, "the composition, the rhetoric, the construction and the rhythm of his works, even the ones that seem the most 'decomposed', that's what 'remains' finally the most 'interesting', that's the work, that's the signature, this remainder that remains when the thematics is exhausted"[82].

As Carla Locatelli says of *Worstward Ho*, in later Beckett "a poetics of 'better failure' reveals that the mimetic ideal of good representation ... should be replaced by the awareness of incessant semiosis, and by a preference for texts characterised by a perpetual regeneration of figures"[83]. In Derridean style, Beckett's protagonists increasingly come to recognise the apparent self-presence of the subject as an illusory effect of language, an effect which can be deconstructed from within but never totally eschewed. As Helga Schwalm writes, "it is the very double nature which Derrida has of course conceded, oscillating between absence of meaning and its necessary illusion of presence which drives Malone into the spirals of self-*de*flection and self-*re*flection"[84]; beyond this, the same drive leads the later works almost (but not quite) to a reconciliation with incertitude and provisionality. Additionally, fundamental to this negative progression is the use of repetition: central to Beckett's work (and to the Derridean critique) is the recognition of language's capacity for re-use. As Steven Connor suggests, Beckett's texts (both within each work and between one and another) constantly re-enact the struggle between the idea of repetition as a faithful copy (which attempts to reinforce the presence of the "original") and as the reproduction which inevitably undermines and disrupts that very presence, questioning its status as original[85].

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[80]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface" to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), xvii.
[81]Jacques Derrida, "This Strange Institution Called Literature," trans. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature, op. cit.*, 60.
[82]*Ibid.*, 61.
[83]Carla Locatelli, *op. cit.*, 259.
[84]Helga Schwalm, *op. cit.*, 9.
[85]See Steven Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text , op. cit.*, 185.

The texts seem to propel themselves towards closure (consider, for example, the repeated use of the word "On" in the opening sentences of *Ill Seen Ill Said*[86]), while at the same time acknowledging that one can only go "Nohow On"[87], that any sense of completion is betrayed because the text is only ending "yet again"[88]. The insubstantial status of the narrators of the *Fizzles*, *Ill Seen Ill Said* and *Worstward Ho* (for example), combined with the textuality of the characters and their locations, focuses on the process by which a subject comes into being, rather than on selfhood as essential and original. Thus the subjects become inseparable from their depiction within their particular locations, and there is no longer any clear differentiation between the inside and outside of the text, no longer any sense of the writer and/or narrator as positions from which the text is produced and controlled with reference to an objective field of stable references. Instead the subject exists as a continual process of composition which constantly re-works its own progress, careful not to include extraneous material which could give the impression of (inevitably false) objective knowledge of that beyond the text.

This process is found in its most concentrated form in *Worstward Ho*, where every proposition is deconstructed as soon as presented, but it is also apparent more generally in the other late prose. The care with which the texts inch forward generates a sense of anxiety by its very caution (an effect which is often enhanced by its mimicking of the physical movement of characters as they explore their terrain). The description of the cabin early in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, for example, is extremely self-conscious, the use of the word "Careful" marking the need to refrain from including information extraneous to that discovered in the actual writing process:

> The cabin. Its situation. Careful. On. At the inexistent centre of a formless place. Rather more circular than otherwise finally. Flat to be sure. To cross it in a straight line takes her from five to ten minutes. Depending on her speed and radius taken. Here she who loves to - here she who can only stray never strays.... How came a cabin in such a place? How came? Careful. Before replying that in the far past at the time of its building there was clover growing to its very walls .... The two zones form a roughly circular whole. As though outlined by a trembling hand. Diameter. Careful. Say one furlong. On an average. Beyond the unknown.[89]

Thus the description of the cabin's position is evocative yet lacks stable substance, and the arbitrary and approximate nature of any description is emphasised (whether

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[86]"From where she lies she sees Venus rise. On. From where she lies when the skies are clear she sees Venus rise followed by the sun. Then she rails at the source of life. On." Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen Ill Said* (London: John Calder, 1982), 7.

[87]Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, op. cit., 7.

[88]_____, *For to End Yet Again* (London: John Calder, 1976).

[89]_____, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, op. cit., 8-9.

with regard to the size and shape of the cabin or to the woman's attitude to the place).

Beckett once described his wish to "bore one hole after another" in language, and to represent this attitude to "the word, through words. In this dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies all"[90]. Here, this seems to be achieved by means of the oscillation between the absence of meaning and the inescapable illusion of presence; Carla Locatelli describes the writing in terms of "subjectivity without a self"[91], and this is appropriate to the emphasis upon the process of "becoming". The anxiety of subjectivity and ontology is projected by the identification with the compositional process as the only means of "self"-definition, yet at the same time a degree of serenity is achieved (however limited), the increasing desperation of the *Trilogy* and *How It Is* having dispersed. Instead of struggling with the apparently objective nature of knowledge, the self and representation, this later prose accepts and explores the resultant instability. The effect is of the sense of meaning being generated by the text's actual movement towards an infinitely receding and probably illusory final definition. Here there is a sense in which while nothing is certain, everything is possible (although the caution of the texts guards against this suggestion being anything more than tentative, an element of anxiety always remaining). In this way, Beckett is able to use the very nature of language against itself (more comprehensively, perhaps, than Derrida could describe), exploiting the very problematics which in the earlier works caused such anguish. Perhaps, as Leslie Hill writes,

> the single most important reason for Beckett's success, with critics and audiences alike, is the questions his work raises as to the shape and character of the negative, the different, the other, the something without name that haunts not only the words and rhythms of Beckett's writing, but also the words with which audiences, too, strive to pattern their lives[92].

Both the residual anxiety and the serenity of Beckett's late texts, then, are effects of a compositional process which comes to seem significant precisely by its mimicking of the very movement in search of meaning which is its subject. In describing Beckett's work in such terms we again seem to be returning towards a position which echoes Susanne Langer's account of musical meaning, but this time, rather unexpectedly, via a deconstructionist approach. Through deconstruction, however, the vital importance of the temporal deferment of meaning in the process of signification becomes clear. Further, this focus on temporality as central to the

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[90]_____, *Disjecta, op. cit.,* 172.

[91]Carla Locatelli, *op. cit.,* 246.

[92]Leslie Hill, *op. cit.,* 163.

impossibility of self-identity begins, especially when considered in relation to Langer's ideas, to suggest a different approach to meaning in both music and Beckett, an approach which can begin to clarify the relationship between the two. This involves the exploration of one specific area that has developed within deconstruction: allegory. As a result of the terms within which allegory has recently been discussed, contemporary allegorical theory can be seen as a useful means of examining not only the generation of meaningful structures in Beckett's late texts and in music, but also the relationship between the two and their further relationship to certain approaches to representation within some postmodern thought.

As Craig Owens has pointed out, in general "to impute an allegorical motive to contemporary art is to venture into proscribed territory, for allegory has been condemned for nearly two centuries as an aesthetic aberration, the antithesis of art"[93]. However, postmodern theory has recently re-evaluated the relevance of the figure, returning to its etymology (which lies in the Greek *allegoria*, meaning "speaking otherwise") in order to reconsider its possibilities as a means of exploring the ability of language to signify on many levels at once. Until recently, allegorical criticism was founded upon the simplistic concept of a contained text which, while elaborating one level of meaning, demands that the reader decipher another hidden layer. This "flat" depiction of allegory as a point-by-point correspondence between narrative and symbolic levels, however, presents a superficial reduction of allegory's fundamental polysemy. Contemporary discussion of the figure, therefore, seeks to "dramatize or enact the possibilities inherent in the linguistic material of the object-text, and does so not by cancelling or excavating the surface of the text in search of deeper meanings, but by improvising on the material of the original text"[94]. As Maureen Quilligan puts it, "what is radical about this redefinition is the slight but fundamental shift in emphasis away from our traditional insistence on allegory's distinction between word said and word meant to the simultaneity of the process of signifying multiple meaning"[95].

In his discussion of allegory, Paul de Man suggests that while allegory and symbol have always formed a contrastive pair, since the second half of the eighteenth century the figure of the symbol has dominated that of allegory. Within this tradition, "allegory appears as dryly rational and dogmatic in its reference to a meaning that it does not itself constitute, whereas the symbol is founded on an

[93]Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," (Part 1) *October* XII (1980), 67.

[94]Steven Connor *Postmodernist Culture, op. cit.*, 214.

[95]Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 26.

intimate unity between the image that rises up before the senses and the supersensory totality that the image suggests"[96]. De Man sees allegory as the result of the interference between the literal and rhetorical uses of language, each of which seeks to deny the other validity: "in most allegories a literal reading will 'deconstruct' a metaphorical one.... Yet because literal language is itself rhetorical ... such readings are inevitably implicated in what they set out to expose, and the result is allegory"[97]. In this way, allegory refuses the closure of meaning, engendering supplementary figural reading which "narrates the unreadability of the prior narration"[98]: consequently, "allegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read"[99]. Thus the consideration of the allegorical function of a text clarifies its undecidability and its existence as a repeated "emptying-out" of meaning.

In de Man's terms the fundamental difference between the figures of symbol and allegory is that while the symbol (following Coleridge) is conceived as a spatial simultaneity wherein the image coincides with its substance, in allegory it is the temporal unfolding of the structure that is fundamental[100]. Therefore, "whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference"[101]. Thus allegory reduces the reference to signifieds to secondary importance, and de Man therefore sees allegorical reading as more truthful and less delusory in its refusal to hold out for the unity of the symbol.

Allegory, then, acts as a textual doubling, but the temporal structure of the addition of one expression to another allows the proliferation of significance beyond this double. Additionally, this can operate either at the level of the text or of criticism, destabilising the boundary between the two and problematising the objective status of the work and its reception. A correspondence with the work of Derrida is here apparent; this notion of allegorical criticism as supplementary (in that the text is "read through another"[102]) relates to Derridean "post-criticism" - performative criticism which "repeats" or "mimics" the text under study, acting at the same level of complexity as that text in order to produce a new parallel text which is of the same kind but different. Such criticism is itself literary in its "tracing

[96]Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Blindness and Insight, op. cit.*, 189.

[97]Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism," (Part 2) *October* XIII (1980), 63.

[98]Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press (1979), 205.

[99]*Ibid.*

[100]Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *op. cit.*, 206-7.

[101]*Ibid.*, 207.

[102]Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a theory of Postmodernism," (Part 1) *op. cit.*, 69.

of the surface of its object of study"[103]; it seeks to re-explore the rhetorical strategies of the text, doubling them in order to expose them to scrutiny (rather than attempting to provide a supposedly objective description of content).

Beckett's adverse opinion of allegory (along with his rejection of symbolism) was explicit: this has been discussed by Marius Buning[104]. As with many critics, however, his opinion seems to be based on the traditional notion of allegory as establishing a rather banal step-by-step correspondence between the narrative levels. As Buning points out, allegory has actually avoided any such stable manifestation, but has rather acted at various levels of explicitness, "from naive and continuous to ironic and indirect allegory, depending on the interaction between the literal and the symbolic level of the text. Modern allegory is to be located towards the latter two stages, that is as a *free-style* allegory in which the relation between concretion and abstraction is unsystematic and intermittent"[105]. As Buning goes on to suggest, the polysemous nature of "modern" allegory as both a writerly technique and a readerly process is highly relevant to Beckett's texts:

> although they would seem to resist the reader's and the critic's desire for
> understanding as far as possible, yet they also invite us, however indirectly,
> temporarily, and provisionally, 'to make sense' of them, on condition that such
> hermeneutic activities are undertaken in the spirit of humbleness and with a
> constant awareness of the fundamental polysemous nature of the texts[106].

From early on, Beckett's texts follow the typical allegorical model of a journey or even a quest, but resist traditional allegorical interpretation by rejecting any superficial correspondence between the literal and "higher" levels of meaning. It is this very resistance, however, which activates the polysemy of the texts, effecting a more sophisticated mode of allegory. This then opens up the question of significance through its interrogation of its own structures and of its linguistic condition. While the earlier journeys comprise a search for absolute self-knowledge, the subsequent crisis of the subject acknowledges explicitly the temporal displacement that is fundamental to selfhood. As a result, Beckett's later texts often trace iconically the shape of such journeys or searches, but lack the specific sense of looking for something believed to be within reach. Instead, this movement maps that of the temporal structure of language and hence of the subject, always displaced from itself, always in motion towards ever-receding self-presence and unified meaning. In this sense, Beckett's later work articulates the fundamental shape of allegory.

[103]Gregory L. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism" in Hal Foster, *op. cit.*, 93.
[104]See Marius Buning, "Allegory's Double Bookkeeping: The Case of Samuel Beckett," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui* I (1992), 69-78.
[105]*Ibid.*, 71.
[106]*Ibid.*, 72-3.

The movement from one Beckett text to the next is itself allegorical in its continual re-working of similar ground. As the subject matter and object content is gradually minimised, the texts become increasingly the same yet different, often both in terms of content and compositional technique (although fundamental to this is the fact that it becomes more and more difficult to divorce the two). Similarly, the process of translation emphasises this, re-casting what are supposedly the same texts in different form. Translation is always dependent upon the logic of the supplement, a logic within which the use of repetition calls into question the categories of original and copy (the original being as dependent upon the possibility of repetition as is the copy upon the apparent fact of an original). Beckett's deployment of repetition both within and between texts emphasises this aspect of translation. Additionally, however, not only does each text exist in at least two languages in the author's own translations, but those translations are rarely direct and often involve significant changes of content, and this foregrounds the difficulty of regarding any text as the original[107]. Seen in this light, the process of translation which is so fundamental to Beckett's work is in de Man's terms essentially an allegorical process which opens up the polysemy of the text by exposing the non-coincident nature of linguistic meaning.

In his discussion of allegory, de Man spends some time examining its relationship to irony, starting from the recognition that both are founded upon the discontinuous nature of the sign-meaning relationship[108]. With particular reference to Baudelaire, de Man defines irony in terms of its duplication of the self into an empirical self immersed in everyday concerns, and a self that is also present in the world but which, though its attempt at self-definition, recognises that it is itself an element within the signifying process[109]. This duplication is dependent on the fact that language is in everyday existence made to act as a means of describing common experiences, functioning "not as the material itself, but as a tool by means of which the heterogeneous material of experience is more-or-less adequately made to fit"[110]. However, the projection of the self out of this world and into philosophical reflection transfers it into a world constituted out of and in language, a world wherein language is itself the material. Thus the ironic self comprises the inevitable fall from the attempt to maintain the difference from nature implied by the reflective capacity; de Man describes this as an attempt to move beyond the inauthentic, empirical self

[107]See Brian T. Fitch., *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of the Bilingual Work* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).
[108]Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *op. cit.*, 209.
[109]*Ibid.*, 213.
[110]*Ibid.*

which inevitably leads to the mystification of the "lyrical" self. However, it will at some point be realised that this mystified self is based on the false assumption of superiority over nature, and this effects a fall back into the original state[111]. As Frank Lentricchia suggests,

> all we can hope for is a self-consciousness, carried by ironic language, which will lift us into the 'knowledge of inauthenticity', a state not to be confused with a positive knowledge of inauthenticity, a doing and being of authenticity.... Nothing is left for the self except to 'ironize its own predicament', to observe with detachment the 'temptation to which it is about to succumb'[112].

Thus de Man describes this double structure of absolute irony as "the consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness; it is a consciousness of a non-consciousness, a reflection on madness from the inside of madness itself"[113].

The structures of allegory and irony are, therefore, fundamentally similar. De Man perceives that the major distinction between the two concerns their deployment of time: whereas allegory acts as a "successive mode capable of engendering duration as an illusion of a continuity that it knows to be illusionary"[114], irony takes place much more quickly, as an instantaneous and sudden fall wherein "two selves ... are simultaneously present, juxtaposed within the same moment but as two irreconcilable and disjointed beings"[115]. For de Man, the truly literary novel is caught between diachronic allegory and the instantaneity of the present, and this seems particularly appropriate to late Beckett; ironic paradox, while ever-present to a degree, is often highlighted at precise moments, bringing into temporary focus the collision which lies at the heart of allegory. In these texts, the relationship between allegory and irony can be defined as that between the paradox of the subject in search of self-presence and the precise moments at which this paradox is precisely evoked, pin-pointed by a specific (usually linguistic) manoeuvre (such as when Moran finally tells us that, after all, "it was not midnight. It was not raining"[116]).

Additionally, it is irony that tempers the inclination towards metaphysics, suddenly drawing the protagonists away from the attempt to transcend their situations by elaborating stories which might provide their experiences with a coherent form (again, consider Hamm's wish to tell his story, or the *Trilogy's* repeated creation of fictional others). Thus Beckett's texts articulate the fundamental structure of irony, exploring the tendency towards mystification and the attempt to

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111*Ibid.*

112Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), 296-7.

113Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *op. cit.*, 216.

114*Ibid.*, 226.

115*Ibid.*

116Samuel Beckett, "Molloy," *op. cit.*, 162.

achieve transcendent significance, while simultaneously exposing the inauthenticity of that tendency.

In much of Beckett's late short prose, such precisely identified moments of irony are far less prevalent, partly as a consequence of the lack of identifiable "characters" or even objects. This more concentrated writing, however, corresponds more exactly to de Man's model of allegory, as the texts double themselves more closely, covering themselves at every turn. Through that very process, the texts focus the attention directly upon the act of composition, highlighting the difficulty of accounting for the sense of significance. The texts no longer present themselves as simultaneously demanding and rejecting traditional "flat" allegorical interpretation, but as a result move closer to the fundamental structure of allegory, the temporal deferment of the closure of meaning and the resultant polysemy being more fully exposed.

Given the terms in which the figure of allegory and its relevance to Beckett's work have thus far been discussed, a link back to Susanne Langer's conception of music seems inevitable. Allegory's emphasis upon polysemy and upon the evocation of a sense of significance in the face of the continual deferment of the signified seems to correspond to Langer's ideas. As was seen in the previous chapter, Langer's theory has much to recommend it, but her description of music in terms of a symbol is problematic in its implication that, as such, its meaning can be concretised in a transcendent unity. However, this implication - the major stumbling block for Langer's critics - belies Langer's recognition that it is music's temporality that is fundamental to what she describes as the "unconsummated" nature of this "symbolism". Effectively, it is the working of time that denies music that concretisation and, in similar fashion, it is the temporal deferment of meaning that is central to the difference between symbol and allegory. While Langer sees music as "symbolic" of the emotive life, her realisation that this correspondence is necessarily inexplicit and dynamic, and that it can act at manifold levels, leads to the qualification of this symbolism as "unconsummated". In this way, while the traditional "flat" interpretation of allegory may seem wholly inappropriate for musical usage, Langer's conception is actually thoroughly congruent with the focus of recent allegorical theory; replacing her concept of symbolism with that of allegory removes the discrepancy between the undoubted worth of Langer's writings and the problems that arise from her terminology. Additionally, to move the focus of Langer's work away from the designation of a symbolism and towards the workings of allegory is to remove (as far as is ever possible) the tendency towards the metaphysical - a tendency which Langer herself seems to attempt to deny by her determination to account as thoroughly as possible for the significance of music.

Thus, once we remove the Schopenhauerian transcendentalist background upon which Langer's work uncomfortably rests, this new perspective reveals that in many ways her writings are very modern, prefiguring certain ideas that have only emerged more fully in recent theory.

Here, again, we find that from another position, the attempt to account for the significance of both Beckett and music can proceed along similar lines, helping to shed light upon the relationship between linguistic and musical meaning and upon both musicology and literary theory. Many aspects of postmodern and deconstructionist theory are of relevance to Beckett and to music theory as a result of the general focus upon the undecidability of meaning. Allegorical theory, however, seems particularly helpful in clarifying the sense of significance that is generated despite the minimal referentiality of both music and (to an extent) late Beckett. Using Langer's terms, Beckett's late work can be seen to evolve a sense of significance from its very process of composition and the expressive dynamic ebb and flow which results, but this can now be seen as dependent on the essentially allegorical (and ironical) condition of the texts, on their fundamental state of *différance* and the repeated doubling of the progress towards a self-presence which, by its very linguistic nature, will always recede from view. Thus the musical effect is a result of the heightened awareness of the linguistic condition of the text (of its "enacting of the possibilities inherent within the linguistic material"), while that condition is at the same time a result of the fundamentally musical structure of that very reduction of reference. In this way, allegorical theory can provide a useful focus for the exploration of the meaningfulness of Beckett's late texts, but the discussion of those texts also clarifies the relationship between language and music.

The relevance of allegorical theory to music can, however, be taken beyond the general "emptiness" of the sign. This may seem surprising, given that musical aesthetics has historically been intimately bound up with the privileging of symbol over allegory. For Schopenhauer and followers music was the highest art-form, able to provide access to ultimate truth through the unity of subject and object. On the other hand (in apparent opposition to this approach) lay Hanslick's formalist standpoint, seeing music as purely abstract structures. Either way, however, music was considered a means of uniting philosophical thought with the perception of the world, providing - like language but in more direct form - a mode of unmediated symbolic reflection: "if literature henceforth aspired to the condition of music, then it did so in the shape of a symbolist aesthetic which dreamed that language might at least momentarily transcend these hateful antinomies, thus managing to reconcile the world of phenomenal perception with the realm of noumenal reason"[117].

117Christopher Norris, "Utopian Deconstruction: Ernst Bloch, Paul de Man and the politics of music" in Christopher Norris (ed.), *Music and the Politics of Culture* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988),

As Alan Street has pointed out, such notions of symbolic unity and organic wholeness have traditionally formed the basis of most musical analysis. Street suggests that the attraction of the notion of the work as a symbolic whole has resulted in music analysis developing reductionist tendencies, tending to iron out disjunction and conflict in favour of synthesis, and thereby presenting an illusion of objectivity which actually comprises "nothing other than a generalised state of false-consciousness"[118]. Street discusses various approaches to music analysis, moving from Schenker's Hegelian organicist conception of the art-work as exemplifying the absolute Idea, through the "humbler sort of organicism" of pitch-class set theory, to Meyer's information-theory model. Even musical semiotics is found guilty; despite its attempts to avoid assumptions of objectivity by allowing higher-level constructs to emerge only as a consequence of the method of segment-identification, the method often configures this distribution in terms of a plot, thereby implying the elaboration of symbolic wholes. From this, Street suggests that analysts have tended to ignore the impossibility of objective explanation, providing representations (whether in the form of prose, score, or graphs) that effectively imply the manifestation of the work as a static, spatial entity, rather than as a temporally-realised process.

From this point of view, music analysis has much in common with literary New Criticism, which makes a comparable assumption of objectivity as a result of the assertion of the existence of a common-sensical interpretative community. Both reveal a "wish to identify the wholeness and integrity of the interpretative image with that of the work itself"[119] and thereby, despite an apparent opposition to the mystifications of German Idealism, display a similar desire for original truth and presence. Street suggests that de Man's theory of allegory, with its focus upon the temporal displacement of identity, could be equally useful for musical analysis, providing a means of avoiding the tendency to assume unity and wholeness as guiding principles (whether explicitly or covertly). De Man himself briefly recognises music as aligned with allegory, describing it as a "persistently frustrated intent towards meaning"[120]. For de Man, this frustration orients music permanently

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317. Here, Norris also examines the relationship between music and de Man's exploration of allegory, but in the context of the philosophy of Ernst Bloch. Although there is not room to explore this topic further, the terms of this discussion in many ways correspond to the treatment of music and language and the relationship to Langer presented in this thesis.

118Alan Street, "Superior Myths, Dogmatic Allegories: The Resistance to Musical Unity," *Music Analysis* VIII/1-2 (March-July 1989), 80. Street's point again highlights the importance of Lydia Goehr's exploration of the work-concept's emergence in music history, and the analytical failure to recognise the historical and cultural nature of this concept. As Goehr writes, "the fact that analysis has been designed not to treat different sorts of subject-matter, but rather to capture only the pure ontological character - the so-called 'logic' - of any given phenomenon, turns out to be the source of all its trouble". Lydia Goehr, *op. cit.*, 86.

119Alan Street, *op. cit.*, 102.

120Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness," *op. cit.*, 129.

towards the future, continually deferring the closure of meaning. Thus "diachronic structures such as music, melody, or allegory are favoured over pseudo-synchronic structures such as painting, harmony, or mimesis because the latter mislead one into believing in a stability of meaning that does not exist"[121].

Literary allegory results from the tension between the deployment of rhetorical strategies in the striving towards transcendent unity, and the simultaneous resistance to that impulse within those very structures. Street suggests that allegorical theory allows musical works to be considered in terms of comparable structural conflicts which manifest themselves both in and through the work's "rhetorical" devices. From this perspective, the allegorical nature of a musical text is a result of the inevitable disjunction between its ambiguity and its drive towards a totalising conception: "consequently interpretation is understood less as a matter of forging a path (*pace* Webern) than as one of being drawn into labyrinths of structural 'undecidability'"[122]. As a result, any analytical truth-claims can be deconstructed into their dependence upon the suppression of other terms. Street even suggests that music should be viewed as the "allegorical art *par excellence*"[123]; the resistance to a semantic continuum effects the work's manifestation as more purely temporal than is the case with literature, and the structural undecidability is consequently more clearly apparent.

As Street suggests, the tendency is for formalist analysis to be satisfied once a stable configuration of a work has been achieved. Admittedly, such readings rarely claim to be absolute. Nevertheless, there remains a failure to recognise that the initial acknowledgement of diversity - that which is required by any conception of unity - is itself responsible for the meaningful residue that remains in excess of the analytical process. The result is often the "subjugation of a genuinely temporal art to the service of a spatial aesthetic"[124]. Additionally, the symbolic explanation of the work's interrelationships (whether in the form of a graph, or of a prose narrative of cause and effect) is dependent upon a false assumption of linguistic communication as unproblematic due to the supposed unity of the sign. Effectively, while musical analysis recognises only those elements which conform to the required representation of unity, this process is always undone by the temporality of the art-form, the manifestation of which activates the resistance to any such reduction within the material itself.

Even if music analysis declares its acceptance that a particular reading of a work may not be absolute, this is not the same as recognising the fully allegorical

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121*Ibid.*, 132-3.
122Alan Street, *op. cit.*, 103.
123*Ibid.*
124*Ibid.*, 105.

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workings of the art-form and its structural power to resist reduction. On the other hand, as Street points out, this scepticism of analytical truth-claims does not imply that all readings are equally valid. This conclusion is one that has been reached by some critical theory, where deconstruction has too often been construed as a validation of the pragmatic idea that "anything goes". As Street observes, such an approach may similarly appeal to some musicologists, seeming to provide an open field of opportunity: "for most music theorists, the opportunity to treat observation languages and even unifying interpretations ... as part of the down-to-earth apparatus which helps us to 'do what we want to do' would no doubt go a long way towards redeeming the contemporary situation"[125]. A reaction in such terms is, however, unfaithful to allegory's demand for close reading, for the engagement with and interrogation of the "text" and its strategies. In no way, therefore, does this approach involve abandoning the possibility of making valid judgements. In fact it is dependent on that very possibility, on the affirmation of close reading alongside the simultaneous sceptical examination of that reading: "for inasmuch as its purpose is to *name* that conflict which cannot be resolved, allegorical argument constantly remakes the chains of logical and narrative succession"[126].

Following de Man, Street identifies allegory as existing in a state of tension between its "utopian" impulse towards critical plenitude and the negative scepticism which deconstructs the tendency towards mystification[127]. Refusing to conform to a designated system or to its own institutionalisation, allegory theorises the resistance to theory, existing in the acknowledgement of its own impossibility in the face of infinitely deferred self-presence. Thus, as de Man writes, the allegorical model is both of "theory and not theory at the same time; the universal theory of the impossibility of theory"[128].

Again, discussion in such terms helps to clarify the allegorical aporia of Beckett's later work and its naming of the impossibility of its own existence. The reduction of semantic content attempts to minimise the gap between figural and referential content, thereby reducing the apparent room for deconstruction. Paradoxically, however, this process only exposes the futility of that aim, laying bare the fundamental condition of language. What we are left with is the rhetoric of composition itself: language stripped to its basic condition of infinite difference, and self-perception constituted as such. The ironic status of *Worstward Ho*, therefore, demonstrates the fundamental condition of allegory. Additionally, as a result of the text's attempted eschewal of semantics and its interrogation of its own temporal

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[125]*Ibid.*, 119.
[126]*Ibid.*, 120.
[127]*Ibid.*
[128]Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," *Yale French Studies* LXI (1982), 20.

development, the allegorical nature of *Worstward Ho* can be seen as in many ways correspondent to that of music.

De Man has written, "whereas we have traditionally been accustomed to reading literature by analogy with the plastic arts and with music, we now have to recognise the necessity of a non-perceptual, linguistic moment in painting and in music"[129]. The allegorical context clarifies this point, but *Worstward Ho* sheds light on both perspectives. While literature may traditionally have been read as aspiring towards music, discussion of the resultant "musicality" of language has usually concentrated on the musical aspects as an *effect* of such language (rather than as its cause). This focus on the sound-patterns and rhythms of language often ignores the more fundamental question of the comparative generation of meaningful structures through the temporal organisation of units. By moving towards but never quite reaching the elimination of external reference, Beckett's work poses this question in more complex terms; the construction of *Worstward Ho* demonstrates the "linguistic moment" of music, exploring the elaboration of significant structures in almost self-reflexive terms, and in doing so creating a musical effect which, in turn, reveals the impossibility of absolutely coincident meaning even within an apparently pure, formalist art. Within this process, however, Beckett demonstrates the inseparability of the structural effect from the "sounding" effect: while both the sounds of the word-patterns and the structural rhetoric are an effect of this linguistic moment, they are also its very cause. Thus music can be seen as both the cause and effect of language, and language the cause and effect of music, neither taking absolute precedence[130], and the focus of allegorical theory clarifies this relationship.

Beckett's writing reaches the very heart and limits of this interdependency by means of the rejection of the symbolist musical aesthetic found in Proust and the (covert) acknowledgement as early as *Dream* of a different model of music, one which rejects an aesthetic of totalising and transcendent unity. In a sense, then,

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[129]*Ibid.*, 10.

[130]Steve Sweeney-Turner seems to imply something similar at the end of his discussion of Derrida and de Man's argument over Rousseau's discussion of harmony: "music, as seen by formalist analysis, represents only its own structures, existing outwith the possibility of representation. What Derrida claims, however, is that the idea of *linguistic communication* is in fact itself ruptured at every point by 'nondiscursive sonority'. In this context, representation becomes a kind of a subset of a more generalised form of signification which looks more like the kind of classical ideas about the way in which instrumental music works (but in an intertextual field which deconstructs any sense of 'aesthetic autonomy')". Steve Sweeney-Turner, "Speaking Without Tongues," *Musical Times* CXXXVI/1826 (April 1995), 186.

Andrew Bowie seems to take this one step further, discussing Manfred Frank's critique of Derrida. Frank suggests "that the 'musicality' of 'poetic' language - those aspects which depend upon repetition and unexpected departure from repetition - cannot be adequately explained by assuming there are two separate dimensions of language, the poetic and the referential: 'For if - according to Saussure - a language only consists of differences, and if, furthermore, the differences are unsayable, then one can justifiably claim that the unsayable is the ground of the sayable'". Andrew Bowie, *op. cit.*, 76.

Beckett's work does aspire to the condition of music (if music is considered allegorically, rather than symbolically), and thus the texts explore and articulate the congruence of music and language, always remaining in excess of symbolic representation.

As an extended postscript to this chapter, and in order to pull together various strands, these ideas will be considered from another perspective - that of Julia Kristeva's development of a concept of revolutionary poetic language from psychoanalytical theory[131]. Kristeva follows Lacan's designation of the mirror stage as breaking up the union between mother and child, but describes that union in different terms. Before the mirror stage, the child, lacking symbolic differentiation, does not distinguish between its own sounds and those of the mother, and the mother and child's bodies signal to one another via the heterogeneous pulsions of vocal and kinetic rhythms[132], providing a "music" of "voiced breath"[133]. As a result of the mirror stage, however, this symbiosis is repressed; the child recognises itself as separate, as a subject, and can now begin to name itself in relation to the other. Thus the entry into the Symbolic order is made via the loss of the union with the mother

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[131]Kristeva's theories evolve from Lacanian psychoanalysis but in many respects involve a re-working of Lacan. Lacan's statement that the unconscious is structured like a language has come to be recognised as profoundly significant by much recent French psychoanalytic and post-structuralist theory, not least that of Julia Kristeva. Lacan suggested that the logic of the unconscious departs from the rational self-identity of consciousness posited by Descartes and as such operates like the total structure of language - as a system of differences which can never be fully represented by a finite collection of individual elements: "language as such is something akin to the implicit, coded structure of rules ... which are - unconsciously - evoked by the speaking being" (John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990), 34). However, while language can be formalised, the unconscious very definitely cannot and avoids representation entirely: we receive only glimpses of that realm, perhaps through dreams or slips of the tongue. Thus the unconscious is a form of knowledge, but one that for the most part escapes representation.

Discussing the young child's acquisition of the sense of self and consequently of language, Lacan describes the earliest phase as the "imaginary" phase, wherein the child has only fragmented experiences and no sense of itself as a separate and unified being. This precedes the "mirror" stage, the stage at which the child, seeing itself in a mirror, comes to realise that the image is a reflection of itself and not simply part of external reality. The mirror stage, then, brings about the child's conception of itself as whole and separate from the mother, and yet this very realisation involves the splitting of that self in two: the child can only recognise itself as a separate and unified subject by seeing itself doubled as an object in the mirror. The recognition of the subject is therefore dependent upon the possibility of a symbol standing in place of the real body, and in this way the mirror stage makes way for the child's entry into language, into the realm of the Symbolic. According to Lacan, this transition is completed by the Oedipal situation; the mirror stage enforces separation from the mother and the acknowledgement of the third term, the father. Thus the recognition of the father and of the self forces a separation from the mother that is to an extent compensated for by the entry into the Symbolic and the possibility of communication through language.

Kristeva's principal change to Lacanian theory involves a concentration upon the drives at work in the pre-Oedipal body - this focus developed as a result of experimentation in the field of language acquisition. See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

[132]See Julia Kristeva, *op. cit.*, 24.

[133]See Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double Bind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 22.

and the repression of the pre-linguistic "music": "founded on a lack and always inadequately, the child fills the gap between its previous imaginary gratification from its mother and its new separation from her with words"[134]. The development of language is therefore predicated on the acknowledgement of a lack, and the mirror stage therefore figures language as a desire for something that can stand in for that lack, a desire for the other.

Kristeva describes these pre-symbolic pulsions as comprising a separate state: the *semiotic*[135]. Entry into the Symbolic order, then, involves taking up a position within the process of symbolisation, breaking with the semiotic maternal body in order to make way for the thetic phase that is necessary for symbolic and social interaction. As it is the order of meaning and logical symbolisation that forms the basis of society and cultural institutions, language which disrupts the conventional structure by acknowledging the semiotic is therefore seen as revolutionary: "like a political revolution, the semiotic in language causes an upheaval of the Symbolic and the subject"[136]. From this, Kristeva develops an account of modern poetic language; avant-garde language - which makes extensive use of non-symbolising elements such as sudden breaks or shifts, ellipses and illogicalities - is considered revolutionary in that the pre-Oedipal drives of the subconscious disrupt the Symbolic order.

Even in revolutionary language, the semiotic is dependent upon the symbolic function for regulation. The semiotic always pushes against this regulation, however, creating a "dialectical oscillation" (to use Kelly Oliver's phrase) which maintains

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[134]*Ibid.*, 23.

[135]Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic is described by Kristeva in terms of the movement from the *semiotic* into the *symbolic*, the relationship between the two configuring the signifying process. For Kristeva, the semiotic flow is gathered up in the *chora* (Greek for womb or enclosed space), this having been defined by Plato in the *Timaeus* as "an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible" (quoted in Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1985), 161; also see Julia Kristeva, *op. cit.*, 25-6). The semiotic continuum of the *chora*, with its provisional, mobile articulation, lacks distinction between the real and the Symbolic and must therefore be split if signification is to take place. This splitting, defined as the entry into the *thetic* phase (in parallel with Lacan's mirror phase), is what enables the recognition of differences. Previous to the thetic phase, the *chora* is regulated (see Julia Kristeva, *op. cit.*, 27), subject to ordering but only according to categories which precede language (categories which are dictated by natural or socio-historic constraints). Once the thetic phase has been entered, however, the *chora* is repressed and is in evidence only as a force which occasionally emerges in the form of disruptions of language.

For Kristeva, Lacan fails to take into full consideration the non-referential elements of signification; the "music" of the semiotic is, according to Kristeva, closely bound to the experience of the body and the pleasure (or, more precisely, the *jouissance*) of the symbiotic union, and her notion of the semiotic operates across the Lacanian Real, Imaginary and Symbolic. As a result of her acknowledgement of both semiotic and symbolic elements within the signifying process, Kristeva conceives the Symbolic in two ways, either as the Symbolic order or as the process of symbolising within the Symbolic order (hence the distinction made by the use of the upper-case initial letter for reference to the Symbolic order).

[136]Kelly Oliver, *op. cit.*, 96.

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this state of crisis. The semiotic functions at the boundaries of language without ever quite dispensing with the symbolic - to do so would lead to pure unconsciousness and to madness. Revolutionary language, by loosening traditional linguistic conventions, gives access to the repressed drives of the unconscious and calls into question the very process of representation: "poetry negates the symbolic in order to call it back to the process of signification of which it is a part"[137]. Additionally, in seeking to break open the unity of the Symbolic, revolutionary language also calls into question the unity of the subject; the thetic can no longer be considered a complete unity and thus the force of the semiotic, in destroying the unity of the thetic, destroys the unified subject position[138]. For Kristeva, the unified subject position is simply a stage in the process of signification. A "transference" can take place between the text and the reader, in which identification with the text can take place[139], but the revolutionary text is never a stable unity and is always "in process", marking its own composition. The constitution of the subject is a necessary part of the process and is itself in process or "on trial"[140].

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[137]*Ibid.*, 99.

[138]"If it is true that there would unavoidably be a speaking *subject* since the signifying set exists, it is nonetheless evident that this subject, in order to tally with its heterogeneity, must be, let us say, a questionable subject-in-process". See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gova, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 135.

[139]See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language, op. cit.*, 208-10.

[140]For Kristeva, while Saussure's approach to linguistics is important in delineating the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified, structuralism fails to take account of the full range of the signifying process, considering semiotic drives only in terms of their relationship to the discursive function of language and effectively treating the sign system as a static entity. On the other hand, Chomskyan generative grammar is viewed as a positive alternative to the extent that it reinstates the speaking subject as the locus of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. For Kristeva, however, even this theory is limited by its assumption that the subject is the traditional Cartesian subject, unified and transcendental: the acknowledgement of the bodily jouissance of the semiotic within language denies the possibility of maintaining the mind-body division of the subject (see Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown*, trans. Anne M. Menke (Hemel Hempstead, Herts.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 261).

Working from the view that the subject can posit meaning only as a result of processes prior to meaning, Kristeva suggests that any linguistics which assumes the presence of a unitary subject can do so only by ignoring the pre-Symbolic aspect of that subject's constitution: "the subject never *is*. The subject is only the *signifying process* and he appears only as a *signifying practice*, that is, only when he is absent *within the position* out of which social, historical, and signifying activity unfolds. There is no science of the subject" (Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language, op. cit.*, 215). Thus, for Kristeva, post-structuralism must develop away from structuralism's rejection of the phenomenological subject towards taking account of the subject-in-process: any theory of meaning will inevitably be a theory of the subject. Kristeva's preferred term for her methodology is "semanalysis", a combination of semiotics and psychoanalysis which approaches language not as a sign system but as a signifying process, taking into account the semiotic field heterogeneous to language. Semanalysis can only proceed by questioning the grounds of its own assumptions, the acknowledgement of the semiotic always problematising the possibility of developing a science of signs. Thus semanalysis, like other post-structuralist theory (especially deconstruction) functions by putting all signification into crisis (including that of its own system). In contrast to deconstruction, however, the basis of this lies in the identification of signification as a heterogeneous mixture of stable symbolism and the repressed, disruptive force of the semiotic unconscious.

To make a connection between Kristeva's theories and Beckett's treatment of language is hardly difficult, nor new. However, no real attention has been paid to the relevance of Kristeva's conception of the musicality of the semiotic to the effect of Beckett's language. Kristeva herself lists Beckett amongst those writers exemplifying the development of revolutionary language. More specifically, Kristeva devotes a section of *Desire in Language* to discussing "First Love" and *Not I* in terms of the effect of birth, the maternal relationship, and the father's death on the acquisition and treatment of language, selfhood, meaning and love[141]. Kristeva's reading is highly evocative but is (at least in the present context) slightly limited by its determinedly psychoanalytic focus. Perhaps more useful are the several analyses that have sought to examine Beckett's work in the light of Kristeva's interpretation of the texts as providing a powerful "interplay of meaning and jouissance"[142]. Several critics have examined the relationship between Kristeva's work and *Not I*, and this is hardly surprising given both the subject matter of the play and its treatment of language. As Elin Diamond suggests, *Not I* demonstrates that the ability to take up a subject position is intimately bound to language acquisition and the ability to name oneself in the first person. The woman's inability to say "I" prevents her full entry into the Symbolic order, and her appearance as a mouth reflects the inability fully to construct the subject. Additionally, the mouth acts as "the body's metonymic reduction, a pulsing muscle that spews words like excrement"[143], thereby linking the imagery of word-production with those of defecation and birth (both of speech and of the child itself).

Kristeva's theories are clearly highly relevant to this play, and it would be pointless to recount the analyses given by Diamond and others. The woman of *Not I* faces questions which are fundamental to Kristeva's work, to Beckett, and to the perception of Beckett's texts: questions as to how speech can be possible in the face of the problematics of subjectivity. The woman wishes to tell the story yet refuses to accept that story as her own; effectively, the refusal of the "I" defers the proper entry into the Symbolic, hence the fact that her language is heavily marked by the semiotic: it is full of ruptures and ellipses and continually foregrounds the rhythmic and sensual sounds of the words above their representational meaning.

Beyond this, Kristeva's theory also seems to shed light upon the question of the reason for the protagonist's gender. Kristeva has suggested that identification with the mother may make it easier for women to make contact with the repressed

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141See Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language, op. cit.*, 148-158.
142*Ibid.*, 148.
143Elin Diamond "Speaking Parisian: Beckett and French Feminism," in Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.), *op. cit.*, 210. Also relevant to this approach are two other articles which appear in the above collection: Shari Benstock, "The Transformational Grammar of Gender in Beckett's Dramas," 172-86; Ann Wilson, "'Her Lips Moving': The Castrated Voice of *Not I,*" 190-200.

drives of the unconscious. Nevertheless, Kristeva stresses the fact that it is not the biological sex of a person that determines their "revolutionary" potential but rather the subject position taken. The semiotic is not itself associated with the feminine, but with a fluidity prior to the establishing of sexual difference: difference only comes into play with the entry into the Symbolic, and henceforth any strong recognition of the semiotic will entail the weakening of traditional gender distinctions[144]. Kristeva rejects both liberal feminism (within which women demand equality of access to an order which has traditionally privileged the male), and radical feminism (which rejects the Symbolic order outright and valorises the female term in its place), instead proposing that the distinction between male and female subject positions should be dismissed as metaphysical (and this can only take place by full acknowledgement of the semiotic)[145]. For Kristeva, then, revolutionary language can lead to social change; as Toril Moi writes, for Kristeva "there is a *specific practice of writing* that is itself 'revolutionary', analogous to sexual and political transformation, and that by its very existence testifies to the possibility of transforming the symbolic order of orthodox society from the inside"[146].

Not I seems to explore the stages of this argument, the gender of the speaker gaining significance from her refusal of unproblematic entry into the Symbolic order. The fact that the figure is female is important given the fragmentary nature of the speech. This relationship between the female and such irrational outpouring has, however, frequently been read negatively, through the designation of women as "naturally" less reasonable and closer to the hysteria of the unconscious. Superficially, the protagonist's stream of words seems to confirm this, the heightened emotional state resulting in near-hysterical speech. Yet, at the same time, some kind of logic is clearly at work; the woman determinedly rejects the suggestion that the story is her own, refusing to take up the subject position offered and seeming consciously to subvert her own role in traditional structures. The text integrates the symbolic with the semiotic; a narrative can be pieced together and a story (of sorts) can be followed, but the power of the semiotic influx is such that to describe the meaning of the text solely in terms of that narrative would severely reduce its significance. The woman's desire to tell the story is tempered by a need to remain beyond the limitations of binary structures, and thus the force of the semiotic not only refuses to reduce the discourse to a linear narrative but also refuses the reduction of the subject to a single, traditionally-gendered position. It is even

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[144]See Toril Moi, *op. cit.*, 164-5.

[145]As Kelly Oliver writes, "Kristeva claims that she turns away from feminism because feminists are merely rushing after 'phallic power'. She objects to a feminism that merely wants to possess power. She is concerned to transform the logics of power that give rise to women's marginalisation in general". See Kelly Oliver, *op. cit.*, 2.

[146]Toril Moi, *op. cit.*, 11.

possible to suggest that although the protagonist is clearly female, the gender is solely dependent upon the actual nature of the discourse as a result of its position outside traditional linguistic structures. This is, of course, emphasised by the presentation of an incomplete body; the lips are in a sense neutral (in that they could be either female or male), but are at the same time female by implication (as an effect of the mouth-vagina imagery). Thus the mouth acts as a shifting signifier in a manner which corresponds to the play's delineation of gender, of representation, and of the relationship between the two.

Kristeva's ideas therefore provide an interesting context for the consideration of *Not I*. However, many of Beckett's other late texts, whatever their apparent subject matter, are concerned with the same fundamental issues and, even if less explicitly, develop from similar approaches to language and the constitution of the subject. As Anna McMullan suggests, while earlier Beckett works present a drive towards knowledge and authority, the later work in general tends to focus upon the margins of representation and the position of powerlessness that results from paying attention to the "other" of language, to that which lies outside traditional (male) structures: "in this sense, Beckett can be seen as having adopted a 'feminized' practice. Central to this issue is the question of the relationship between the Symbolic and the Other. Is this a stable, unchangeable position, or is it subject to negotiation and change?"[147].

Kristeva's work questions how it can be possible to continue to speak in the face of the problem of self-definition, a question which is of particular importance to women, but which is also fundamental to Beckett. Kelly Oliver suggests that Kristeva's work relates more closely than might at first be apparent to that of many British and American feminists in that it is struggling with "this double-bind, which brings into focus problems of identity and difference that revolve around language and representation. How can we use language in order to change notions of identity and difference when it is language or representation through which stereotypical

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[147]Anna McMullan, *Theatre on Trial: Samuel Beckett's Later Drama* (London: Routledge, 1993), 72. This perhaps needs further clarification. Much argument has taken place over the question of Kristeva's feminism in general and her relationship to other strands of French post-structuralist and/or feminist thought in particular. Some writers argue that her association of the semiotic *chora* with the feminine and the role of motherhood returns to biological essentialism and identifies womanhood with maternity (see Kelly Oliver, *op. cit.*, 48). Others, like Toril Moi, argue that Kristeva's position does not deny the *political* necessity of radical feminism as a reaction to a patriarchal ideology that subjugates women. Instead, Moi suggests, Kristeva's theory points out the risks of radical feminism, the danger of it simply taking over the metaphysical categories put in place by that patriarchy without deconstructing the positions involved. Kristeva's view "in one sense leaves everything as it was - our positions in the political struggle have not changed - but in another sense radically transforms our awareness of the nature of that struggle" (Toril Moi, *op. cit.*, 13). From this perspective Kristeva's work is profoundly feminist; even if she herself has criticised various feminisms for ignoring the differences between individual women and producing fixed and essential notions of femininity, her work is fundamentally concerned with the questions of the constitution of the subject and of difference that are in turn intimately bound to questions of language.

notions of identity and difference are perpetuated?"[148]. In this way, Kristeva's work helps to bring into focus the relationship between Beckett's work and much feminist thought in their common exploration of the "other" of typical structures of representation.

The heterogeneity of signification that Kristeva describes is fully appropriate to the language of Beckett's later texts; both explore the viability of a non-Cartesian subject-in-process which acknowledges the influx of the semiotic into the process of symbolising without abandoning the possibility of meaning. Central to this is Kristeva's conception of the semiotic as fundamentally musical. Kristeva suggest that the semiotic "gives 'music' to literature"[149] as a result of the "maternal music" of the pre-Oedipal relationship. This idea may appear problematic, initially seeming to position music as the "other" of meaning and the excess of language. Kristeva herself, however, places quotation marks around the word "music" when using it in this way, and at other times she stresses that in being intimately bound to the semiotic, this musicality is considered powerfully central to, not outside, the heterogeneity of signification: "the irruption of the semiotic within the symbolic is only relative. Though permeable, the thetic continues to ensure the position of the subject put in process/on trial. As a consequence, musicality is not without signification; indeed it is deployed within it"[150].

Such comments, though rare, reveal Kristeva's complex view of the relationship between language and music with regard to signification, one intimately bound up with the inseparability of the semiotic and symbolic aspects. From this point of view, Kristeva's view of the semiotic and its "musicality" encompasses far more than simply the "musical" aspects of poetic language - the sounds, rhythms and sensual flow of words - but instead displays an understanding that the generation of meaningful structures is dependent upon more than symbolic reference. Thus, both despite and because of the location of the semiotic in the pre-Oedipal union with the mother, in no sense can the semiotic, once within the Symbolic order, be discounted as merely natural and irrational, as its role within signification is meaningful in itself. Thus Kristeva's view of signification involves a re-integration of the "other" of language - that which has generally been aligned with the unconscious, the irrational, the feminine, and the musical - into meaningful structures. Again, the relevance to Beckett, to the perception of his work as musical, and to the feminist interest in Beckett's exploration of non-binary structures, is clear[151].

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[148]Kelly Oliver, *op. cit.*, 154.

[149]Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language, op. cit.*, 63.

[150]*Ibid.*

[151]Kristeva's theories have frequently been discussed in association with those of two other influential post-structuralist writers on feminist issues, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. However, there are important differences between the positions of the three. For Kristeva, unlike Cixous or

Despite the fact that Beckett does not always feature in Kristeva's lists of revolutionary writers (unlike other more indisputably modernist authors such as Joyce, Mallarmé, Lautréamont, and Artaud), it is possible to see her theories as being more relevant to his later work than to that of those more often listed, his reduction of the referential content of language effecting a practice closer to the boundaries of signification. Kristeva seems to prefer to discuss those writers whose treatment of language effects a plurality of meaning, the force of the semiotic foregrounding those aspects of language traditionally considered musical. With these authors, however, the semiotic remains in excess of the symbolic, whereas Beckett's late work delineates more concisely the integration and co-dependence of the semiotic and the symbolic aspects of signification.

Beyond all this, the relationship between the work of Kristeva and postmodernist theory helps to clarify that between Beckett and postmodernism. As with post-structuralist thought in general, the relationship between Kristeva and postmodernism is not easily defined. Kristeva has herself written on the subject of postmodern literature, defining it as "literature which writes itself with the more or less conscious intention of expanding the signifiable and thus human realm"[152]. This clearly implies that revolutionary language and its acknowledgement of the semiotic are, to Kristeva, fundamental to the postmodernist experience of limits. It is possible to argue, with Andreas Huyssen, that while the work of Kristeva may provide a useful approach to modern literature, like much post-structuralist theory (in Huyssen's view), it does little to clarify the difference between modernist and postmodernist ideas [153]. Certainly, Kristeva herself defines this difference more in terms of the intensified experience of the limits of representation, rather than as a

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Irigaray, writing is not gendered, since the acknowledgement of the semiotic destabilises these distinctions in the complex play of signification. Indeed, Kristeva implies that those who take such a stand unwittingly subvert their own position by describing as "feminine" those aspects of language which have traditionally been marginalised; in Kristeva's view, Cixous' establishing of an écriture féminine, which valorises those "whispers" in language previously deemed "unsayable", simply leaves women in the same position (see Kelly Oliver, op. cit., 176-7; for a description of écriture féminine see Susan Sellers (ed.), The Hélène Cixous Reader (London: Routledge, 1994), xxix-xxx).

As far as the relationship to Beckett is concerned, some interesting criticism has explored the relevance of Irigaray and (more frequently) Cixous (see, in particular, Mary Bryden, op. cit.). However, Kristeva's theories are perhaps more useful, given her view of the heterogeneity of signification. Similarly, Cixous acknowledges the traditional positioning of music as the irrational and non-significant "other" to language, and within écriture féminine music is therefore re-valorised. Nevertheless it still remains marginal; Cixous effects a re-essentialising of music that corresponds to the re-essentialising of the feminine and which fails to deconstruct the interdependency of the terms involved. In this way, the complex view of meaning presented by Kristeva is here lacking. For a thorough discussion of Cixous' work, see Morag Shiach, Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing (London: Routledge, 1991).

[152]Kristeva "Postmodernism?" in H. R. Garvin (ed.), Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 137.

[153]Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism (Bloomington and Indianapolis : Indiana University Press, 1986), 214.

break with earlier ideas; for example, Kristeva describes experiments such as those of Cage or Robert Wilson as simply extending Mallarmé's or Joyce's expanded fields of reference into new areas, effecting an "emptying and circumventing of language and the theatricalisation of gestures, sounds and color"[154]. Nevertheless, even within this definition there lies the combination of contiguity and change which always seems to characterise definitions of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. In this way, just as Kristeva's work is actually more relevant to the limit-experience of Beckett's work than to the semantic profusion of Joyce and others, its focus is similarly more closely tied to the concerns of postmodernism than modernism.

Kristeva's theory of the semiotic acts, in true post-structuralist fashion, as an attempt to avoid metaphysics; the semiotic is described as a force which can never be fully named, but which is, through its entry into the symbolic, meaningful in a different sense. As Kelly Oliver suggests, "in a sense, Kristeva is saying 'my unnameable is not metaphysical because I realise that I have already named it. I have made the unconveyable conveyable'"[155]. Oliver questions the validity of this manoeuvre, suggesting that the positing of the semiotic should not allow Kristeva to side-step metaphysics since it merely betrays the same obsession with "conveyability" which Kristeva accuses the Western tradition of harbouring. Here, though, Oliver's own notions of meaning and iterability seem to have narrowed, denying the possibility of meaningful signification except by means of actual designation. Undoubtedly Kristeva here reaches the limit-point of signification and hence the limits of theory and literature, proposing the viability of a kind of ineffability without metaphysics as an effect of the workings of the semiotic. To explain or analyse the content of the semiotic in full would be impossibly reductive, yet not to attempt to "name" it in some way is to retreat into the mystical, to confine it to the position of the "other" of consciousness and logical thought. At this point, Kristeva's theory inevitably reaches an impasse, attempting to encompass its own impossibility and its inevitable resistance to its own terms: at this level the attempt to name the unnameable (seen in Kristeva's terms as the attempt to recover from mourning for the lost union with the mother) leads to what Oliver describes as Kristeva's melancholia as a theorist[156].

This corresponds precisely to Beckett's aesthetics of failure and its own experience of limits (and also, in many ways, to de Man's concept of the allegorical text's resistance to theory). Additionally, the experience is in both cases intimately bound up with the evocation of musicality; the musicality of Kristeva's conception

154Julia Kristeva, "Postmodernism?," *op. cit.*, 140.
155Kelly Oliver, *op. cit.*, 138.
156*Ibid.*

of the semiotic corresponds to the profoundly musical effect of Beckett's late texts and their determined avoidance of traditional structures and metaphysical assumptions. The musicality of both arises from similar explorations of the sense in which meaningful structures can evolve without sole dependence upon symbols, but while still avoiding designation as wholly irrational. It is, in this way, the musical aspects of both Beckett's and Kristeva's work that clarify their postmodern nature and underlies their relevance to one another. From the opposite perspective, the relevance of Beckett's work to musical aesthetics is clarified by Kristeva's particular exploration of questions of meaning.

Finally, this perspective has the additional advantage of helping to elucidate the relationship between feminist and postmodernist thought[157]. Just as postmodernism seeks to unravel the structures of Enlightenment rationality, post-structuralist thought in general and Kristeva's work in particular seeks to deconstruct the binary polarities involved so as to reveal the dependence of valued terms upon the oppression of the other. This process should clearly be of value to music theory, effecting the move away from the idealist vision of music as supposedly transcendental in its ineffability but effectively meaningless as a result. Additionally, the other side of this idealisation of music has been its alignment with the female, the irrational, the natural and the bodily, outside rational structures of (male) logical thought. As a result, the relevance to musicology of this process of re-evaluation is (especially in this context) directly correspondent to its relevance to the possibility of beginning to view gender in non-essentialist terms. And the relevance to Beckett of both these strands is clear; the breakdown of restrictive linguistic structures is fundamental to his work and is responsible for both the musical effect and the ambiguity of gender in his later work.

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[157]The relationship between feminism and postmodernism has always been a difficult one, partly as a result of the problems of defining postmodernism that were earlier discussed. As many writers have pointed out, feminist and postmodernist (especially deconstructionist) thought share certain aims, both exploring the relationship between traditional structures of language and structures of power (see, amongst other texts on the subject, Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism" in Hal Foster *op. cit.*, 57-82; Linda J. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms en abyme* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Mary Poovey, "Feminism and Deconstruction," *Feminist Studies* XIV/1 (Spring 1988), 5-65).

As Linda Nicholson suggests, postmodern theory can help to guard against any feminist tendency to make assumptions about the universality of women's experiences: "for some feminists, postmodernism is not only a natural ally but also provides the basis for avoiding the tendency to construct theory that generalizes from the experience of Western, white, middle-class women" (see Linda J. Nicholson, "Introduction" to Linda J. Nicholson (ed.), *op. cit.*, 5). On the other hand, the attempt to reconcile what is generally seen as the conservative nature of postmodernism with the political edge of feminism causes problems for many critics; as has been seen, the tendency has been to equate the postmodernist unravelling of hierarchies with the belief that value judgements and ethics are virtually impossible (see Diane Elam, *op. cit.*, 18). As has been suggested, this view of postmodernism is severely limited, but it is a position that has become firmly established and, as such, is central to the feminist debate.

To examine Beckett's approach to signification is, then, clearly instructive with regard to the political and ethical vitality of postmodernist and deconstructionist thought, demonstrating that a crisis of representation does not necessarily lead to a loss of meaning and value. Beckett's early covert exploration of that which has traditionally been figured as ineffable and irrational, of disordered and fragmentary experience, involves a move away from the idealist view of music as transcendental. Not surprisingly, then, he deploys music as the inspiration for this process; just as the disintegration of traditional linguistic structures heightens the musical effect of the language, the position of music as non-referential yet meaningful effects the progression away from the restrictions of semantics towards a mode of composition which reaches to the fundamental condition and the limits of language as *différance*. Thus music plays a prime role in Beckett's exploration of language, representation, and subjectivity, an exploration that closely maps the process by which modernism becomes postmodernism. Beckett's late texts open up spaces of discourse and subjectivity beyond those of traditional structures of representation and, as such, acknowledge the role of non-referential elements in the generation of meaning. Despite their different approaches, both allegorical theory and the work of Julia Kristeva provide specific points of focus for the exploration of how structures can begin to take on significance by means of their compositional rhetoric as much as through representation. In doing so, both theories reveal the constitutional moment of music in literature and literature in music, a relationship which is laid bare by certain of Beckett's late texts.

In a sense, the anti-postmodernist branch of Beckett criticism falls prey to the assumption which has blighted certain areas of musical philosophy over recent centuries - that meaning is wholly dependent upon nameable, referential content, and that anything beyond that is purely metaphysical and cannot be explored. However, the work of Derrida, de Man, Kristeva, and others who refuse the simplified approach to postmodern ideas is essentially concerned with precisely that which has concerned all philosophers throughout the centuries - the question of how to account for significance beyond the nameable. The only difference is their determination that the metaphysical conclusions of the past were wholly rhetorical, and that analyses of meaning should establish the structural reasons for this effect while at the same time acknowledging the inevitability of the resort to metaphysics. Musical philosophy and analysis should by rights have a central role to play here, the absence of semantics allowing the focus on precisely the question of how meaning can be generated through self-reference. Yet, outside the discipline, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the attempt to account for the meaningfulness of music. The condition of Beckett's late texts positions them at the heart of this discussion, and the fact that their musicality has repeatedly been remarked upon, without this having had any real

impact on the exploration of their significance, only seems indicative of the absence of music from much current debate.

CHAPTER SIX
From Language to Music: Composers' Responses to Beckett

Summary:

   Previous chapters as having explored the reasons for the widespread perception of Beckett's texts as peculiarly musical - the attraction of Beckett's work for many composers - the precise musical nature of the texts meaning that their setting is problematic - the question of how a composer might respond to the texts successfully in musical terms - certain composers as confronting this question by using Beckett's texts but avoiding traditional word-setting techniques - the relevance of this to the relationship between music, language and meaning in general.

   Morton Feldman's Neither - his indifference to traditional concerns with textual clarity - the elusive quality of Beckett's text and its evocation of states of "betweenness" - the formal subdivision of the music into juxtaposed blocks of time - the distribution of varying metres and of different layers of even and uneven pulses, creating the impression of the not-quite-presence and not-quite-absence of regularity - the distribution of pitches, their block orchestration and the relationship between the soprano and the orchestra - their effective musical evocation of the textual movement back and forth and of the attempt to find an unlocatable point of origin - the parallels between the nature of Feldman's music and the bilingual status of Beckett's works - Feldman's lack of anxiety in contrast to Beckett's problematisation of the creative act.

   Richard Barrett's Ne songe plus à fuir - the complexity of Barrett's scores and his emphasis upon the difficulty of the situation within which the performer is placed - the monologic nature of Ne songe plus à fuir - each section as elaborating a failed search for expression within one main type of material - Barrett's concept of "virtual" material and his deployment of exponential procedures - these as aiding the listener's ability to perceive the complexity of the musical experience, following the attempted development and subsequent abandonment of the material - the paradoxical problematisation of the nature of contemporary composition and performance - the difficulty of exploring such ideas through music - the parallels with Beckett's questioning of the viability of true expression - the contrast between Beckett's negation of the semantic content of language (in order to create a musical "syntax of weakness"), and the elaboration of a quasi-semantics which allows Barrett first to develop and then to undermine the listeners' expectations - the difficulty of maintaining such a delicate balance in music.

   The relationship between Barrett's work and issues in postmodernism - Barrett, like Feldman, as displaying an affinity with Beckett, exploring similar

preoccupations through the actual deployment of musical material - Beckett and Barrett as pushing towards the meeting-point of music and language from opposite directions - both as articulating the fundamentally textual condition of being, the infinite deferral of self-presence, and the interdependence of music and language in the constitution of meaning.

The arguments of the preceding chapters lead inevitably into the realm of actual music and to the question of the musical setting of Beckett's texts. Not surprisingly, many composers have been attracted to Beckett's work. Traditionally, there have always been two alternatives for word-setting: either the composer aims to serve the words' own meaning and construction in the belief that the music may underline particular dimensions of the text, or else the composer asserts the right to create an entirely different work, recasting the textual rhythms in line with the new context and respecting the original solely from the point of view of its relevance to the composition. From either of these perspectives, however, the choice of a Beckett text seems strange; the increasing concentration of Beckett's work is such that no individual aspect of meaning or expression can be separated from another. To highlight a chosen dimension can only be detrimental to the piece as a whole, and the rhythmic precision is such that an additional layer of musical rhythm will destroy rather than enhance the text. Thus the first method is invalidated, and yet to choose a Beckett text for the second approach seems merely perverse: if the words are to be set in such a way as to create an entirely new work, then why choose a text that is already so complete?

Despite these objections, there have been many attempts to set Beckett's words to music. Roger Reynolds and Earl Kim have both used Beckett texts on several occasions, though their approaches are very different. Kim's works achieve an economy of expression, the music often closely mapping the delivery of the text with chords frequently placed so as to emphasise certain words. The rhythm of the text usually, therefore, becomes that of the piece; Kim conceives the process of word-setting as a form of translation, describing it as an attempt to create a "one-dimensional" music[1]. Reynolds' works immediately appear more complicated in scale and conception. One of his latest compositions, *Entre le galet et la dune* (1989-1993) is a large work for two voices and ensemble[2] and incorporates extracts from

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[1]These comments were made during a talk given at the symposium "Beckett in the 1990s" in The Hague, April 1992. Earl Kim's Beckett-based pieces include *Exercises on Route* for soprano and chamber orchestra (Cambridge, Mass.: Palindrome Press, 1969); *Footfalls*, a one-act opera (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Theodor Presser, 1980); *Eh Joe* (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Theodor Presser, 1994).

[2]Roger Reynolds, *Entre le galet et la dune* (New York: Peters, 1993).

Beckett texts which are delivered simultaneously in English and French, the voices being spatially manipulated by computer so as to avoid the words being obscured. György Kurtag also uses a bilingual approach, simultaneously setting the English and Hungarian versions of *What is the Word* and dividing the text between a reciter and a vocal ensemble[3]. Kurtag's setting is in other respects, however, closer to that those of Kim, if only in that the delicate instrumental accompaniment is almost always in unison with the voices.

Certain other composers have been drawn to Beckett's work, but have sought alternative responses. Probably the best known such work is Berio's *Sinfonia*[4], which incorporates snippets from *The Unnamable* into some of the spoken commentary. Bernard Rands' solo trombone piece *Memo 2*[5] is derived from the structure of *Not I*, but uses none of the words, while Roger Marsh's *Bits and Scraps*[6] takes fragments from *How It Is*. More recently, Mark Anthony Turnage's *Your Rockaby*[7] (for saxophone and orchestra) makes use of rhythmic elements from *Rockaby*.

This chapter will examine in detail two particular musical responses to Beckett texts: Morton Feldman's *Neither* and Richard Barrett's *Ne songe plus à fuir*. As would be expected, these differ hugely in approach. Nevertheless, through their very avoidance of traditional techniques of text-setting, the works both open up the question of the viability of exploring Beckettian ideas in musical terms.

[3]György Kurtag, *Samuel Beckett:What is the Word* (London: Universal Edition, 1991).
[4]Luciano Berio, *Sinfonia* (London: Universal Edition, 1969).
[5]Bernard Rands, *Memo 2* (London: Alfred A. Kalmus (Universal Edition), 1973).
[6]Roger Marsh, *Bits and Scraps* (London: Novello, 1979).
[7]Mark Anthony Turnage, *Your Rockaby* (London: Schott, 1993).

Morton Feldman's one-act opera, *Neither*[8] (for a single soprano and orchestra), is one of the most interesting attempts to set a Beckett text. The work, first performed in May 1977 by Rome Opera, was composed upon a text specifically requested for the purpose:

> to and fro in shadow from inner to
> outershadow
>
> from impenetrable self to impene-
> trable unself by way of neither
>
> as between two lit refuges whose
> doors once? gently close, once turned
> away from gently part again
>
> beckoned back and forth and turned
> away
>
> heedless of the way, intent on the one
> gleam or the other
>
> unheard footfalls only sound
>
> till at last halt for good, absent for
> good from self and other
>
> then no sound
>
> then gently light unfading on that
> unheeded neither
>
> unspeakable home[9]

A mutual friend had told Beckett of Feldman's wish to set some of his work to music and Beckett had suggested several already existent possibilities. Feldman, however, felt that none of these pieces needed music. At an initially rather awkward meeting, the author embarassedly explained that he liked neither opera nor his words being set to music, only to find that Feldman was in complete agreement with him: "'in fact it's very seldom that I've used words. I've written a lot of pieces with voice, and they're wordless.' Then he looked at me and said, 'But what do you want?' And

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[8]Morton Feldman, *Neither* (London: Universal Edition, 1977). While the title of the Beckett text uses a lower-case initial letter, Feldman uses a capital. This difference is useful for distinguishing between the two and is therefore used throughout this thesis.

[9]Samuel Beckett, "neither" in *As the Story was Told* (London: John Calder, 1990), 108-9. There is some confusion over the date of this text. The Calder volume in which the text appears gives its date as 1962. Feldman, however, clearly states that Beckett wrote the text at his specific request in the mid-1970s, and this has been confirmed in a letter to the author from William Colleran, director of United Edition (Feldman's publisher).

I said, 'I have no idea!'"[10]. Given Beckett's repreated expression of his sense of working with "impotence, ignorance"[11], Feldman's attitude might well have seemed attractive, leading to the subsequent agreement to send Feldman a libretto.

Ironically, considering his earlier rejection of other Beckett texts on account of their not needing music (and especially considering his stated wish "slavishly to adhere to *his* feelings as well as mine"[12]), Feldman began writing the music before receiving the libretto, hence the absence of the soprano from the opening[13]. This fact, however, seems less strange when one considers how the words are set; Feldman neither sets the text so as allow the words to be clear to the audience, nor gives the sense of commenting on the words by highlighting a certain dimension or particular textual relationships. Instead, he remains stubbornly indifferent to any need to present the text sympathetically in terms of audibility or clarity of meaning. The textual rhythms are obscured by the setting of individual words or even syllables in isolation, often intoned on repeated notes or else spread across a group of two or three notes with no indication as to the precise rhythm in which they are to be sung[14]. For much of the opera, the soprano remains in her top register, and this again ignores the usual preference for clarity. The combined effect suggests that the listener must either know the text in advance, or must trust that the music corresponds so closely to the text that the simultaneous apprehension of the two would be rendered tautologous.

Given Feldman's general concern to avoid symbolism by presenting sonorities "objectively without the complexities and superfluities of process or 'message'"[15], this approach to word-setting begins to seem appropriate. As with Beckett (if we are to believe his early statements concerning the communicative impossibilities of art[16]), with Feldman's work, as Cage observed, "we are in the presence not of a work of art which is a thing, but of an action which is implicitly

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[10]Howard Skempton, "Beckett as Librettist," *Music and Musicians* XXV/9 (May 1977), 5.

[11]Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," *New York Times*, (6 May 1956), sec.2 ,3.

[12]Howard Skempton, *loc. cit.*

[13] It seems that Feldman often prefers to approach his texts in an unconventional manner; in an interview following a recording of Beckett's *Words and Music* (for which Feldman composed the music), Feldman said that he hardly read the play before starting to compose, and that when he did read it, he "dipped in and out" of the play, starting in various different places. Everett C. Frost (director and producer), *The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays* (New York: Voices International, 1988) [Audiotape].

[14]In the setting of the phrase "away from gently part again", each word is spread across three notes with no indications as to how the three-syllable words should be divided. See Morton Feldman, *op. cit.*, 19.

[15]Robert Ashley, "Morton Feldman: An Interview with Robert Ashley" in Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (eds.), *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 362.

[16]In "Proust", for example, Beckett writes: "art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication". Samuel Beckett, "Proust," *op. cit.*, 64.

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nothing. Nothing has been said. Nothing is communicated"[17]. Beyond this, Feldman's statement, "I agree with Kafka. We already know everything"[18], allows the extension of such an interpretation, suggesting that the libretto is not merely being treated as known in the sense of it having been read before the performance, but rather in terms of some vague, pre-existent, perhaps even pre-conscious knowledge. This in turn seems to correspond to Feldman's statement that, in looking for a text, he was "looking for the quintessence, something that just hovered"[19].

Beckett's *neither* is free from the specifics of name, place, or event, evoking nothing more substantial than oscillatory motion. The sense is of a dislocated "between-ness", a ghostly movement coming and going between different gradations of shadow, between self and "unself" equally impenetrable, achieving stasis only through the abandonment of such distinctions and even then located only by the negative, inexpressible terms of "unspeakable home". The movement seems evocative of the unceasing search for an essential "I", but such absolute presence remains beyond the reach of the shadows, denied by the inability to find a central locus from which true self-knowledge (knowledge of both self and other) would be graspable: the saying of "I" requires the location within that self, but the objective existence of this subjectivity cannot be verified other than from without.

Feldman was initially struck by the visual punctuation of the work - the spaces on the page between each of the ten "sentences". As he read and re-read the lines, the composer gradually became aware of the relationship between the separated sentences:

> I'm reading it. There's something peculiar. I can't catch it. Finally I see that every line is really the same thought said in another way. And yet the continuity acts as if something else is happening. Nothing else is happening. What you're doing in an almost Proustian way is getting deeper and deeper saturated into the thought.[20]

Feldman clearly relates this to the description of Beckett's working methods: "he would write something in English, translate it into French, then translate the thought back into the English that conveys that thought. And I know he keeps on doing it"[21]. It seems, then, that Feldman perceives the text as the repetition in terms varying in small incremental differences of a single idea that is itself without substance or definition, but which is purely, abstractly evocative. In this sense, the words are

[17]John Cage, *Silence* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1966), 136.
[18]Cole Gagne and Tarcy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 172.
[19] Howard Skempton, *loc. cit.*
[20]Morton Feldman, "Darmstadt-Lecture" in Morton Feldman, *Essays*, ed. Walter Zimmerman (Kerpen:Beginner Press, 1985), 185.
[21]*Ibid.*

mere traces of an inexpressible thought, and Feldman's music attempts to recreate parallel traces in musical notes. For the composer, the text is a multi-dimensional object, exposing different facets of the same "non-idea"[22] while giving the impression of change.

The validity of such an interpretation must, however, be questioned. Despite the ineffable character of the libretto and its apparently goalless, pendular movement, some kind of closure *is* finally achieved. The status of this repose is certainly dubious, even ghostly, in its positioning beyond the regions of self or other; the implications of this final stasis are deathly, and the unsayable nature of the resting place suggests its inaccessability to our limited comprehension. Nevertheless, the possibility of stasis is undeniably suggested, however negatively: the concept of some kind of end to the continual wandering is posited, but Feldman does not seem to want to allow for this. The non-specific self-enclosure of the text means that it is dangerously reductive to draw any positive hermeneutical conclusions. Antoni Libera, for example, attempts to interpret the intra-textual relations by their alignment with the opposition of mental ("inner shadow") and sensual ("outer shadow") images, of cognition and experience[23]. It is equally misleading, however, to ignore the general direction in which the end of the libretto moves, as does Feldman's setting. There is perhaps an acknowledgement of this in Feldman's comment: "I noticed that, as the work went on, it became much more tragic. It became unbearable, while here [in the opera] it's bearable"[24].

Feldman's approach to the text, then, is to attempt to render in musical terms the pendular motion of a single insubstantial idea, viewed in varying contexts. The question of the opera's suitability for analysis is, as one would expect, a difficult one. The piece comes late in Feldman's output, well after his experiments with free duration and graph notation, and after his gradual detachment from Cage's aleatoric experimentation through his sense that "Cage's idea ... [that] 'Everything is music' had led him more and more toward a social point of view, less and less toward an artistic one"[25]. Following this, Feldman began to feel that a minimal degree of control was necessary for the exploration of the experience of sound - "you can't write *growing* sound with free notation"[26] - and, similarly, his pieces increased their degree of musical incident. Nevertheless, the notion of unfixing sound from its

[22]Feldman describes the subject of the Beckett opera - life as framed in a shadow into which we cannot see - as a "good non-idea". Morton Feldman, "XXX Anecdotes and Drawings" in *ibid.*, 163.
[23]Antoni Libera, "Some Remarks About *neither*," *Journal of Beckett Studies* III/2 (Spring 1994), 85-91.
[24]Howard Skempton, *op. cit.*, 6.
[25]Morton Feldman, "Give my Regards to Eighth Street" in *Essays, op. cit.*, 76.
[26]Richard Bernas and Adrian Jack, "The Brink of Silence," *Music and Musicians* XX/10 (June 1972), 8.

referential associations and from teleological narrative structures remained central to the composer's aesthetic, and the music therefore attempts a certain "'inbetween-ness': creating a confusion of material and construction"[27]. Certain characteristics are therefore common to both the earlier and later works.

Clearly, the libretto of *Neither* had little effect on Feldman's compositional approach; it is easy to make specific comparisons with the deployment of pitch material and its orchestration in other works (especially in the other Beckett-related works - *Words and Music* and *For Samuel Beckett*). As in most of Feldman's output, lyricism without melody, the unmediated contemplation of sound, and the avoidance of dramaticism through the use of understated dynamics are all evident in *Neither*. Similarly typical is the approach to form as a length of time with minimal divisions, such that the piece is extended without any sense of causality, thereby rejecting the idea that art-works should grow organically. Like various minimal artists, Feldman refuses to see the parts as more important than the whole, agreeing with Donald Judd that "the thing is to be able to work and do different things and yet not break up the wholeness that a piece has"[28]. Instead, Feldman prefers the determination that form is inseparable from the experience of the material: "the *idea* of a piece no longer exists.... The *idea* is dissolved in the complexity of experience"[29]. Thus any attempt to find micro/macro-structure correspondences, or even to divide the work into sections for examination according to the allocation of material, is rendered nonsensical. Odd moments may suggest growth as if towards a climax, but this is never pursued over any length of time or to any kind of resolution[30]. Similarly, the deployment of material has, typically, an arbitrary quality, suggesting the pre-eminence of intuition in the choice and placing of chords. Despite this, however, an examination of the pitch content of certain textures reveals the adherence to surprisingly specific parameters; this combination leaves us faced with the "exact and maddening superimposition of logic and enigma"[31] and, therefore, analysis of the compositional choices and their relevance to Beckett's libretto can, to an extent, proceed usefully.

On the simplest level, the visual division of the text on the page is translated into a kind of formal grid which juxtaposes blocks of non-developmental material. In

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[27]Morton Feldman, "Crippled Symmetry" in *Essays, op. cit.*, 136.

[28]Donald Judd cited in Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd" in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 155.

[29]David Lee, "A Systematic Revery from Abstraction to Now" in *ibid.*, 198.

[30]The most definite impression of growth towards a climax occurs in the gradual thickening of the texture towards and beyond figure 110. Even this, however, disappears suddenly, without any conclusion having been reached.

[31]Brian O'Doherty cited in Peter Gena, "Freedom in experimental music: the New York revolution," *Tri-Quarterly* LII (Fall 1981), 230.

an interview with the composer this is described as "a regular arrangement of bars within the system, each system containing half a line of text"[32]. However, this is only the case for some of the work, the entirety not being as simply constructed as this quotation might suggest. The grid starts with basic subdivisions lasting twelve bars, and each of these covers the breadth of one page of score. These segmentations are maintained until figure 69. However, the division of the text into one half-line per twelve bars is not always strictly adhered to - the longer third sentence is spread over four segments, while the fourth ("beckoned back and forth and turned away") covers only one twelve-bar length. Similarly, the sentence partitions do not always follow the syntactic logic of the text, as in the setting of the fifth sentence ("heedless of the way, intent on the one gleam or the other"), which is split after "on" rather than after the comma. The inclusion of sections from which the soprano is absent, and the incorporation of the word "whose" (from the third sentence) into the end of a section in which the soprano is otherwise resting (figure 24) both have the effect of disrupting the system slightly.

From figure 69, part way into the soprano's wordless section, the lengths of the divisions change. Each page of score still constitutes one section, but the number of bars included begins to vary to fifteen, eighteen, twenty, and so on, and this inconsistency continues to the end of the work. Despite his indifference to the fact that the audience will expect to make out the words, Feldman occasionally chooses to repeat certain words or phrases, as if to highlight them: the line "unheard footfalls only sound" is sung twice, and the final word is repeatedly echoed in the plural over the following twelve bars. Similarly, the words "neither" and "unspeakable home" are sung nine times and eight times respectively.

Given the constantly changing bar lengths, the varying pulses used within and against the metres, and the apparently arbitrary allocation of words or syllables within the sections, it has to be admitted that the regularity of much of the grid is not aurally perceptible. Instead, its significance seems to derive more from its value to the composer as a sequence of frames within which the material can be arranged (unsurprising, considering Feldman's early experiments with graphic notation and his links with various minimal artists). Nevertheless, as will become clear, the formal layout finds a more audible counterpart in the actual treatment of blocks of material (even if the correspondence to the divisions of the grid is not always absolutely precise).

The time-signatures themselves contribute to the unsteady sense of motion to and fro. The opening is quite unstable, but nevertheless hovers around a mean bar-length of 2/4, which alternates with the slightly shorter or longer lengths of 3/8 and

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[32]Howard Skempton, *loc cit.*

Example 1

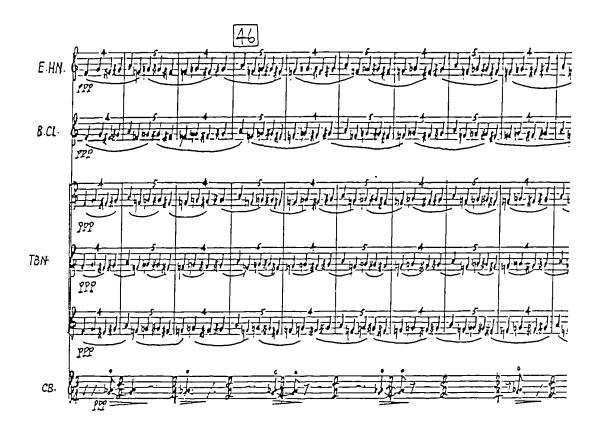(quality of reproduction of the Feldman examples is limited by that of the original score)

5/8 in no regular pattern. Once the second page of the score is reached, however, the metre settles into the steady alternation of 2/4 with 3/8, and this remains constant until the fourth bar of figure 43. From this point on, the time-signature patterns become less fixed, changing either from one twelve-bar section to the next, or at least between small groups of the divisions. However, the metres are almost always organised in pairs wherein one of the signatures has both an odd number of beats and a beat-length half or quarter that of the other, thereby combining repetition with unevenness. For example, in the two sections around figures 44 and 45 the metre oscillates between 3/4 and 5/8, from three bars before figure 46 until just after figure 49 the alternation is between 3/4 and 2/2, and from five bars before figure 61 until just before figure 64 3/8 and 2/2 are alternated. Occasionally, but far less persistently, the bar lengths are arranged in repeated groups of three or four changing metres (3/4-3/8-2/2-3/8 in the section from the fourth bar of figure 49, for example); any of these patterns create comparable effects of movement in and out, across a central position. Ironically though, because of the varying lengths of the pedal notes and the ostinati, their effect is all but destroyed: the mean time-signature which would seem to provide a central focal point is both present and absent. Again, as with the grid structure, the score reveals an interesting aspect of the representation of the text which, in itself, remains unheard, but which finds an audible counterpart in the rhythmic organisation of the actual pitch material.

Speaking of his interpretation of the text, Feldman commented, "I certainly know more than anyone else in my generation what the 'self' is in terms of personal music. I had to invent the 'unself'. I saw the 'unself' as a very detached, impersonal, perfect type of machinery. What I did was to superimpose this perfect machinery in a polyrhythmic situation"[33] . In this way, many of the sections of *Neither* comprise layers of differing pulses (even or uneven), or pedal notes which either begin or end at different times or else incorporate dynamic swells (again either even or, more often, slightly uneven), so as to give the effect of periodicity. In the section around figure 2, for example (where the time-signatures have first settled into the regular alternation of 2/4 and 3/8), four different pulsations are superimposed (see example one). The bass clarinet, contrabassoon and 'cellos alternate notes with rests throughout the section. These usually involve playing on alternate beats of five quavers in the time of the 2/4 bars and of four in the time of the 3/8 bars, but occasionally straight quavers are played instead. Thus the rhythm is made uneven by the tiniest fractional differences, and the instability is increased by the apparently arbitrary incorporation of ordinary quavers. At a very slightly slower pace, the harps play on the second and third triplet beats of every 2/4 bar, resting in between.

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[33]*Ibid.*

Example 2

Finally, the trombones, tuba and *tremolo* timpani hold pedal notes which, over different lengths of time, swell up from and fade back to *pianissimo* - the timpani *crescendo* and *diminuendo* covers six quavers and the tuba half this length, while the trombones work to a four-quaver pattern. Thus the most regular pulses, ironically, would appear to be those created within sustained notes, and yet even this is undermined by the slight variations in the *crescendi* that are bound to occur through the in-built imprecision of "hairpin" notation. The total aural effect is of confusing layers of pulse, the most consistent of which - the harps - is disrupted by the longest rests. The impression is that of music in search of a regular metre, but also of the implication that there must be some common denominator lying beneath the various layers, some unlocatable mean pulse to which the instruments are working.

Throughout most of the work, similar effects are created by the movement of different instruments in and out of the texture with their own pulsations. The textures as a whole do not always change from one twelve-bar section to another, but the entries and exits of instruments usually coincide with these points. For certain sections, most of the instruments (usually including the faster pulse material) suddenly drop out of the texture, and an entirely different effect is then created through the use of static chords. Even here, however, it cannot be said that the effect of pulse - or of the attempt to find a pulse - has been entirely abandoned. All that has changed is the time-scale; either one instrument (or more often the soprano) will persist in the reiteration of a single note, even if at a slow and perhaps uneven pace (as in the section around figure 22), or else the pitch material of the sustained chords will gradually alter while their incidence remains regular (as in the solo 'cello and *divisi* viola section that begins just after figure 30). Only one type of material is ever played in unison, entering accompanied by nothing but intermittent double bass harmonics (see example two, from three bars before figure 46). Even here, though, within a single line of pitch material, a kind of virtual polyrhythm is created through the repetition of a nine-note melodic figure; each statement of the figure covers two bars (3/4 followed by 2/2) comprising four notes in the time of the 3/4 bar and five in the time of 2/2 and thereby alternating slightly different note lengths against the metre. Additionally, each instrument divides the figure into different phrase-lengths (varying from three notes to seven), such that the stresses of both the phrases and their alignment with bar openings all work against one another.

Taken cumulatively, the effect of the block juxtaposition of rhythmic material is of the not-quite-presence and not-quite-absence of regularity. If straight rhythmic repetition is allowed to occur, then it can only do so within the constantly changing contexts of orchestration and/or pitch. Otherwise, it will be undermined by the superimposition of other (often irregular) pulses. Feldman has said, "what I'm

trying to do is hold the moment"[34], and he perhaps achieves this as closely as is possible. While we might expect unchanging, static chordal material to be the most appropriate musical expression of a held moment, Feldman realises the falsity of such a representation in its inability to continue indefinitely: either the stasis inevitably implies expectations of change, or, at the very least, the piece has eventually to end. Feldman's undertaking is more complex, exposing the attempt to grasp the ungraspable and thus articulating the "almost-ness" of the situation.

Writing about Cezanne, Feldman once said that his contribution to art "was not how to make an object, not how this object exists by way of Time, *in* Time or about Time, but how this object exists *as* Time.... Time as an Image.... This is the area which music, deluded that it was counting out the seconds, has neglected"[35]. Feldman therefore confronts the fact that while music must be played through actual time, he requires it to reveal the experiential nature of time. All music creates a kind of virtual experience of time, but Feldman sees this as a mere falsification: the focus should instead be upon the very point of intersection or collision of the two temporal experiences. The concern is with keeping the piece going; his interest lies with the process of duration extended by means of change and reiteration[36], with the "rightness of the moment, even though it might not make sense in terms of its cause and effect"[37]. Thus the various polyrhythmic disruptions of pulse act as a musical equivalent to the "something that just hovered" that Feldman had required of Beckett. The impression is both of an elusive and perhaps even non-existent central point of focus and, simultaneously, of the direct experience of the very search for this stable position.

At rare points in the score, the uneven metrical effects are temporarily abandoned; twice - first in the eighteen-bar section from one bar before figure 72, and then in the thirty-one bar subdivision at figure 104 - a single time signature is suddenly maintained throughout: 3/8 in the first instance and 2/4 in the second. In both cases, the material is also such that periodicity is emphasised by the placing of material exactly on the beat. At one point, a similarly regular effect is achieved by alternative means: in the fifteen-bar segment from the fourth bar of figure 77, the time-signatures gradually lengthen by one semiquaver per bar, starting from 5/16. Since all the instruments (with the exception of the sustained string notes) play on the last crotchet of each bar, whatever its duration, this even process is clearly

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[34]*Ibid.*

[35]Morton Feldman, "Between Categories," *Contemporary Music Review* II (1988), 3.

[36]"I'm working with two aspects which I feel are characteristic of the 20th century. One is change, variation. I prefer the word change. The other is reiteration, repetition. I prefer the word reiteration." Morton Feldman, "Darmstadt-Lecture," *op. cit.*, 212.

[37]Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *loc. cit.*

Example 3

audible (this can be seen in the percussion part given in example three). In each of these three isolated cases, then, regularity seems, momentarily, to have been achieved. Yet no sooner has this been recognised than it is retracted by the return to the old, rhythmically disruptive material. The effect is of a tantalising revelation of that which has thus far been withheld beneath the surface. The brevity of the experience, however, is such that its concreteness remains questionable. In this way, correspondences begin to emerge not simply between the opera and Beckett's text, but also between the roles of the audiences of each. Just as the reader of Beckett's text mirrors its "subject", scanning back and forth across the text, attempting to grasp the meaning and the strange effectiveness of the work, Feldman creates a parallel effect: the music seems to search for its own centre, while the listener both follows this process and tries to find his/her own focal points in the rhythmic wanderings.

Writing of Feldman's organisation of time, Peter Gena cites Brian O'Doherty: "time is used to destroy time. The resulting stasis is what opens the way to the spatial idea. And in turn the spatial idea more or less suggests simultaneity, the possibility of seeing all the piece at once"[38]. Thus it is not simply the formal division of the piece into juxtaposed blocks of non-developmental material which generates the impression of a single multi-faceted object being viewed from different perspectives; the smaller-scale movement from one moment to the next effects the sense of an extended present tense. Feldman attempts to evoke the inescapable directness of a not-quite-apprehendable "now", and this, in turn, suggests the possibility of contemplating the object as if suspended in space. At the same time, however, the object is always slightly beyond reach, such that its full apprehension remains impossible: beneath the "hovering" of Feldman's music, time ticks on, passing into the memory.

As with many of Feldman's techniques, the influence of minimal art is here apparent in the formal obfuscation of any distinction between internal divisions and the edges of the work. More specifically, a comparison can be made with Rothko's blurring of the boundaries between areas of colour: "musical events Feldman moves away from, drawn to what Rothko said about image-disclosure: darker tones work to 'slow down' formation of objects, withhold their approach"[39]. Feldman creates a musical equivalent to this attempt to capture the dynamic moment of experience and the endless deferral of absolute presence. Interestingly, in the Rome Opera staging Feldman himself invoked the comparison with Rothko, expressing his concern that the effect of the work should not be translated simplistically in the lighting: he

[38] Brian O'Doherty, loc. cit.
[39] Wilson Baldridge, "Morton Feldman: One Whose Reality Is Acoustic," Perspectives of New Music XXI/1-2 (Fall-Winter 1982, Spring-Summer 1983), 112.

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requested that the designer should "make it like a Rothko painting, the gradation of shadows rather than just a kind of easy symbolic visual aspect of shadows"[40].

Beckett on several occasions spoke of the "consternation" that lies behind the form of his work[41], and suggested, "if anything new and exciting is going on today, it is the attempt to let Being into art"[42]. For Beckett, then, the attempt to express is the (impossible) attempt to evoke both ontological experience and our impotence and ignorance of it. Like Feldman, Beckett often preferred to express this need for a radical revision of subject-object relations with reference to his favoured modern artists. Writing of Bram van Velde, for example, Beckett describes the paintings' ability to capture the unattainable object in simultaneity with the need for the act of representation: "it is the thing on its own, isolated by the need to see it, by the need to see. A motionless thing in the void; here at last is the visible thing, the pure object"[43]. Thus Feldman's lamenting of the neglect of the true nature of time in music equates with (and is a part of) Beckett's determination to break open artistic form and reflect the true nature of being.

For both artists the challenge is formidable, for what is attempted must endeavour to express its own inability to be grasped. The medium of music is from different perspectives either perfect or inappropriate for presenting the experience of time in such terms; while the lack of any concrete subject matter allows a more concentrated focus upon the organisation of sound in time, the very expectation of a different temporal experience makes it harder for a composer to direct attention towards this aspect. On the other hand, this experience is constituted by language itself: the subject and its expression have no existence beyond their linguistic articulation, and since this, in turn, is part of Beckett's subject matter, he - unlike Feldman - can never permanently abandon the use of language.

Returning, in the light of this, to Feldman's indifference to the audible coherence of the libretto, it could be suggested that the composer effectively overcomes the problem of the different temporalities of music and language through his awareness that the issues invoked by the text are better examined by the very deployment of material - through the music's *embodiment* of those ideas - rather than by any attempt to use the music to "comment" on the text. The simultaneous transience and ever-presence of the temporal experience of being and the continual effacement of actual presence are both articulated through the rhythmic functions

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[40]Morton Feldman, "XXX Anecdotes and Drawings," *op. cit.*, 163.

[41]Beckett once said, "In my work, there is consternation behind the form". Quoted in Israel Shenker, *loc. cit.*

[42]Lawrence Shainberg, *op. cit.*, 105.

[43] Translated from Samuel Beckett, "La peinture des van Velde", *Cahiers d'Art* (1945-6) to accompany the 1993 Tate Gallery exhibition, "Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55".
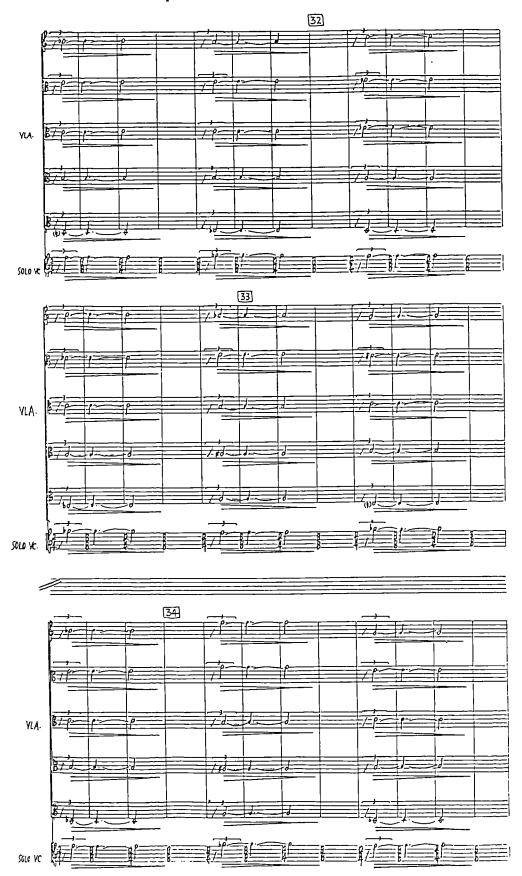
Example 4

Example 5

and their formal juxtapositions, and, moving into the area of pitch, the deployment of material can be described in similar terms.

Throughout the opera, the non-developmental nature of the grid divisions is compounded by the correspondence between certain types of pitch material and individual instruments. Thus a particular instrument or class of instruments becomes associated with specific notes or chords, and interest is maintained by the reiteration of the various material-types in different combinations or orchestrations. This is very obviously the case with the different kinds of pulsation (in the opening, for example): whenever an instrument re-enters the texture with pulse material (almost always at the beginning of a grid division), it will play the same pitch or combination of pitches. Certain instruments therefore become identified with one element, rarely playing anything else. For example, the timpani are very much associated with the *tremolo* chord of Gb, C♯ and G♮ which is only occasionally varied by its slight augmentation up to Ab or A, or by the diminution of the lower interval by the use of C♮. Alternatively, material may be passed back and forth between instruments, as is frequently the case with the strings' widely-spaced three-note chords; these are often swung between upper strings and woodwind (see example four, around figure 9), emphasising the block orchestration. The pulse material tends to consist of a single note or semitonal pair of notes all very close in pitch class, such that their gradual superimposition fills out a certain block of the chromatic scale, often in several registers simultaneously. This can be seen in the section between figures 5 and 6 (example five), where the pulsations of the combined dynamic swells in the sustained chords result in the gradual filling-in of almost the entire region from D below middle C to the Ab above (while the faster 'cello, harp and horn reiterations are located well below this, in ledger lines).

The chordal material is, in contrast, generally built from three-note chromatic clusters. These can either remain in semitonal intervals, or can be transposed into widely-spaced chords consisting of minor ninths and/or major sevenths. Thus while the pitch classes remain constant, the effect is of the alternate expansion to intervallic extremes and contraction to clusters: movement in and out. Within an instrumental section (in this case, either strings or woodwind), each group will take a different three-note cluster. Frequently, these are then combined in groups of three, such that nine consecutive pitches of the available twelve are covered, and their superimposition fills out patches of sound in the same manner as the accrual of the various pulse materials. An independent pulse will then be formed by the occurrence of each chord at a different point in the bar, or, if the chords are sustained simultaneously, by the various peaks of the *crescendi* and *diminuendi* of each instrument. Effectively, this generates several types of motion to and fro; in addition to the rhythmic oscillations, we are presented with the linear movement of one

Example 6

instrument between the different pitch clusters, the swinging of intervallically related material between different instruments within the same instrumental group, and the passing back and forth of exactly the same material (in pitch and interval) between instruments of contrasting types (as in the section around figure 43, or that around figure nine in example four). Each musical parameter is in this way isolated, established within a limited range of articulations, and then treated as a constant for organisation into different permutations.

Importantly (and perhaps not surprisingly, considering Feldman's early interest in graph notation), these processes are clearly apparent in the layout of the score; both the alternation between contracted and expanded three-note chords and their oscillation between pairs of instruments effect a striking visual image, such that the musical concerns are apparent in various modes of representation. All possible similarities and differences are highlighted, and thus the contexts in which material is heard are varied on all levels: the same pitch in different instrumental colours, differing pitches but in the same intervallic relationships and in varying orchestrations, and, on the larger scale, these whole blocks of material in different superimpositions with one another. Feldman thereby explores different musical manifestations of space, emphasising the physical distribution of the instruments, the spacing of pitch areas, and the rhythmic spacing of the pulses. The use of such techniques avoids the sense of development or eventfulness that would normally result from the introduction of new material; the possibilities are endless and the order in which they will be explored can therefore remain arbitrary.

As was found with the examination of rhythm and metre, even when a complete change of character takes place (as in the abandonment of faster pulses in favour of static chords and sparse textures), a certain aspect of the music is made reassuringly recognisable through the recurrence of past chordal structures, or of an underlying pedal note that has been heard earlier in the same instrumentation. Even in the reflective passage for solo 'cello and *divisi* violas, where the chordal progression is clearly intuitive and its duration arbitrarily determined[44], we recognise the transference of the soprano line into that of the 'cello, and are even reassured both by the semitonal pairs of notes that constitute parts of the chords, and by the close semitonal movement that marks the progression between one chord and the next within much of each viola line (see example six). Change and reiteration are therefore both present, but only to the minimal degree necessary for the continuation of the piece.

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[44] In the above-cited interview with Howard Skempton, Feldman said, "what made me determine the length of the instrumental interlude? I can't answer. It's almost as if I'm reflecting. I didn't want a cause-and-effect continuity, a kind of glue that would take me from one thought to another". Howard Skempton, *loc. cit.*

Perhaps the most noticeable and "event-like" change is the sudden introduction of the unison nine-note motif around figure 46 (example two). For the first time since the opening, new material is introduced in a striking manner, and almost entirely without elements from the preceding section - only the sparse reiteration of double bass harmonics on G and Ab gives any sense of continuity. Both the instrumentation and the material have changed at once, and never before have we heard a single unison line. Yet, even here, the recovery is rapid, since the nature of the material is such that its character is immediately established. The figure's winding quality, revolving around a fixed chromatic cluster as if in search of a point of focus, echoes the evocative effect of previous material, even if its entry gives the sense of an interruption. Additionally, the repetitive wandering around the F-F$\sharp$-G-G$\sharp$-A area is recognisable (despite its faster speed and octave displacement) as re-contextualised material from the (now absent) soprano line. In a sense, then, even the hazy parameter of musical "character" has become one of the aspects to be examined in varying contexts - this despite the abstraction of the music, especially in Feldman's deliberately non-symbolic usage.
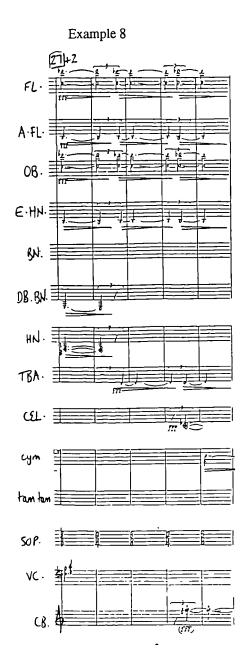
Throughout the work, Feldman seems to play with notions of presence and absence through the deployment of pitch material. The superimposition of three-note chords wherein each pitch class is different could so easily allow the presentation of the full chromatic gamut. Occasionally this does occur (around figure 51, for example). Most of the time, however, Feldman restricts the number of these chords to three, often combining this with a pair of semitones held in another instrument so as to increase the number of pitches present to eleven[45]. Thus the frustrated attempt to fill the chromatic spectrum seems to correspond to the rhythmic effect of the attempt to find a central, original pulse, and both of these translate into musical terms the libretto's condition of ceaseless pendular movement. Naturally, the exclusion of a single pitch class is not likely to be aurally detectable, especially within the often wide range of the note distribution, and yet Feldman does use devices that suggest a desire to make his organisational priorities clear. At times, we *are* presented with all twelve pitch classes at once. When this happens, however, it is not normally by the inclusion of the twelfth pitch within the chordal material, but rather by its separate presentation within a different kind of material, and often in an unusual range and/or orchestration.

The first appearance of the chromatic gamut, for example, is in the section from one bar after figure 6 (example seven), where the flutes, oboes, and clarinets each have a three-note chord of sevenths and ninths. To this the double basses add a semitonal pair of harmonics, such that the sustained chordal material includes every

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[45] See, for example, the few bars opening the section from the fourth bar of figure 25, where F$\sharp$ is excluded in this manner (apart from its occasional sounding in the soprano part).
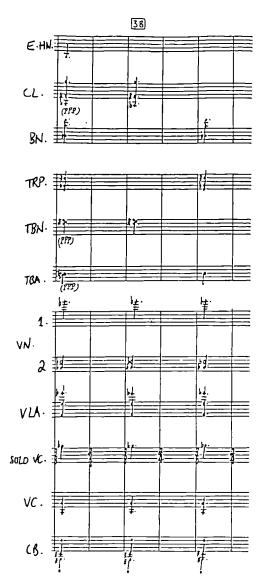
Example 7

Example 8

Example 9

pitch except F. Continued from the previous sections, however, is the unsteady harp pulse simultaneously sounding E♯ and F, very low in register and emphasised by the instrument's ability to doubly pluck the notes by means of enharmonic tuning: this arrangement of material recurs on several occasions. Similarly, and even more pointedly, the missing note may enter suddenly, again in a noticeable instrumentation and often part way through a section (as is the case in the subdivision beginning five bars before figure 27). For the previous two grid divisions, F (again) has been the only note omitted from the pitch clusters, but here, half-way through the section, it enters alone, independent of any other entries and played by the tuba (see example eight). This pattern of events recurs on occasion later in the work, as at figure 112 where, having been absent for five segments, the F enters at the opening of the subdivision in the bassoons, momentarily at the base of the sustained chordal material.

In this way, the listener receives a clear sense not only of the coming and going of material, but, more precisely, of the interdependence of the presence and absence of particular notes; the missing note is made obviously present, and yet will usually remain excluded from the main texture. It is noticeable how often the isolated pitch is of the same class; while it is not always the note F which is absent, two specific pitch areas are gradually established from which the missing note may be picked. The most commonly used of these two areas is that around F, F♯, and G: a large proportion of the segmentations which omit a single note or a small group of notes choose one or more of these, sometimes for more than one consecutive division. This is the case in the section around figure 21 (example nine), which omits F, F♯ and G (at least until the soprano entry in the final bar), and in the sections from three bars before 56 and one bar before 57, which leave out all three notes. In contrast, the other area from which missing notes are commonly chosen is that around C, C♯, and D. For example, B, C and C♯ are the only pitches excluded from the section around figure 15, and C and D are similarly omitted from that after figure 17. In the reflective chordal section for solo 'cello and *divisi* violas, the 'cello takes over from the soprano, alternating strictly between the notes F and Gb (example six). The viola chords which lie beneath the 'cello are obviously fairly arbitrarily determined; while the linear motion is often either semitonal or tonal, the adherence to this is variable, as is the direction of the movement. Nevertheless, one particular factor does seem to have been taken into account, and this again concerns the pinpointing of these two pitch areas, this time focusing on the notes around D and G. For example, while the chords in the grid division from the fourth bar of figure 31 (taken cumulatively) exclude the notes G and G♯, the next section includes every pitch class except D, and that which follows excludes D, D♯ and G♯. Following this, as the 'cello continues its solo but the accompanying orchestration changes, the

Example 10

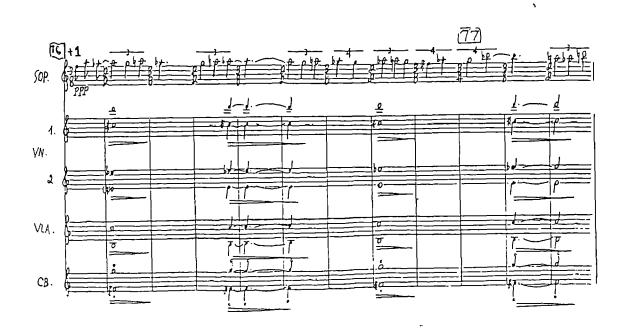Example 11a   Example 11b

division from one bar before figure 35 alternates the presence and absence of the D (emphasising its omission by the inclusion of the surrounding notes C♯ and Eb in the same register), while the next section excludes D but focuses upon G and the neighbouring pitches. The chords of the next subdivision suddenly exclude both notes before, two bars before figure 38, we hear both simultaneously, emphasised by their orchestration (the D is placed at the base of the chord, in the tuba, while the G is at the top of the clarinet chord - see example ten). Despite the fact that these presences and absences are clearly indeterminately ordered (and that the excluded note is not necessarily the sole omission), no other notes are treated in this fashion, and the movement continues back and forth between the permutations of their inclusion and exclusion.

The demarcation of these two areas effectively bisects the octave, giving the effect of passing between two opposing poles of pitch. This is established almost immediately: C is the only note missing from the second section, while F♯ is absent from the next section from which such an omission is made (that starting one bar before figure 5). Nevertheless, as is now clear, the positions of these points are themselves unstable, and they tend to give the effect of marking out general pitch areas rather than specific points.

Beyond this, the rough bisection of the octave is used not only in the isolation of two pitch areas, but also for the opposition of chromatic blocks of material. In many places where the material does not cover all or virtually all of the twelve pitches, the examination of included notes reveals that they fill out all of one patch of pitch classes, the outer-reaches delimited by either C/C♯/D or F/F♯/G. For example, while the section around figure 16 includes all the pitches from C♯ through to G except D, that around figure 22 comprises those from G to Db (see example eleven). Thus the dual presence of the note G (separately allocated to the soprano), acts as a kind of axis for the pitch territory either side, while the complete absence of the note D pinpoints the other pole. The consecutive subdivisions from three bars before figure 102 and two before figure 103 demarcate similar blocks, the former including the pitches F-Ab while the latter covers A-Db; in this case, while the first section encompasses the whole area around one pitch pole, the second extends the pitches upwards, but again points out the absence of the D by including all notes up to it. The instability of the territories is again occasionally emphasised by the expansion of the pitch-block boundaries, as in the sections around figures 10 and 11 where the pitches cover C-G, thereby including the areas around both pitch-poles and the intervening notes on one side. Thus the block material can expand outwards to encompass each focal point, or contract inwards to pinpoint the exclusion of one or both.

Example 12

Example 13

On other occasions, while all or nearly all the pitch classes may be included, the delineation of the two opposing areas is achieved by means of orchestration (as is the case in the following section, where for three individual bars the missing notes G♯-B are added in the low wind, brass, and piano). Similarly, in the subdivision beginning one bar after figure 76 (example twelve), the soprano line encompasses the pitches from F to B, while the string chords consist of those from B to E (and also of F♯ and G, as usual emphasising the presence of these notes above the others); in this instance, the contrast is not simply between two pitch areas, but also between the soprano's linear and the strings' chordal exposition of the territories. The sense of movement between regions is thereby combined with the linear spatial exploration of one area. Again, while the precise pitch correspondences may not be aurally perceptible, the effect is clear: the rhythmic, dynamic, and textural flux back and forth is mirrored by the linear and chordal expansion and contraction of pitch areas around points which are themselves unstable. Thus even the audibility of the compositional procedures and the interdependencies of the material are subjected to the process of "coming and going" - the alternate setting up and effacing of various elements is enacted both within the material, and on the external level of audition. This combines with the painterly attention to the physical shapes of the chords and their distribution on the page to explain Feldman's assertion of the importance of notation in determining the music itself, rather than as a mere template for realisation[46].

Examining the part of the singer, it becomes clear that it is the soprano line that is responsible for the pitch divisions. For roughly the first two-thirds of the opera, the soprano is restricted to the pitches of F♯-G-Ab in the upper register, only extending this slightly (upwards, to a top B) in the wordless section. Thus the choice of one or more of these notes as significantly absent from the orchestral textures is contrasted with their presentation in the brief soprano entries, and this is occasionally emphasised by the unaccompanied sounding of only these notes in the soprano and one or two other instruments. This occurs, for example, around figure 26, where the soprano reiteration of F♯-G-Ab is accompanied solely by harp and double bass harmonics on F♯ and G (see example thirteen). Similarly, when the singer suddenly re-enters after the *tacet* following the wordless section (at "unheard footfalls only sound", one bar before figure 91), the pitch has been unexpectedly shifted down to the note D, which is then intoned throughout the line and its repetition. From this point on, the soprano continues to delineate these two pitch areas, moving around either one. This changes only once, for a brief moment in the last pages of score, when the intervening pitches are, for the first time, covered; the

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46 "The degree to which a music's notation is responsible for much of the composition itself, is one of history's best kept secrets." Morton Feldman, "Crippled Symmetry," *op. cit.*, 132.

effect is of a temporary breaching of boundaries that, ironically, reveals both their self-imposed nature and - through the inevitable return to the restricted higher region for the repetition of the final words - the inescapability of their definitive power.

The soprano and orchestra, therefore, exist in mutually supportive roles in more than just the traditional sense. With regard to the pitch material, each seems to fix its own presence in relation to the position of the other, and yet neither is at all stable. Both are endlessly shifting in time and aural space; each attempts to define its presence in terms of a lack or an absence in the other, and yet the instability of these elements renders this impossible - the contexts are constantly changing. Despite the eschewal of micro/macro-structure correspondences, the reiteration and variation of limited material enhances the self-referentiality of the work. The close relationships between musical materials serve not as a means of achieving a coherent organic unity but, in opposition to this, as the means by which the absence of a central point of focus is suggested. Eventfulness is minimised, ironically, through the very realisation of the proliferation of possibilities; the internal reflection of material through contextual variation and juxtaposition gives the effect of everything being the shadow of everything else: the original image, if it ever existed, is beyond reach.

In a general statement about his work, Feldman once wrote:

> essentially I am working with three notes and of course we have to use the other notes. But the other notes are like shadows of the basic notes.... When after a few years I added another one, I added four notes, because the four notes would give me the relationship of either two minor seconds or two major seconds.[47]

This seems peculiarly apposite in the current context, relevant not only to the hazy evocative effect, but, more specifically, to both the precise terms of Beckett's libretto, and the incorporation of three-note chords. Thus the most minimal addition to the material generates a whole field of possibilities, and the correspondence between this method of working and Feldman's description of Beckett's technique of continual translation becomes clear: the increment of differences through repeated translation back and forth between two languages finds a parallel in the accumulation of intervallically related chromatic clusters allocated variously in terms of both register and instrumentation[48]. The result of both is the infinite shifting of contexts by minute degrees, and the impression of forward momentum is given

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[47] Morton Feldman, "XXX Anecdotes and Drawings," *op. cit.*, 169.

[48] Feldman himself seems to make this connection, albeit with respect to his general technique: "what I do then is, I translate, say something, into a pitchy situation. And then I do it where it's more intervallic, and I take the suggestions of that back into another kind of pitchyness - not the original pitchyness, and so forth, and so on. Always retranslating and then saying, now let's do it with another kind of focus". Morton Feldman, "Darmstadt-Lecture," *op. cit.*, 186.

without the occurrence of any real change. In each case, the skill is such that the technique is fundamental to the evocative power of the content - the two are interdependent, and the use of regular, block material (temporally, instrumentally, and in terms of pitch), combined with arbitrary choices as to the deployment of material-types within these divisions, creates the simultaneous effect of rigorous searching and unfocused wandering.

Beckett's use of translation as a compositional method, therefore, corresponds to the constant re-contextualisation of sound in Feldman's work. Feldman has often spoken of the vital importance of instrumentation - "for me, composition is orchestration"[49] - but also of his sense that "instruments get in the way of sounds, robbing them of their immediacy"[50]. This attitude is, perhaps, the musical equivalent to Beckett's preoccupation with the intermediary distortion of words - "more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it"[51]. Yet, if anything, Feldman sees his medium as more restrictive than Beckett's:

> Beckett's voice is also so prevalent on his stage that it's difficult to distinguish *what* is said from *who* is saying it. As in Guston's painting, we seem to be hearing two voices simultaneously. For a composer this is a crucial problem: that the means or the instrument you use are only to articulate musical thought and not to interpret it.[52]

The pre-existent nature of musical notes differentiates them from the materiality of words or paint, and this purity, in a sense, precludes the direct "touch" of the composer: "the tragedy of music is that it begins with perfection. You can see all the time, while you are looking at a terrific picture, where the artist has changed their mind. I love those Mondrians where you can see it's erased.... There's nothing like that in music"[53]. Thus in Cezanne's painting, his "intelligence and touch have become a physical thing, a thing that can be seen. In the modulations of Beethoven we do not have his touch, only his logic. It is not enough for us that he *wrote* the music. We need him to sit down at the piano and play it for us"[54].

Feldman's concern, then, is to create a music with "surface" definition - "time canvasses" which attempt to capture the direct experience of temporal existence - and hence to give up the control of his material as far is possible while still being able to call the piece his own. The composer, according to Feldman,

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[49] Paul Griffiths, "Morton Feldman," *Musical Times* CXIII/1556 (August 1972), 758.

[50] Peter Dickinson, "Feldman Explains Himself," *Music and Musicians* XIV/11 (July 1966), 22.

[51] Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta* , *op. cit.*, 171.

[52] Morton Feldman, "Essay" in *Essays, op. cit.*, 116.

[53] Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars, "Morton Feldman Interviewed by Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars," *Studio International* CXCII (November - December 1976), 246.

[54] Morton Feldman, "Between Categories," *op. cit.*, 4.

cannot simply and tyrannically manipulate his material, but must pay real attention to it: "the composer may have plans ... but the music others"[55]. The relationship to Beckett's statement that "the kind of work I do is one in which I'm not master of my material"[56] is clear, and such an attitude is vital to the attempt to express the ungraspable nature of being.

Feldman once wrote, "what concerns me is that condition in music where the aural dimension is obliterated", moving on to explain that he means this not in the sense of inaudibility: "I think of Schubert, *Fantasie* in F-Minor. The weight of the melody here is such that you can't place where it is, or what it is or what it's coming from"[57]. The ideal of a sourceless music of surface in relation to which the listener does not know how to fix his or herself is thereby evoked. The endlessly self-reflective, shadowy character of the material and organisation of *Neither* can be seen in this light - the treatment of pitch, rhythm, and form, the minimisation of eventfulness, and the promotion of orchestration to pre-eminence, all contribute to the effect of movement around a central absence. Again, this relates to Feldman's attitude towards the libretto and clarifies the sense of its implications being somehow pre-existent and already known; the musical processes attempt to render the impression of the piece having begun before its opening and continuing beyond its end. Thus, while the expected authoritative essence is absent, the terms within which it has been sought revolve endlessly. In this sense, and through the work's identification with Beckett's view of the human condition, the lack of concern for the intelligibility of the soprano's words can be seen as a fundamental and necessary part of the process of setting this particular libretto.

Beyond the specific correspondences between Feldman's music and Beckett's text, it is possible to trace analogies with Beckett's general status as a bilingual author. In his book *Beckett and Babel*, Brian Fitch draws attention to Beckett's unique position as a writer and self-translator producing each text in both French and English. As was discussed earlier, Fitch points out that in translating a text Beckett often made alterations, frequently of single words or phrases, but sometimes of whole passages, such that the two versions of each work are significantly different. This calls into question the status of the work: neither can be seen as the "correct" or authoritative version, and yet the two are not the same. Each is dependent upon the other since, while the second text cannot exist without the former, the changes and its temporal succession suggest its priority. In terms of the Derridean concept of the supplement, it is this very addition - that which seems to

[55] Peter Dickinson, *loc. cit.*

[56] Isarel Shenker, *loc. cit.*

[57] Morton Feldman, "The Anxiety of Art" in *Essays, op. cit.*, 89.

guarantee the presence of an original - which reveals the lack in each, opening up an absence. From this perspective, there is no original and the status of the work is thrown into crisis through its unstable location in the very movement between languages. The contradictions between the two versions deny the text any existence as a "whole" other than in some purely hypothetical space within which the differences could co-exist. As Fitch concludes, "Beckett's persistence in producing a second-language version of each and every one of his works is intimately bound up with his conception of his fundamental enterprise as a writer"[58]; beyond the content of the works, textual authority is effaced within the actual process of creation (just as Feldman attempts an "inaudible" music), a fact which serves as the ultimate denial of the viability of effective literary expression.

In the light of this, Feldman's fascination with Beckett's method of repeated translation becomes particularly relevant, especially considering his own view of orchestration as a musical equivalent to translation. The analogy, however, opens up a problematic area in which certain attitudinal differences begin to emerge. While Feldman laments the perfection of music and attempts to create a musical surface by emphasising the materiality of sound, Beckett seems to move in the opposite direction, breaking down the structures of language, as if to dissolve its substance into something more pure and direct (and, ironically, something more musical). This situation is, however, more complex than such a simple opposition might suggest, for, despite the apparent divergence, both see the problem in similar terms. While Feldman appreciates the materiality of words and paint in contrast to the purity of music, this is not from any wish to deny music its abstraction, but rather from his concern to make the process of composition its own subject matter. This approach developed through an appreciation of Abstract Expressionist painting: he gives the example of a Jackson Pollock, wherein the way the paint falls onto the canvas is clearly formative of the work's subject[59], and this corresponds to Beckett's attempt to use language in such a way that "the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said"[60].

In interviews and essays, Feldman often returned to the idea of a music without instruments, a music that would bypass the problem that performers are "not interpreting the music; they're interpreting the instrument, and then the music"[61]. Thus Feldman's attempt to give his music a certain plasticity and Beckett's dissolution of linguistic structures are both results of the need to bypass restrictive intermediary factors which unavoidably falsify the directness of expression by

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[58] Brian T. Fitch, *op. cit.*, 229.

[59] Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars, *op. cit.*, 245.

[60] Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit," *op. cit.*, 123.

[61] Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *op. cit.*, 166.

dissociating what is to be said from how it is said. While Feldman may believe that the "impurity" of words restricts their distortion by the performer or the reader, Beckett would seem to disagree, as is shown by his assiduous direction of his plays[62]. Effectively, both Beckett and Feldman use the meeting point of their media and the *différance* of their signifiers to emphasise both the self-referentiality of the works and, at the same time, their fundamental relationship to the condition of being, to the impossibility of self-presence: each leads us "to re-enact what might be called our *extensive identity* in the world, an identity forgotten or repressed by the authoritative self intent on reinforcing its boundaries in order to know better what is beyond them"[63].

Feldman's assertion that "for art to succeed, its creator must fail"[64] seems to echo Beckett's comments on the impossibility of expression, yet a vital difference remains. Feldman once stated, "where in life we do everything we can to avoid anxiety, in art we must pursue it"[65], but his music in general, and *Neither* in particular, simply do not approach the level of consternation of Beckett's work. Beckett's later works, including the *Neither* libretto, may have moved beyond the desperation reached in *The Unnamable*, but the residual anxiety of the attempt to find a position from which self and other can be melded into the unity of full presence remains. In Feldman's case, however, the sense is always of the wealth of possibilities inherent within reduced circumstances[66]: even the above quotation regarding the necessary failure of the artist includes the *success* of the art work itself, a possibility which Beckett would not admit. In *Silence*, John Cage tells of a car journey with Feldman: "out of a sound sleep, he awoke to say, 'Now that things are so simple, there's so much to do.' And then he went back to sleep"[67]; while the incident may be from early in Feldman's career, the positing of endless creative possibility is equally relevant to later works, including the generative properties of *Neither*. Feldman's association with Cage provides an interesting counterpart to his relationship to Beckett and helps the assessment of aesthetic differences; while Cage's assertion that Feldman "is not troubled about continuity for he knows that any sound can follow any other"[68] may overstate the case, denying a concern with

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[62] Consider, for example, Billie Whitelaw's descriptions of working on a Beckett text by listening to him read it and then following his intonation and timing. See Jonathan Kalb, *op. cit.*, 234.

[63] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 207.

[64] Morton Feldman, "The Anxiety of Art," *op. cit.*, 91.

[65] *Ibid.*, 96.

[66] In an interview, Feldman said "whether it's on the keys of the piano or on the canvas, there are thousands of other possible notes or marks to choose from". Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars, *loc cit.*

[67] John Cage, "History of Experimental Music in the United States" in *Silence*, op. cit., 72.

[68] _____, "Juilliard Lecture" in *A Year From Monday* (London: Marion Boyars, 1968), 98.

"keeping the party going"[69], it serves as a reminder of Feldman's roots in the experimental music of the 1950s and 60s.

Feldman's *Neither* may articulate precisely the ceaseless motion back and forth and the instability of the attempt to locate an original point of focus - the contradictions of not-quite-full presence and not-quite-complete self-effacement may be simultaneously delineated without assimilation into unity - but the final state is of the acceptance of plurality, rather than Beckett's problematisation of that acceptance. Our reaction to Beckett's attempted "fidelity to failure"[70] may be complicated by the appreciation of the expressive power of Beckett's work, but while Feldman can accept contradiction into the equation, Beckett's work achieves both formidable linguistic expressivity *and* the problematisation of the creative act. Ultimately, the very contradiction within Feldman's attitude indicates the prevalence of a positive approach to which dialectical justification is unnecessary, an approach which Nicholas Zurbrugg sees as typical of the generally affirmative nature of American postmodernism (strongly influenced by Cage)[71].

Feldman's assertion that he never has to worry about having ideas[72] even denies the artist his or her traditional distress at being faced with a blank piece of paper or canvas. Feldman thus lies somewhere between Cage and Beckett, adapting the terms of each and presenting them simultaneously in full recognition and acceptance of their inherent contradictions. Feldman, like Cage, "rejects the limitations of the past rather than worrying about the limitations of the present and the future"[73]. For Beckett, in contrast, the weight of literary history hovers over his work as a reminder of past heroic failures. Beckett's work is innovative, but through an angst-ridden process of refining both his own work and its relationship to literary tradition. Feldman's relationship to the history of Western music is more complex than he would admit; despite the early "unfixing" of sound from the musical canon and its academic study (since "sound does not know its own history"[74]), later writings seem to make increasing references to past composers[75]. Yet this anxiety is purely personal and, despite changes in compositional style, it is hardly apparent in the music.

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[69] Richard Bernas and Adrian Jack, *loc. cit.*

[70] Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit," *op. cit.*, 125.

[71] Nicholas Zurbrugg, *The Parameters of Postmodernism, op. cit.*, 55-6.

[72] See Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars, *op. cit.*, 247.

[73] Nicholas Zurbrugg, *The Parameters of Postmodernism, op. cit.*, 12.

[74] Morton Feldman, "The Anxiety of Art," *op. cit.*, 86.

[75] In an interview, Feldman described his retreat from Cage's absolute abandonment of artistic control: "I once told Cage: 'John, the difference between the both of us is that you opened up the door and got pneumonia and I just opened up a window and got a cold'". Fred Orton and Gavin Bryars, *op. cit.*, 246.

Clearly, then, the aesthetic correspondences between the work of each artist are many. Both Beckett and Feldman locate the reader/listener within the instability of the experience itself, rather than allowing the safety of objective contemplation from without. Thus the work comes to exist dynamically within the space of its reception: as Feldman wrote with reference to the painting of Philip Guston, the work is "not confined to a painting space but rather ...[exists] somewhere in the space *between the canvas and ourselves*"[76]. However, while Beckett retains the sense of a struggle with the semantics and the history of his medium through a process of refinement rather than rejection, Feldman frees sound from the old structures of goal-oriented tension and resolution but, having done so, does not look elsewhere for a means of recasting the anxiety of expression. In this case, the very clarity of Feldman's approach - his appreciation of the "deity of sound"[77] - precludes any real pursuit of anxiety. This is again reminiscent of Feldman's acknowledgement that the opera is less tragic than the original text. It seems, therefore, that Feldman's insistence upon a new text was unnecessary: the opera effectively renders aspects of the subject and general effect of Beckett's output (most especially the later works) successfully in musical terms.

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[76] Morton Feldman, "After Modernism" in *Essays, op. cit.*, 106.

[77] Robert Ashley, *op. cit.*, 364.

While it would be hard to find two composers more aesthetically disparate than Morton Feldman and Richard Barrett, there are certain similarities in their relationships to Beckett. Richard Barrett has produced a whole series of compositions with quotations from Beckett texts written into the scores. No attempt has been made to set the words - indeed, it seems that such a concept would be anathema to Barrett - but the repeated references to Beckett strongly suggest that Barrett must see his compositional projects in relation to the preoccupations of the author. On examining the works, many aesthetic parallels begin to emerge (and, naturally, to raise questions about the relationship between the different media), and it is here that the link to Feldman's *neither* becomes clear: while Feldman may have chosen to set Beckett's words, it is nevertheless his actual treatment of musical material in which lies the link to Beckett, and this is equally the case for Barrett. For both composers, the attraction to Beckett is more the result of a perceived aesthetic affinity than of a desire to give the words an added dimension through their musical setting.

Richard Barrett is a relatively young composer, but came to music late after first studying science. His works have attracted a high degree of interest, thanks partly to his association with the so-called "New Complexity" movement. However, while he undoubtedly shares some of the concerns of other composers of complex music (such as its prime exponent, Brian Ferneyhough, and others such as Michael Finnissy, James Dillon, and Chris Dench), Barrett's relationship to "New Complexity" is qualified by the strength of his individual concerns.

For Barrett, complexity is a necessary result of the disappearance of common practice in music-making of the twentieth century. The current plurality of musical styles is such that composers can no longer rely upon any tradition of performance practice (Barrett's favourite example of such a tradition is the slight *rubato* commonly introduced into waltz rhythms by the lengthening of the first beat). Instead, every detail must be included in the score, and the intricate notation is therefore a necessary result of accounting for the complexities of any performance situation. Beyond this, however, the difficulty of realising such notation cannot avoid highlighting the performer's struggle to play the music accurately. Barrett shares this emphasis with Ferneyhough; both stress that the foregrounding of the act of performance differentiates itself from the Romantic tradition of virtuoso performance by focusing on the actual process of note production, rather than on the player's mastery of the instrument. For Ferneyhough, the result is a kind of objectified virtuosity, wherein the performer's ego is transcended through the intense concentration required by the process of realisation, and a more direct contact

between composer and audience is thereby achieved[78]. However, while this immediacy is very much a part of Barrett's brand of complexity, his emphasis is instead upon the difficulty, even impossibility, of the situation in which the performer is placed. Faced with such incredibly detailed notation the player will inevitably fail to give a wholly accurate performance, and it is this process of failure which seems to interest Barrett. The extremity of the situation simply exaggerates usual performance activity, and Barrett's adoption of a complex mode of writing therefore problematises the casual acceptance of the situation of performance and, indeed, of musical expression itself.

In this way, the reason for Barrett's attraction to the works of Beckett starts to become apparent. Clearly, it has nothing to do with any perception of "musical" elements within the texts (and Barrett has himself made this clear[79]), but instead lies in a common need to question the expressive possibilities available, and to do so through the very act of creation. Beckett is by no means the only figure to have inspired Barrett - other works take their titles or involve quotations from authors such as Pinget, Flaubert, Proust, Lautréamont, and from the painter Roberto Matta - but he is by far the most prevalent source[80]: indeed, Barrett's pre-compositional work for his string quartet *I open and close* consisted of reading and re-reading Beckett's entire output. Even those works which make no mention of Beckett retain the same attitude towards composition, opening up the question of quite how similar concerns can be examined in the different media of language and music.

On the simplest level, Barrett is interested in monologues. Several of his pieces are for solo instruments, (*Tract* for piano, *air* for violin, *Nothing elsewhere* for viola, and *knospend gespaltener* for clarinet, for example), while his ensemble pieces often include monologic sections which may take the form either of cadenza-like passages or of the dramatic opposing of one instrument with the others. *Ne songe plus à fuir*[81] (*Dream no more of fleeing*) for amplified solo 'cello is one of

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[78]"Ferneyhough hopes that by presenting him [the performer] with almost insuperable difficulties he will suppress his subjectivity and any personal desire to interpret the music - there simply would not be time or concentration left while struggling to comply with all the notated difficulties." Jonathan Harvey, "Brian Ferneyhough," *Musical Times* CXX/1639 (September 1979), 724.

[79]"Of course much has been said on the 'musicality' of these texts, in sonorous terms, structural terms and so on. But I don't think that was the main reason for the attractiveness of that body of work to me." Richard Barrett, letter to the author, 16 June 1994.

[80]Several of Barrett's pieces take their titles from Beckett: *I open and close* (1983-88) for string quartet and optional amplification, and *Another heavenly day* (1989-90) for Eb clarinet, electric guitar, and double bass, for example. Other works are prefaced by quotations from Beckett, or else have quotations written into the scores, alongside the music. Examples are *Anatomy* (1985-6) for eleven instruments, and *Tract, part one* (1984-89) for solo piano. The works are all published by United Music Publishers, London.

[81]Richard Barrett, *Ne songe plus à fuir* for amplified solo 'cello (London: United Music Publishers, 1985-6).

Example 1

Ne songe plus à fuir

Richard Barrett
1985-86

Stories.. I have not been able
to tell them I shall not be able
to tell this one.   (Beckett, Molloy)

Barrett's most successful pieces to date. The title comes from a painting by Chilean surrealist Roberto Matta; according to Barrett, it depicts "a dark, troubled atmosphere within which anthropomorphic figures are immersed in attitudes of desperation, imprisonment [and] oppression, surely influenced by the often brutal recent history of the artist's home country"[82]. The work, therefore, has a specific political background (indeed, Richard Toop sees it as part of a post-war tradition of works in which the 'cello is used as a symbol of human suffering, citing Bernd Alois Zimmerman's *Canto di Speranza*, Isang Yun's *'Cello Concerto*, and Ferneyhough's *Time and Motion Study II* (originally called *Electric Chair Music*) as predecessors[83]). In addition to the Matta reference, however, Barrett prefaces the score with a quotation from Beckett's *Molloy* ("stories ... I have not been able to tell them. I shall not be able to tell this one"), and a quotation from *As the story was told* is placed at the end of the piece: "no, was the answer, after some little hesitation, no. I did not know what the poor man was required to say in order to be pardoned, but would have recognised it at once at a glance, if I had seen it". Thus Barrett chooses accompanying quotations which might refer to the background political situation, but which could also describe the processes of composition or performance.

The piece is divided very clearly into eight sections - bars 1-33, 34-59, 60-81, 82-111, 112-120, 121-127, 128-133, and bar 134 - such that the latter sections are far shorter than those of the opening (the last section comprising a single very long bar). Within these, the bars themselves form self-contained units clearly demarcated by the dynamic outlines, by the use of rests, or by the frequent placing of commas at the ends of the bars. The bar-lengths hover around a mean of 5/8, and the performance details state that each bar should be played as if taking place in a single breath (the commas thereby acting as breaks for gasps of air): the total effect emphasises the monologic nature of the piece and is highly reminiscent of Beckett's *How It Is*, wherein the protagonist emits a stream of grammatically incomplete phrases, punctuated only by actual gaps in the text layout.

In many ways, the first section sets up the pattern for those which follow. It begins with the minimal, bar-length gesture of a long, accented C♯ harmonic, high on the bottom string (which has been tuned a semitone lower than normal). The note begins *sfffz* and *diminuendos*, becoming an ordinary stopped note with a small *glissando* down to a B quarter-flat at the very end. This bar is repeated five times, allowing the establishment of its gestural identity before the development of the following bars (see example one). Over these bars, each element is gradually transformed. The short *glissando* at the end of the first bar is developed, first by its

[82]Barrett quoted in Richard Toop, booklet notes to the Elision Ensemble CD of Barrett's music (Etcetera KTC 1167, 1993).
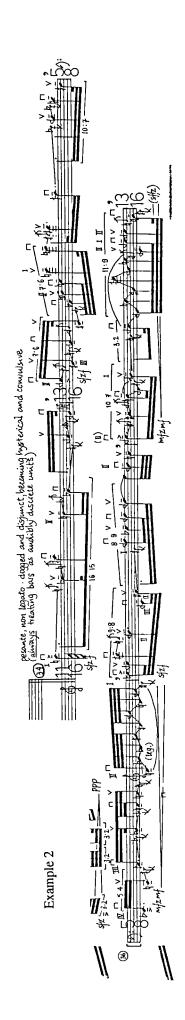[83]*Ibid.*

extension (in bar 7) into a plunge down to the bottom open string, producing a double-stop which is itself a repeat of the opening pitches transposed inwards by a quarter-tone and displaced by an octave. At the same time, the main note decreases in length until it is so short that the *glissando* itself becomes the opening gesture of the bars. In the course of this, the C♮ has a B added to it, and this double-stop is gradually moved down in pitch while the pitches at the base of each *glissando* gradually rise from bar 12 onwards, often by microtonal intervals. At bar 14, the initial plunge downwards is abandoned and the low accented B (along with the next open string, the F♯ a fifth higher) takes over as the focal point at the beginning of each bar. This string now becomes the point of return from which each bar sets out, straining up into increasingly frantic *glissandi* and *pizzicati* (and the fact that these following bars effect an elaborated inversion of the opening glissandi is emphasised by the hovering around the harmonic C quarter-sharp in bar 14). The dynamic structure of each bar is similarly transformed, varying according to the placing of material: the downward *glissandi* always involve a *crescendo,* whether from *pianissimo* to *piano* (as in the small opening *glissandi*), or from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* (as is the case with the three octave plunges down to the low B). The general dynamic outline of most bars, however, follows a single trajectory, either from very quiet to very loud or vice versa.

These opening few bars provide the gestural material and the points of focus from which the rest of the first section is generated, deploying increasingly frenzied material, often in *quasi arpeggiando* figuration but with microtonal pitch adjustments. While the rhythms are complicated and the pitches very difficult to find due to the constant use of quarter-tones, harmonics, and double-stops, the processes of gestural transformation are surprisingly easy to follow in general terms. Basic areas of pitch are established and become associated with different types of material; for example, in each of bars 13 to 18, the 'cello at one point plays an harmonic *glissando* oscillating around two areas, the first of which starts by covering the smallest of intervals (Gb-F♯) and gradually expands over the bars (until it covers A quarter-flat to E quarter-flat), while the second begins by covering just over a sixth (D quarter-flat to B) and again expands slightly (both within each bar and from one to the next). Additionally, because so much of this material involves expansion either out *from* the smallest intervals of a quarter-tone to a tone, or out *to* nearly an octave (i.e. to roughly the inversion of the quarter-tone or tone), and because the constant use of *glissandi* and harmonics generates an approximate sense of pitch, it is very easy to hear these isolated areas as transpositions and transformations of the original basic gestures.

Once the bottom open string has been sounded at the end of bar 7, it becomes the major focal point of the section, recurring almost every bar (and often more than

once). Its use at the base of the *glissandi* (either as the starting point or at the end), or held under the start of a oscillating harmonic *glissando,* gives the impression of it generating the rest of the material, acting as a root from which the bow attempts to pull away, but to which it is constantly drawn back. Its frequent occurrence in a double-stop with next (F♯) open string, and with the later addition of the top two open strings (again at the bar openings, from bar 23), implies a conception of the 'cello's open strings as the resonating force from which each bar attempts to develop; as will become clear, this corresponds to Barrett's conception of his processes of pitch selection. The effect is complemented by the instruction that the harmonic *glissandi* "are to 'emerge' from the upper partials of the low B"; at this speed, the 'cellist cannot really hope to be fully in control of the emergence of harmonics, but the instruction gives a strong indication of the desired effect.

The repeated plunging down to the bottom strings followed by the straining away and upwards into the higher reaches of the instrument, all demarcated by breaks for gasps of air, effects a clear sense of expression under restraint. The impression is of a musician making repeated attempts to present something of meaning and aid its development, perhaps getting a little further each time (at least for a while), until it becomes clear that no progress is being made and the attempts become more hysterical. The oscillating *glissandi* unavoidably suggest a search for the "right" notes, and Barrett's written instructions clarify this: the opening is marked "with barely articulated anger", and bar 26 is marked "increasingly incoherent, phrases becoming wild spasms". By the end of the section, the hysteria has degenerated into nothing but brief, frantic double-stopped *glissandi* between the areas thus far pinpointed, often with the accompaniment of finger percussion. Despite the clear definition of this first section, in no sense does it form a completed whole. Instead, the sense is of something abandoned, of faith having been lost in the potential of the material to become meaningful. While the expansion of initial ideas and the recurrent exploration of particular pitch areas and intervals (usually themselves related to the opening) suggest development, the further the 'cellist moves from the fundamental notes, the more desperate the impression: the intervals covered by the *glissandi* widen, and the sound becomes more screeching and scraping (as a result of the higher harmonics). The sense of development is therefore revealed as misleading, and Barrett's use of the narrow opening *glissando* followed by the enormous breadth of the *glissando* in bar 7 seems almost to parody the very nature of motivic musical development - in a sense, any music could be seen to have grown from such elements: the musical result is shown to be purely arbitrary, rather than the result of a uniquely inspired process. As Barrett has suggested, "one needs to have in mind that there is some ineffable vision there in the midst of it, which needs to be got at, yet I know all the time, and so does everyone else, that it isn't
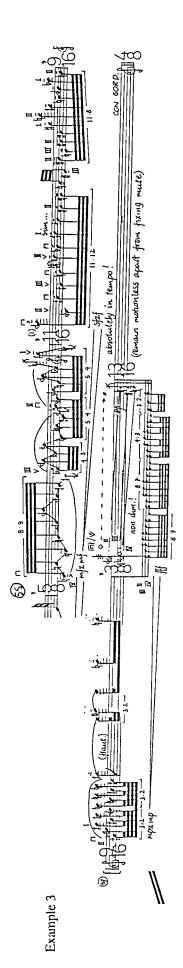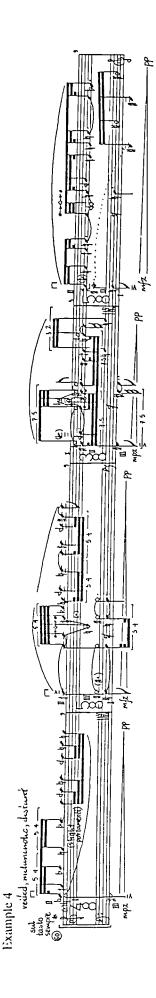
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Example 2

really there ... it's a process of gradually finding out the truth that there was nothing there in the first place"[84] (sentiments which relate closely to those of Beckett).

The first section sets up the pattern for the rest to follow. The material of the following subdivisions, however, is generally more restricted than that of the first, each section elaborating a search for expression within one main type of material. The second section (marked "*pesante, non legato*: dogged and disjunct, becoming increasingly hysterical and convulsive") is mainly concerned with *glissandi* (on stopped notes rather than harmonics). The main notes are stressed or accented, giving the effect of the left-hand fingers attempting to create a coherent line by hanging on to fixed pitches for as long as possible before being pulled away to the next position. No system of pitch organisation is audible, and Barrett does not use recurrent points of focus as clearly as in the first section, yet occasionally within a bar a particular note (or a note in close proximity) will be reiterated after a sudden plunge away. The speed and the use of *glissandi* disorient the listener to a certain extent, such that the return to a pitch from the same general area as a recently sounded note is perceived as establishing a momentary focal point (especially since the intervals between clear pitches are either fairly wide - almost or just over an octave - or very small).

In the first bar of the section (bar 34), for example, the top C and C quarter-sharp, and the lower Ab and A quarter-flat are heard as two demarcated regions, while in bars 37 and 38, the area around E and E quarter-flat a tenth above middle C is returned to repeatedly (see example two). Even instances as insubstantial as the brief reiteration of the B quarter-flat near the end of bar 41 attract the attention of a listener eager to make some sense of the constant sliding back and forth. As with bars 1-34, this section grows progressively more frantic due to the increasing use of very fast string-crossing and the shortening of those clear notes which seem to provide the only stability. Additionally, the sense of onward struggle is emphasised by the progression upwards to the very high F quarter-sharp, G♯, G natural, and A in the penultimate bar (bar 57), before the instrument seizes up on a *tremolando* harmonic chord. The straining towards this summit, though hard to hear clearly, is suggested throughout the section by the isolated sounding of gradually higher pitches from this region (over two octaves above middle C) in the midst of the frantic playing of lower notes. The section begins with a high C, followed by a leap back up to C quarter-sharp later in the bar. A high D quarter-sharp occurs three bars later, E quarter-sharp in the next bar, a *glissando* to F quarter-sharp in bar 39, and a G quarter-flat a few notes into bar 40. From this point, the ascent seems to become

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[84]Barrett quoted in Richard Toop, "Richard Barrett in Interview with Richard Toop," *Sounds Australian* XXIX (Autumn 1991), 31.

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5

more difficult, the high notes being sounded more infrequently: bar 45 includes an A quarter-flat, bar 52 an A quarter-sharp and Gs, while bar 55 falls slightly in order to reactivate the climb through F quarter-sharp (with an F *acciaccatura*), G quarter-flat and A, before the fina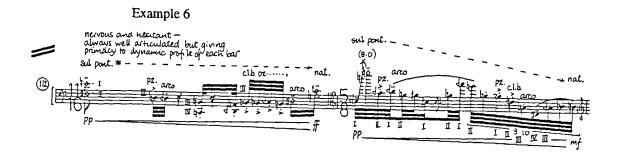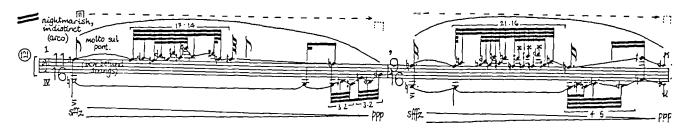l attempt in bar 57 (see example three). This contributes to the general effect of increasing desperation and the final abandonment of the material.

The following sections work through similar processes, each within its own distinct timbral colouring. The third section is muted and *sul tasto*, and is marked "veiled, melancholic, distant". Each bar opens with a chord, often taking either the F♯ or A string (or both) as the root and usually partly comprising harmonics (frequently especially awkward false harmonics, thereby emphasising the indistinct opacity of the sound). From each chord, a certain pitch (or pitches) is selected and extended into the bar; the 'cello usually oscillates unsteadily around the quarter-tonal intervals surrounding these pitches, giving a *portamento* effect which, instead of leading somewhere, simply fades away through a long *diminuendo*, giving the effect of a chord disintegrating into its overtonal vestiges (example four). Gradually, this residue is expanded, growing in importance and taking over from the opening gestures as the main point of interest. Again, some kind of development seems to be taking place from one bar to the next, with the widening of the intervals, the introduction of *glissandi*, and the increasing incidence of notes. Each bar generally begins at a progressively higher dynamic level, until from bar 76 the bars end in sudden *crescendi* through wide harmonic *glissandi*: over the final few bars these gain in importance, until the last bars comprise nothing else. Thus, as in the first two sections, the activity becomes gradually more frantic (though the effect is this time restricted by the use of the mute, the harmonics and the instruction to play *sul tasto*), until the last desperate bars fade out in swooping harmonic *glissandi* which freeze on a final chord, nothing having been achieved.

The fourth section (from bar 82) attempts to develop "grinding and laborious" quarter-tonal double-stops (example five). The upper and lower lines, often both moving by *glissandi*, are pitted against one another by means of a gradual *crescendo* from *mezzo-piano* to *fortissimo* in each bar of the lower part, and a *diminuendo* from *sffz* to *mezzo-piano* in each bar of the upper part - even if the two separate dynamic outlines are not audible, the effect of the lines struggling against one another is apparent in the *glissandi*. Regular bow changes emphasise the laborious sawing back and forth, and (as usual) the movement is often around the same or similar pitch areas; the bars often end only a very small distance from the starting point, adding to the impression of little having been achieved. In bar 99, the music seizes up on a *fff*, grinding, semitonal double-stop, but starts afresh in the next bar. This time, though, the 'cello gradually covers more wide-reaching pitches, again

Example 6

Example 7

Example 8

Example 9

Brixton
23 October 1986

giving the impression of increasing desperation, until bar 111 accelerates out of control.

Section five comprises very "nervous and hesitant" material, oscillating quickly between differently articulated bowed and *pizzicato* notes, each bar (except the last, which is "gently disintegrating") following a long *crescendo* and a correspondent change from *sul pont* to natural playing (example six). Section six ("nightmarish and indistinct"), on the other hand, echoes the third subdivision's use of an *sffz* opening chord (this time nearly always comprising the outer two open strings) which fades into barely audible oscillations around its remnants (see example seven). Here, however, the use of finger percussion and of the bow behind the strings, *molto sul pont*, give a different, scraping quality to the sound. There is again some sense of the recurrence of certain pitch areas, but this is now limited by the insubstantial nature of the material.

Each of these sections repeats the articulation of an attempt to develop something concrete, but by the time the six bars of the penultimate section are reached, defeat is virtually inevitable - all that can be attempted is "groaning" around the area of the D below midd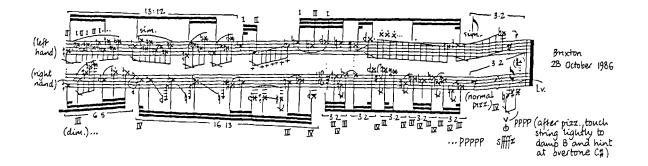le C (see example eight), on different strings and with different articulations, as if in final brief attempts to develop something from the note (and, significantly, this pitch is again that of the D open string). Each bar begins *fff* but *sul pont*; the sound quality is therefore extremely harsh, and the section ends with a single quarter-tone (D and E quarter-flat) bowed "unbearably hard" until the bow comes to a complete standstill. All that is left for the final "fleeting delirious" one bar section is frantic *col legno battuto* behind the bridge and finger percussion which very occasionally picks out the notes of the open strings (or these same pitches in octave displacements): the articulatory paraphernalia remain, but the actual musical substance has evaporated. The whole piece fizzles out with the plucking of the bottom open string, *sfffz*, followed by the light touching of the string, *pppp*, to damp it and to hint at the overtone C♯ (in a final reference to the piece's opening gesture - see example nine).

In a sense, then, sections two to eight follow the template of the first section, each comprising a sequence of bars which take similar starting points to one another and attempt to develop something substantial, before falling away in frustration. However, none of these passages achieves as strong a sense of searching through material as the opening. This is partly due to the fact that the initial section comprises a wider range of material types; sections two to eight each have their own specific limited range of timbral characteristics. While section one does have clear gestural preoccupations, its spectrum of sound sources is wider, ranging from ordinary double-stopped chords (with or without *glissandi* and covering a wide range of pitches), to harmonic *glissandi*, and sometimes including *sul pont* playing,

jeté, pizzicato, finger percussion, and *arpeggio* figurations. Each of the sections, therefore, explores different facets of section one, thus giving the impression of examining the residue of a fundamental in a manner correspondent to the internal workings of each bar. In this way, the first section could be viewed as providing, albeit inexplicitly, the range of expressive devices and timbres upon which the following sections will attempt to focus in order to attempt the derivation of a piece; it therefore seems appropriate that while the first section does initially delude the listener with impressions of development, the increasingly limited resources of successive sections gradually undermine this effect, until the music can barely be said to have achieved anything more than futile gesturing.

Such a clear depiction of failed expression could be interpreted in several ways. The most obvious is naturally the link, through the title, to the restrictions upon freedom in oppressive regimes (and Barrett has suggested that the impression should be of the music being "extorted from the 'cello as if under interrogation"[85]). However, in hearing (and especially in seeing) this piece performed, the most striking aspect of the situation is the fact of an instrumentalist attempting to play a piece of music (and, of course, the audience may be unaware of the significance of the title). The effect of struggle is twofold, for while the music itself articulates a search through potential material, the player is faced with notation of great complexity from which a performance must be unravelled. In this sense, the struggle is that of the extreme performance situation, but also that to create a piece of music of any real significance.

The composer is obviously keenly aware of the physical aspect of performance; like Ferneyhough, Barrett's music takes on a meta-musical level in that it is both complex and about that complexity. Percussionist Steven Schick has written of the necessity of choreographing his performance of Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet* such that the physical and aural aspects are thoroughly integrated in the process of learning[86]. Similarly, Barrett's attention to details of bowing, to the exact placing of notes on the string, and to the mode of note production (or, more precisely, to the *effect* required of the mode of production), reveal a sense of the physicality of the performance process as integral to the piece. The expression markings tend to give emotive descriptions of the required effect, sometimes even describing the state of mind to be suggested (in *Dark ages* (1987-90), for example, Barrett uses instructions such as to play "as if straining vainly to continue" and

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[85]Barrett quoted in Richard Toop, "Four Facets of the New Complexity," Contact XXX (Spring 1988), 36.
[86]Steven Schick, "Developing an Interpretive Context: Learning Brian Ferneyhough's *Bone Alphabet," Perspectives of New Music* XXXII/1 (Winter 1994), 132-53.

"sliding helplessly back from silence"). In the solo piano piece, *Tract*, these dramatic elements are made more explicit with the inclusion of directions as to both how the pianist should enter ("walk slowly and wearily onstage to piano with unsuccessfully suppressed apprehension as if about to embark on a compulsive but eviscerating experience for the thousandth time.... Move hands slowly to keys and remain there for a disconcerting time before beginning"), and how the piece should end ("stop dead with no sense of completion. Remain motionless, without relaxing, throughout the silence, hands remaining at the keyboard, eyes at the score").

Just as Barrett creates drama by pushing the natural characteristics of the situation to extremes, in *Ne songe plus à fuir* his treatment of the 'cello and the pitch material is derived from the fundamental nature of the instrument itself. Thus an instrument with great potential for beauty is stripped of its lyrical tradition, and the four open strings and their overtonal resonances provide the basis of the material. Despite the mass of aural information, therefore, the perception of the open stings as gravitational "roots" towards which the bow is constantly pulled back corresponds to Barrett's conception of the material. Beyond this, however, the processes of pitch selection are far more complicated, based on statistical processes developed by computer. The piece, like other Barrett works, is based on the development of an array of "virtual pitch material"[87] from which the final pitches are extrapolated. This material may have particular characteristics; an early example is the work *Coïgitum* (1983-5), wherein the virtual material takes the form of four modes with notes which function as the "hypothetical centre of computerised, 'probabilistic' distributions - the most probable outcome at any moment is a note of the mode itself, the next most probable outcome a semitone above or below etc."[88]. In *Anatomy*, Barrett chose to focus the distributions around *glissandi* rather than fixed notes, with the result that even the "virtual harmony" (which may or may not arise from these vectors) is in a constant state of flux. Returning to *Ne songe plus à fuir*, here the virtual material is derived from the nature of the 'cello; Barrett divided each string into eight overlapping registers, each sampled vectorially such that at any moment thirty-two pitches could potentially be available (though these notes are not necessarily all different). In this way, a large proportion of the virtual material - as much as 85%, Barrett suggests[89] - never finds its way into the piece. Thus the process corresponds to the duration of the work, generating centres of "pitch probability" which transform throughout the work and from which the actual written pitches are derived

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[87]Barrett has written that "the word 'virtual' is used in its original sense, ie. as *opposed* to 'real'; the common conjunction of the two words in recent years, though on the face of it meaningless, has however achieved the sanction of usage to the point that I've now more or less stopped referring to 'virtual material' for fear of misunderstanding". Richard Barrett, letter to the author, *op. cit.*

[88]Richard Toop, "Four Facets of the New Complexity," *op. cit.*, 33.

[89]Barrett quoted in Richard Toop, "Richard Barrett in Interview with Richard Toop," *op. cit.*, 28.

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at further levels. Barrett sees the development of this process as realising his concern to let his pieces follow a centripetal process, "moving from the 'architectural' to the 'anatomical', so to speak (as a result of searching for methodologies which were congruent with my own perception)"[90]. This refers to Barrett's concern that his music should develop in a manner appropriate to the psychology of perception and memory - hence his preference for exponential processes, as the fact that the rate of change increases as the process develops seems (to Barrett) to correspond to the way the memory allows the mind to assimilate music: "a given situation is apprehended and then a certain change to that situation can be apprehended and, as one becomes more used to the kind of network of ideas initially set up, it changes more and more rapidly without one losing track of it"[91].

While it would therefore be impossible to follow the details of Barrett's computer-based procedures of pitch selection without knowing the full mathematical details, such knowledge would not aid the understanding of the piece. Similarly, it is important to note that Barrett expresses a certain reluctance to describe the specifics of the processes, not from any desire to conceal information, but because "such processes are of significance only in as much as they form a contributory layer to the work's formal/expressive conception"[92]. In other words, in the case of *Ne songe plus à fuir*, the significance lies in the fact that the virtual material is taken from the anatomy of the instrument; Barrett suggests that his procedures realise the possibility of "'sculpting' pitch materials (for example) from the nature of the instrument itself"[93], and this is relevant to his attraction to composing solo pieces. In other works, the process is taken to further extremes; for example, *air*[94] derives its pitches initially from a virtual network of trajectories of the left-hand over the violin's fingerboard. The overall processes were traced by the constantly changing values of the left-hand position (in terms of the first finger's distance from the nut) and its extension (the distance between the first and fourth fingers), while the structure of the right-hand part defined which strings were available at any point. The pitches therefore resulted from the interaction of the two different levels (and pitch is only one component of the strata)[95].

The lack of detailed information regarding the workings of Barrett's mathematical processes makes it hard to ascertain whether the perception of pitch relations in *Ne songe plus à fuir* is purely subjective or an actual result of the procedures. Nevertheless, the description of note relationships based on probabilities

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[90]Richard Barrett, letter to the author, *op. cit.*

[91]Barrett quoted in Richard Toop, "Four Facets of the New Compexity," *op. cit.*, 32.

[92]Ricahrd Barrett, letter to the author, *op. cit.*

[93]*Ibid.*

[94]Richard Barrett, *air* for solo violin. (London: United Music Publishers, 1993).

[95]_____, letter to the author, *op. cit.*

which gradually decrease as the notes move away from one another seems closely linked to the perception of particular pitch areas as centres of gravity to which the music constantly returns. This perhaps clarifies the meaning of Barrett's statement that the music "cannot be 'explained' or analysed in these terms, only, if at all, by a listener's intuition"[96]. This is most apparent in the use of open strings, but is also suggested by the frequent phrases which expand from the same rough area (as in section three, for example), or by the *glissandi* which are pulled back to a previously sounded note (or a close relative) before being allowed to escape to a new pitch. Again, this seems to clarify Barrett's comment that the processes are important only in forming a layer of the structural and expressive conception, since it is the formation of these gestures around the restrictive limits of gravitational centres which plays the major role in generating the impression of an instrument in search of effective expression.

Barrett's delineation of the bars as isolated units, each of a length which fluctuates around a mean of 5/8, limits the distance that can be travelled in a single bar; once the end of the "breath" is reached, the 'cellist must break off, as if for a gasp of air. Within each bar, the rhythms are, again, determined by exponential processes: as before, Barrett sees the proportions as correspondent to processes of perception, even if the means by which the rhythms are generated remain imperceptible. Barrett describes these rhythmic structures in the general terms of the "hierarchical ordering of 'disturbances' in a chain of iterations"[97] which moves from binary subdivisions (2:1), to ternary (3:2), and on to more and more distant subdivisions. The frequency of occurrence of the different subdivisions is exponentially proportional to the inverse of its "remoteness", such that, ideally, every rhythm is conceived (and hopefully perceived) as a "more or less extreme departure from an implied 'fundamental'"[98]: the irrational nature of the rhythms therefore becomes compositionally meaningful. Barrett describes this as a kind of "harmonics of pulsation", evoking the analogy of the hierarchy of the harmonic series (an analogy which seems particularly apt in the light of the work's exploitation of the resonant potential of open strings).

As with the determination of pitch, these compositional processes bear little relation to the audible result; indeed, while it is possible to perceive focal pitch areas (which may or may not result from the mathematical procedures), this is not the case with the rhythmic divisions. The constant use of *glissandi* and the unavoidable imprecision of the awkward harmonics deflect any attempt to hear the piece in terms of related rhythmic structures. However, certain more important effects *are* audible:

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[96]*Ibid.*
[97]Richard Barrett, "The Notation of Time: a Reply," *Contact* XXX (Spring 1987), 34.
[98]*Ibid.*

these concern the rate of note production and its relation to individual bar units. Due to the pauses between bars, it is rare that durational patterns are comparable between any two bars other than in extremely general terms (such as the lengthening or shortening of the same or a similar gesture). Within the bars themselves, however, it is possible to perceive the rhythmic subdivisions as correspondent to the pitch structures in the articulation of general patterns of growth and decay. Thus each bar of the opening (from bar 9 onwards, at least), follows a pattern of increasing rhythmic incidence that corresponds to the broadening-out of the pitch material from certain points of focus. Additionally, the outline of each of these bars is mapped onto roughly the first two-thirds of the section as a whole; the general attempt at development is followed by means of each bar starting a little further along the line in terms of the rate of subdivision, with gradually increasing rates of note production and greater irrationality. This disperses only as the failure becomes apparent in the bars marked "increasingly incoherent, phrases becoming wild spasms".

Similar patterns do occur in the following sections, but to a lesser degree, thereby adhering to the general delineation of increasingly restricted attempts to escape the imposed structures. In a sense, therefore, these rhythmic shapes do follow the model expected from exponential processes, the note-values becoming less rational and shorter as the ability to perceive new information grows. However, in no way is the listener able to hear the rhythms as related in any specific sense, other than as a general growth in incidence from an initial long note. Instead, the significance clearly lies in the restrictions imposed by the isolated bar units and by the increasing irrationality. Furthermore, the patches of rhythmic indistinctness, along with the harmonics and *glissandi*, could be seen as creating a deliberate obfuscation. The piece effects a visceral depiction of the failure of musical expression, but in order to do so it must maintain a degree of control over the psychology of the listener (and the player), such that the apparent progression from the original ideas can be apprehended, despite the encroaching disintegration. Barrett sets himself a very difficult task, wishing to remain uncompromising in his commitment to representing the complexity of musical experience while also aiming to present the attempted creation and gradual abandonment of such an experience. In addition, the struggle of the performer must be directly enacted - the struggle cannot simply *represent* the problematics of the situation.

The obfuscatory timbres and irrational rhythms, therefore, both cause the performer great difficulty and limit the listener's ability to follow the apparent processes of gestural transformation. Simultaneously, though, such developments can, if required, be heard as a natural extension of the preceding bars, and Barrett thereby opens up the question of quite how musical processes are perceived. Barrett

puts the very nature of compositional practice into crisis by providing the listener with certain aural paths to follow, paths which appear to adhere to a pattern of cause and effect, but which suddenly break off and start afresh. Eventually, it seems that the gestures which initially appeared to have some generative potential were merely empty, or, to look at it from another point of view, the restrictions imposed by the material (particularly the gravitational pull of the open strings) were too great for any true voice to be found. We are presented with what is, in traditional terms, a failed exercise in composition and a futile attempt to perform that composition. A completely successful realisation would be impossible, given the demands made upon the performer, and, in any case, how would an audience recognise a "successful" rendition of such a work? To an extent, even the listener is placed in a position of failure as, gradually, the ability to make sense of the music, except in terms of failure, is eroded.

This is not, however, the whole truth, for Barrett faces us with the paradox that if the piece were truly unable to communicate ideas, we would surely not be able to perceive it as a depiction of failure. The audience is not simply presented with an instrumentalist floundering around an instrument. Much of the time, the gestures could have formed the basis of an "ordinary" contemporary composition as well as any others; indeed, much of the opening material is as convincing as that of any piece. Barrett's achievement is to allow the processes to degenerate without simply disorienting the listener. The listener may experience a degree of confusion, but providing that the initial processes are comprehended this will be recognised as *meant*, and the work therefore experienced at a further, meta-musical level. The confusion is no greater than in most contemporary music, and rather than the listener's subjectivity being cancelled (as one vehement critic has claimed[99]), the engagement within the process heightens the awareness of individual perceptual responses. Ultimately, the listener is able to react on a variety of levels, experiencing confusion while following a process wherein confusion is necessary to the representation.

Barrett does not simply present failure, but problematises the nature of contemporary composition and its ability to express, questioning the viability of situations which ordinarily pass as the norm. Barrett's choice of gestures has great semantic coherence; it is impossible to hear the first section other than as some kind of restraint being placed upon the 'cellist's attempts at expression. Similarly, passages which involve repeated *glissandi* away from semi-stable pitch areas cannot fail to evoke a sense of the fingers trying desperately to create a coherent line, especially considering the additional scraping and sliding qualities often generated

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[99]Ivan Hewett, "Fail Worse; Fail Better," *Musical Times* CXXXV/1813 (March 1994), 148-51.

by Barrett's timbral effects. We are faced with an abstract piece of music that almost seems to challenge us to hear it as such - Barrett seems to play on the fact that the only way to talk of this piece is in terms of struggle, torture, and desperation, and yet the piece is purely instrumental. To create such a visceral depiction coherently in abstract musical terms is difficult, and it is only due to the gestural specificity that listeners are able to locate themselves both actively within and passively without the musical experience, collating points of reference while at the same time observing the more far-reaching problematization of the nature of composition and performance. Thus Barrett demands that the listener places faith in him, accepting both the articulation of a coherent piece of music and its subsequent undermining as intentional: the coherence is thus transferred to another level wherein it is the very incoherence of the situation that is made clear. Additionally, this act of faith corresponds to that required of both the performer (who knows that success is impossible, but must proceed as if it is not), and of the composer himself. Barrett has often talked of his music as proceeding "from fictions which are necessary for the personality of the composer to believe, to make acts of faith in order to carry the work through"[100]. This suggests that all a composer needs to create a piece of music is confidence in the original material, but at the same time undermines this faith through the realisation of the arbitrariness of that material and hence of the whole composition: *Ne songe plus à fuir* explores precisely this, articulating Barrett's sense that "confusion is all there is, and to create music is to endlessly rebuild, and inevitably destroy, the edifice of lies we might call inspiration or imagination"[101].

Such an attitude seems closely related to Ferneyhough's perception of his compositional structures as labyrinthine, the initial material being arbitrarily chosen and following no pre-determined path, such that manifold outcomes are possible. For Ferneyhough, pre-compositional work acts as a kind of life-support system, propping up the work but never defining each stage *a priori*[102]. Each musical event projects both backwards and forwards in time, functioning as a consequence of previous parametric gestures as well as providing potential material for those which follow: the music follows an organic logical continuity in which "each moment is ... an inspired momentary response to a given set of constraints - in each case, other

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[100]Richard Toop, "Four Facets of the New Complexity," *op. cit.*, 31.

[101]Barrett quoted from his unpublished "Lecture to the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik" (1986), 11, in Christopher Fox, "Music as Fiction: a consideration of the work of Richard Barrett," *Contemporary Music Review* XIII/1 (1995), 153.

[102]In conversation with James Boros, Ferneyhough commented: "the high density of pre-compositional preparation for a piece does not set out to define *a priori* each and every event: it is meant to provide a life-support system, a dispositive of constraints and delimitations with which it is meaningful to make decisions affecting other parts of the totality". James Boros, "Shattering the Vessels of Received Wisdom: Brian Ferneyhough in conversation with James Boros," *Perspectives of New Music* XXVIII/2 (Summer 1990), 20.

solutions, equally compelling, would have been thinkable"[103]. Both composers are fascinated by the fact that tricks played by the memory can allow the building of a future from a fictive past. However, the more easily perceived identity of Barrett's gestures produces a more specifically narrative effect; despite the difficulty of Barrett's works, the complexity results from the exaggeration of elements present in any musical performance, whereas Ferneyhough's parametric procedures effect a deliberate over-coding. Ferneyhough consciously builds a disparity into the time-flow of his compositions, such that the listener is always one step behind the music, picking a path through the over-abundance of parametric relations; this is in direct contrast to Barrett's insistence that, through the use of exponential processes, his compositional procedures should correspond to the perceptions of the listener. While both composers foreground the response of the individual, stressing the multiplicity of available paths, with Ferneyhough, the listener is entangled within the whole volume of parametric relations and their extension into different dimensions. With Barrett, on the other hand, the ambiguity seems to lie more within linear relations and the question of whether or not meaningful relationships are being formed therein (hence the abundance of solo pieces).

Similarly, Barrett's compositional procedures "prime the canvas" (to use the composer's own term), setting in motion probabilistic strategies which nevertheless have "no guarantee, no certificate of theoretical rectitude"[104]; Barrett works inwards, the processes allowing the delineation of a space within which each element can take its place, the specifics of pitch and rhythm being the last elements to be fixed. Additionally, however, the composer sees the statistical aspect of the processes as a means of building imperfections into the structure, imperfections which result not exactly from chance, but from the possible non-coincidence of the processes with the listener's perceptions. Thus Barrett uses the analogy of Cage examining his manuscript paper for imperfections and incorporating these into the notation (although Barrett's deliberate inclusion of the disparity means that it is more specifically "created", rather than purely aleatoric). In this way, Barrett generates an ironic structure of control and non-control (or control sublimated to the listener's perceptions), which corresponds to the overall paradox of his attempt to communicate non-communication.

It should by now be clear that Barrett sees his work not simply as creating pieces of music, but as articulating a "conscious aesthetic project" (as Christopher Fox puts it[105]), which challenges normally accepted premises of musical

103Richard Toop, "Brian Ferneyhough's *Lemma-Icon-Epigram,*" *ibid.*, 53.
104_____, "Four Facets of the New Complexity," *op.cit.*, 34.
105Christopher Fox, *op. cit.*, 147.

performance. Considering the uncompromising nature of his stance and the harshness of his sound-world, it is not surprising that his output has generated hostility. In part, this is a consequence of the fact that, in general, it seems harder for people to accept the questioning of established structures by means of music than the other arts; the acceptance of "difficult" contemporary music seems to lag behind that of literature or visual art, music being more often required to provide pleasurable entertainment than to provoke serious thought. No doubt this is partly due to music's more abstract nature; the constant presence of the concrete semantics of words is undoubtedly reassuring, even when the subject matter is not, whereas the general reluctance to treat even music of the past as meaningful rather than merely pleasurable puts music at a disadvantage in the attempt to explore structures of meaning. Yet the clarity, or even iconicity, of Barrett's gestural types in *Ne songe plus à fuir* is hardly taxing. Barrett has admitted a need to be uncompromising in his compositions, but tempers this with the hope that the music is still accessible in its sonorous immediacy [106]: the transparency of the gestures of *Ne songe plus à fuir* certainly achieves this.

Barrett's "conscious aesthetic project" clearly corresponds to Beckett's in many respects. Both are equally concerned with the viability of true expression, and this is apparent at the levels of creation, performance (by instrumentalist, actor, or even by the actual protagonists of the prose), and reception. The instrumentalist's struggle to create an effective performance from Barrett's elaborate notation corresponds to the struggle of Beckett's characters (whether on the page or the stage) to express themselves coherently in words. Similarly, the incredible intricacy of Barrett's notation could be seen as comparable to Beckett's repeated assertion of the impossibility of expression and his rejection of authority. The effect of Barrett's notation, on one level, is to suggest a striving for the impossible; musical notation is itself an inevitably arbitrary means of determining an act of performance, and the inclusion of ever more fantastic detail serves to reinforce this elusiveness: the closer the notation comes to the absolute determination of the performance, the more obviously it falls short of this.

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[106]Barrett stresses his interest in a wider view of the consequencs of composition than mere pitch relationships, focusing on the actual intersection betwen performer and instrument so as "to compose with these elements which seem far more graspable to me - more tactile - than the idea of working with pitches". (Barrett quoted in Keith Cross, "Sound/Form and the Traditions of Hearing," *Resonance: An L.M.C. Supplement* (1992), 5). This concern with the tactility of sound presumably relates to Barrett's statement, "I believe that every composition must attempt to manifest at least one level which is immediately engaging" (Barrett quoted in Daryl Buckley, "Richard Barrett: A Contemporary Voice," *Australian Guitar Journal* II/3 (1990), 166). On the other hand, this does not have to result in stylistic concessions: "I think one has to write one's music uncompromisingly, and hope that at some stage there will be some kind of equality of access to it" (Barrett quoted in Richard Toop, "Richard Barrett in interview with Richard Toop," *op. cit.*, 30).

In many ways, Barrett and Beckett place their audiences in similar positions. Beckett's gradual negation of the semantic properties of his words and his disintegration of the structures of syntax and narrative increase the involvement of the receptor. In plays such as *A Piece of Monologue*, *Footfalls*, *Come and Go*, or *Play*, the audience must piece together the pattern of events; this is taken to extremes in *Not I*, where the breakdown of the grammar is such that the listener must attempt to reconstitute some kind of narrative by associating particular words and phrases in the endless stream. Similarly, in some of the later prose, the syntax is so dissolved that the reader is involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in determining the grammatical function of the linguistic elements. Thus, in all these cases, the audience is placed both within and without the situation, experiencing the attempt to find meaning at the same time as observing this.

Returning to music, while it could be argued that all music makes these same demands on an audience (in that the listener must extrapolate relations between sounding events in the absence of concrete semantics), Barrett clearly heightens this effect. The transparency of gesture in *Ne songe plus à fuir* is such that the establishing of large scale relationships is deceptively easy. However, it is precisely this that allows the audience to perceive the impossible complexity of the detail within the gestures, avoiding mere confusion. Without such clearly related gestural types, the audience would simply be faced with a mess of aural activity within which they could play no role and find no paths to follow. In *Ne songe plus à fuir*, then, the listener has the sense of following a process, relating the elements, and yet this apparent certainty is undermined both by the incredible and unfathomable detail within those gestures and, more importantly, by the uncertainty of the gestures themselves. As has been noted, many of the apparently related events are based on approximations - the return to the rough area of a previous note, or the use of repeated *glissandi* between approximately similar intervals. This opens up the question of whether or not such relations are intended, or whether they merely result from the listener's need to find a path through the detail (a question which is certainly - and presumably deliberately - not answered by Barrett's description of his compositional processes). Thus we are told that Barrett employs exponential processes which correspond to the processes of aural perception, yet we do not know if this is or is not the cause of the perception of gestural relationships. Just as Beckett denies the meaningfulness of his words by means of various anti-grammatical and anti-narrative strategies, Barrett puts into question the apparently meaningful relations in his piece. Similarly, the approximate nature of the gestures effects an ambiguity of function comparable to the positioning of linguistic elements in *Worstward Ho*. Both the stimulation and the subsequent undermining of the

audience's interpretative faculties are vital to the enterprises of Beckett and Barrett but, perhaps ironically, their effects are achieved by means of opposite processes.

Beckett attempts the eschewal of semantics in order to effect a true syntax of weakness, thereby avoiding the limitations of fixed definitions. However, the absolute negation of semantics will never be possible unless he is to abandon words completely - an act which is impossible due to both the compulsion to express and the fact of words as his (and our) primary mode of expression. Ironically, in later texts and in plays such as *Not I*, the vestigial semantics add to the effectiveness of the texts by allowing for the involvement of the reader or the audience; the presence of these minor reference points not only gives the audience of *Not I* something from which to build various linear narrative representations, but, additionally, the choice of words is so careful that those referential meanings which do remain are employed either in the depiction of the minimal events or situations, or in the actual delineation of the compositional process. As was seen in the analysis of the opening of *Worstward Ho*, the choice of words in this text is so precise as to incorporate the unavoidable designative meanings of the words in the actual process of construction (hence the choice of the opening word "on" for its quality of propulsion, and the constant use of words relating to the need to express, to the need to situate the self through language: a very similar process is also clearly apparent in *neither*).

In order to create a comparable effect in music, Barrett elaborates a quasi-semantics, composing gestures which cannot but be interpreted in certain terms and which clearly relate to one another within those terms. A very delicate balance is therefore necessary; the semantic must be defined enough to give the desired impression of struggle and to allow the listener to perceive both the initial development of material and the gradual abandonment of this process. Simultaneously, however, the material must be handled in such a way that these perceptions are gradually undermined, the relationships becoming increasingly ambiguous. This equilibrium is even more precarious for Barrett than for Beckett, as in music the semantic must itself be created. While in Beckett's terms it would seem that Barrett has the immediate advantage of working with material that is comparatively pure, for Barrett's particular project music is a more difficult art-form within which to be working. Effectively, in *Ne songe plus à fuir* Barrett creates a kind of minimal double articulation, allowing certain gestures to achieve a quasi-morphemic status; on one level this effects a more tangible semantic than is normally possible (or required) in absolute music, while the details themselves remain at the non-specific differential level equivalent to (though not precisely identifiable with) phonemes.

The maintaining of such structures is, in music, a very delicate business; whilst too great an emphasis on the creation of reference points would create too

solid a degree of certainty for Barrett's project, the deployment of hardly recognisable gestures would, on the other hand, result in mere confusion: either way, the ambivalence of intention would disappear. The difficulty of achieving this balance is perhaps revealed in the ease with which the results can be misinterpreted; in his attack on Barrett's music, Ivan Hewett compares Barrett unfavourably with Beckett, claiming that while both deal with the uncomfortable subject of the failure of expression, with Beckett, unlike Barrett, this failure is offset by success at the level of expression[107]. The suggestion is that Beckett explores failure in an eloquent, expressive manner, whereas Barrett presents us with a direct evocation of failure through the humiliation of a performer floundering around an instrument, unable to realise the intricacies of the score. However, this criticism again seems to arise more from the nature of Barrett's art-form; as one respondent to the article suggested, Hewett's comments ignore the dialectical situation in which statements (even musical statements) are made[108]. Hewett refuses to grasp the concept of music operating on more than one level of meaning; he seems unable to realise that, in *Ne songe plus à fuir* at least (and, I would suggest, in Barrett's other works for solo instruments), the careful handling of gestural relationships and non-relationships both depicts a performance situation and is *about* that depiction, both creates a piece of music and is about that act of composition. The effective achievement of this state of equilibrium is surely proved, to a large extent, by the very possibility of recognising such ideas; in a piece of absolute music there is nothing informing us of such intentions other than the structures themselves - even if we are aware of the composer's comments regarding the pieces, this alone is not really enough to account for such responses.

Hewett's preference ultimately seems to be rooted in the different degrees of uncertainty he finds in the works. Hewett suggests that in Barrett all subjectivity - of composer, performer, and listener - is annulled[109], leaving nothing but confusion. Yet the above discussion suggests that Barrett is very careful to leave traces by which all three can maintain some minimal sense of self throughout the processes of construction and reception; the effect is of the questioning and problematising of subjectivity rather than its destruction, and this is surely an intention common to Barrett and Beckett.

An unavoidable difference between the work of the composer and the writer is undeniably effected through their media; despite Beckett's disintegration of character, his presentation of incomplete or shade-like figures, and his attempts to

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[107]Ivan Hewett, *op.cit.*, 149.

[108]Peter McCallum, "Negative Equity," *Musical Times* CXXXV/1817 (July 1994), 422.

[109]"No remnant of subjectivity remains in Barrett's music, which is alienated and objectified through and through." Ivan Hewett, *op. cit.*, 151.

remove his own authority from the texts, the written work always holds for us a stronger sense of subjectivity than a musical performance. Ironically, this usually results precisely from the effacement of the author; a text usually requires a speaking figure, usually in the form of a narrator (however uncertain we are as to the concreteness of their existence), and a text without such a figure usually assumes the status of a direct pronouncement of an author. Thus however uncertain the status of the enunciator, we begin from the assumption of this presence as a relatively stable entity - an author's voice will displace that of a narrator, but if a narrator takes over, we temporarily efface the presence of the author, maintaining the sense of a concentrated source.

In the musical process, however, the voice is automatically less unified, the composer and performer being more solidly co-present. The composer's voice can never be effaced, as is the case in most texts, the assumption being that the performer is there to serve this voice. Yet at the same time, the performer's interpretation cannot but enter into the equation to a lesser or greater degree, and in this way the construction of a musical source subject is inherently less stable than that of a text (even ignoring the lack of semantic grounding, which heightens this effect). Certainly, this distinction is lessened by many of Beckett's techniques - the undermining of the narrative perspective or of his own authority in the early novels, the lack of substantial "characters" in the later prose, and perhaps most strikingly, the treatment of actors as pure vessels for his "music" (especially in the shorter plays). Even here, however, it is easier for an audience to hear a voice of some kind, to secure a provisional sense of a subjectivity (however fragmented) from which the text emerges. This is perhaps the result of nothing more than the fact of the use of words and the weight of literary tradition behind the author, but it is nevertheless unavoidable to a certain degree: even deconstructionist criticism admits its identification as the starting point from which suppressed meanings can be unravelled. Ultimately, the sense of a more substantial initial point of reference, however false, allows the audience to accept the subsequent questioning of those fundamentals: again, the resistance to the idea of music as active on different conceptual levels is stronger.

Yet Hewett's criticisms are still surprising, given the coherent gestural immediacy of a work such as *Ne songe plus à fuir*; while Beckett attempts the undoing of literary art's assumption of transcendental subjectivity, Barrett moves towards the same position but from the opposite direction, thanks to the different nature of his medium: his gestural outlines actually provide a process from which the listener can extrapolate relationships and hence construct a provisional sense of their own selfhood: here, this process is more concrete than is the case with most music. Hewett complains that Barrett is in search of unmediated essences in which he does

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not believe[110], yet, again, this ignores the meta-musical aspect; Hewett is right to a degree, but refuses to acknowledge the fact of Barrett's *depiction* of this search and its subsequent problematization.

Beyond this, Barrett employs the sonorous immediacy of instrumental sound as an additional means of providing a concrete point of reference for the listener. The huge range of articulation and timbre suggests the projection of a bodily presence through the grain of the sound[111] (especially considering the particular focus on open strings and on the strong, grating quality of a hard bow, rather than on the cultivated, rich sound usually expected of the instrument). Combined with the physical presence of the frantic performer, this provides a visceral presentation of the body in the sound; the result is a strong sense of the attempt to inscribe a physical self, an attempt which parallels the work's general problematisation of subjectivity. While Barrett employs sonority as a physical grounding for the listener's immediate reaction, this is then undermined by the scrabbling away from apparent points of reference into the instability of *glissandi*, harmonics, and microtones. Thus the physical impression of the sound follows the same process as the mental representation, effecting the repeated demarcation of positions from which to develop, positions which are subsequently revealed as merely provisional, arbitrary, and no more stable than any others. As Barrett writes with reference to his string quartet, *I open and close*, the effect is of "obsessive circling around an obscure fixed point"[112] without ever finding a centre, an image which is thoroughly redolent of Beckett.

Barrett's expressed interest in treating the instrument (or even the ensemble and its historical background) as a source for excavation[113] is clearly represented in his deployment of sound and material, and his concept of the score as somewhere between tablature and notation[114] parallels this. Everything in this world - whether

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[110]*Ibid.*, 149.

[111]As Liza Lim has pointed out with reference to Roland Barthes' discussion of *musica practica* (in *Image - Music - Text*), "New Complexity" often invokes an "aesthetics of *physicality*: the act of performance and the notion of the 'limits' of physical possibility, is drawn into the fundamental conception of the compositions". Effectively, "the text is not a cypher for a literal transcription but must pass through the medium of the performers' bodies". Liza Lim, "The Body: transcribes the text, inscribes the sound," *Sounds Australian op. cit.*, 21, 24.

[112]Richard Barrett, introduction to the score of *I open and close, op. cit.*

[113]"The idea of sculpting out of a pre-existent object can also be applied to the instrumental resources themselves: the individual instruments, their relationships to one another, and the ensemble as a whole." Barrett quoted in Richard Toop, "Richard Barrett in interview with Richard Toop," *op. cit.*, 27.

[114]"'Classical' notation, as it's evolved gradually over the centuries, has been directed towards the notation of *sounds*, i.e. events which to the reader are independent of whichever instrument is or is not specified.... In *tablature*, however, the actions made by the performer, rather than some desired results, are notated, such as the specification of fingers and strings (without reference to tuning) in lute music. The notation of my music frequently occupies an ambiguous position between these two extremes." Barrett quoted in Daryl Buckley, *op. cit.*, 167.

score, sound, structure, composing self, performing self, or listening self - has a provisional immediacy and materiality of its own which is progressively destabilised, its substance being put into question. A tension is therefore apparent between Barrett's references to mining the playing traditions of instruments and ensembles for their associations and his assertion that his works should not require the listener to have any background knowledge of music[115]. No work can be entirely free of history, and especially not when, like Barrett's, it carries a conceptual weight. As Christopher Fox points out, Barrett's works in this respect inevitably provoke more general questions regarding the accessibility of radical music[116]. On the other hand, they reveal a deep concern that his music should not alienate, and in *Ne songe plus à fuir* the sonorous and gestural immediacy certainly provides an easy entry into the complexities of the music.

The fundamental question posed by this music lies with how far such ideas can be taken. While the gestural cohesion of *Ne songe plus à fuir* and the careful equilibrium of points of focus and anarchic confusion allow the perception of a complex web of conflicting interests, this is less so with Barrett's ensemble pieces. In many ways, *Ne songe plus à fuir* comprises an extremely effective summation of central concerns, but the use of such compositional elements is clearly limited and cannot be repeated piece after piece nor easily transposed into the more elaborate textural world of ensemble works. Barrett is hampered by the need to construct a quasi-semantic basis in order to proceed - he can never take this as given, as can Beckett. This need not be a problem, but for the fact that Barrett is treading a narrow line beyond which lies the mere confusion which threatens to obscure the effect of his work (and which he has been accused of producing). While the solo pieces provide effective instances of music's potential to examine its own structures of meaning, certain passages in the ensemble pieces lose the necessary clarity, thereby dispersing the perception of ideas on different, though related levels of experience.

Perhaps, however, this is a necessary risk, and one that is unavoidable for someone working at the limits of an art-form. Barrett certainly provides an effective

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[115]In his 1986 Darmstadt lecture, Barrett suggested that musical works should be "optimally self-contextualising" and that "one should not have to have assimilated the last thousand years of musical history in order to be qualified to have an appreciation of what can be heard now". Richard Barrett, "Lecture to the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik," 2, quoted in Christopher Fox, *op. cit.*, 153-6.

[116]Barrett "is making music which is unlikely to be accessible to any but a few people, not only because, for historical reasons, the distribution of 'serious' music favours a highly educated, predominantly middle-class elite, but also because, for those same historical reasons, it is only among members of that elite that Barrett is likely to find listeners prepared to accept that a music which deliberately sets out to illustrate the impossibility of satisfactory musical expression is anything other than unsatisfactory .... Above all ... [Barrett's listeners need] previous experience if they are to appreciate the bitter irony of which Barrett is such a master, since the appreciation of an ironic utterance presupposes an awareness of what sort of utterance might normally be expected in this context". Christopher Fox, *op. cit.*, 153-6.

problematization of the musical subject, whether in terms of the actual material or of the composer, performer or listener, and it is perhaps this which sets him apart from the other composers usually associated with "New Complexity". Richard Toop, in his article on Barrett, Finnissy, Dench, and Dillon, seems to imply that the four are all transcendentalists in the mould of Ferneyhough (while still acknowledging their individual characteristics and compositional preoccupations)[117]. Toop presents these composers as the current carriers of the modernist torch, concerned to develop ever further the realms of musical possibility. Barrett, however, seems to sit uncomfortably within this group, employing a superficially similar language to pursue entirely different concerns.

While Finnissy, Dench, and Dillon follow Ferneyhough in assuming the existence of a pre-existent transcendental subject, Barrett questions the presumption of pure communion between composer and audience. Thus while in Ferneyhough virtuosity is employed as a means of bypassing the intervening ego of the performer, in Barrett similar devices are focused on the very difficulty and ambiguity of that mediating role and on the materiality of sound. Similarly, while the labyrinthine nature of the compositions is a common feature, the resulting effect on the audience is very different; Ferneyhough's profusion of possible paths effects a "positive structure of doubt"[118], whereas Barrett's labyrinths are very much more negative, exposing the difficulty for a listener in understanding a piece. Thus Ferneyhough's works give the impression of centrifugal processes from which emerges an abundance of possible meanings[119], whereas Barrett moves centripetally inwards, examining the very nature and viability of his basic materials. Despite the obvious differences, a parallel can perhaps be drawn with a comparison of Joyce and Beckett; beyond the superficial sensual similarity in the treatment of language, the linguistic conglomerations of *Finnegans Wake* produce manifold meanings, while Beckett's concern is to find a pure mode of linguistic expression, resulting in a process of contraction into the constituents of the words themselves.

In this sense, it is difficult to align Barrett with the high modernism usually associated with "New Complexity". In many ways his music effectively problematises the organicist and transcendentalist basis of much of this music in much the same way that postmodern thought puts into question the ideals of modernist art. Asked for his views on postmodernism, Barrett replied that he finds

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117 See Richard Toop, "Four Facets of the New Complexity," *op. cit.*, 4.

118 Ferneyhough quoted in Jonathan Harvey, *op. cit.*, 728.

119 Ferneyhough talks of his interest in "creating polyvalent or multivalent levels of perception". Ferneyhough quoted in Richard Toop, "Brian Ferneyhough in Interview," *Contact* XXIX (Spring 1985), 7.

the ideas involved to be reactionary[120]. This presumably arises from an awareness of the tendency to classify (especially musical) postmodernism solely in terms of a resort to a parody and pastiche of earlier styles which both expresses a distaste at the elitist and alienating effect of modernism and highlights the crisis of representation with which art is supposedly faced. As was seen in the previous chapter, however, this position belies a common unwillingness fully to explore the complexities of the issues involved, revealing a preference for the simplistic formulation of postmodernism in terms of schizophrenia, superficiality and political conservatism.

As has been noted, Beckett's work exposes the complexities and deliberate contradictions of the postmodern condition. His assertion of the impossibility of expression is offset by the experience of reading, watching and/or listening, and the paradox of the success of his writing resists simplification and focuses on problematization as a force for creation (without ever suggesting that the problems have been solved). Additionally, the later short prose works effect a mode of writing which successfully eschews the confines of subject, narrative or location, delineating a search for selfhood but in terms of a mesmerising movement between ever-shifting poles, rather than as a desperate attempt to consolidate self-identity and unity.

Similarly, in *Ne songe plus à fuir* and other solo pieces, Barrett's achievement is to refuse the simplification into pure confusion. Due to the abstraction of his medium, the very fact of apprehending Barrett's ideas effects a movement away from the asserted stultification, establishing an equilibrium between the demonstration of the difficulty of expression and the successful representation of this. Again, the problematization of modernist concerns does not lead to indifference, but to an anxiety to find different modes of expression which avoid the assumption of essential universals. Barrett, like Beckett, questions transcendental presumptions, providing instead a series of provisionally delineated, incomplete subjects (whether from one work to the next or in the fragmentation between author/composer, protagonist/performer, and audience).

Returning to Nicholas Zurbrugg's distinction between B- and C-Effect postmodernists, Barrett's negativity (like Beckett's) relates to that of the B-Effect in general. At the same time, however, his complex evocation of a differential subjectivity corresponds to the C-Effect tendency to "*depersonalize* context [by the employment of chance operations and the refusal of artistic control] and *repersonalize* content (by retaining and revealing sufficient accent to establish the singularity of both narrator and narrative material)"[121], a comparison which is

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[120]Barrett asserts that "every individual aspect ... raised by theorists of postmodernism as being new is not actually new ... it strikes me as a very reactionary way of looking at everything". Richard Barrett quoted in Keith Cross, *op. cit.*, 2.
[121]*Ibid.*, 39.

enhanced by the fact of Barrett's use of computer processes and his derivation of the work from a field of "virtual material". Barrett and Beckett both reposition their provisionally denied authority such that it remains in the "fabric of the sound", and this corresponds to the Barthesian concept of the "grain of the voice"[122], through which postmodern authorial presence is, in a sense, partially "resurrected" (to use Zurbrugg's term). Barrett's exploitation of timbre and texture effects a literal translation of this idea, and such a repositioning is a device common to much postmodernist work:

> Brion Gysin argues that despite the impersonality of Burroughs' cut-up narratives, one needs only take 'one sniff of that prose' and 'you'd say, "Why, that's a Burroughs."' In much the same way, Cage's fellow composer Christian Wolff insists upon the individuality and the innovation of Cage's notionally impersonal compositions, observing 'His music ... is like no other, I know of hardly anything that sounds like it.' Briefly, the subject is alive and well in postmodern culture, if a little more fragmented than hitherto.[123]

In these terms, the ideas explored by Barrett correspond to certain of the preoccupations of the postmodern debate, many of which are found in (and are often pre-dated by) Beckett's texts. Barrett's work (or at least the solo pieces) musically parallels many of Beckett's ideas while simultaneously providing instances of resolutely absolute music very much concerned with their own condition as abstract works in sound. Returning to the comparison with Feldman, it becomes clear that, despite the difference in musical language, the similarity lies in a perceived affinity with Beckett's preoccupations. Both composers examine certain of these concerns through the actual deployment of the musical fabric, rather than by means of traditional text-setting. Despite a certain similarity of purpose, though, the divergent languages naturally lead to differences in the composers' approaches. As was noted in the examination of Feldman's *neither*, there is a fundamental lack of real anxiety in Feldman's work, and this marks its character off from that of most of Beckett's work. Clearly, such anxiety is more obviously present in Barrett's compositions, and here again, Zurbrugg's distinction between B- and C-effect postmodernism becomes useful: the two composers provide an example of the way in which the two strands are developed from different treatments of very similar concerns. Both composers effect the musical delineation of the search for selfhood, and both juxtapose musical events, generating spatialised structures which invoke the re-treading of paths rather than linear progression, structures of volume rather than of purely organic narrative development. Fundamental to this is the common impression of an absence of centre, of each starting-point as provisional; both composers create apparent points of focus

[122]See Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice" in *Image - Music - Text, op. cit.*, 179-89.
[123]Nicholas Zurbrugg, *The Parameters of Postmodernism, op. cit.*, 40.

which are increasingly destabilised through their dependence on other equally non-essential factors.

Nevertheless, the desperation apparent in a performance of *Ne songe plus à fuir* is a very different matter to the almost detached serenity of a Feldman work, and the natural tendency is to see Barrett as closer to what is commonly perceived as the spirit of Beckett's work. Such a conclusion is, however, over-simplistic, reducing the range of Beckett's writing; the text with which Feldman is concerned is of a profoundly different character to this general perception of Beckett and like much of his later short prose, *almost* achieves a quality of serenity. The character of Feldman's compositions in general, and his treatment of this text in particular, provides an effective musical correspondence to the text at many levels, even if the lack of anxiety is, in the final analysis, too absolute. Barrett's works, however, provide an equally effective counterpart to Beckett's earlier works, in which the crisis caused by the uncertainty of identity and expression is more unbearable. Thus the two composers represent musical responses to different areas of Beckett's work (even if inexplicitly).

Fundamentally, the difference between the two composers is evident in their approach to sound. Barrett's exploitation of the grain of instrumental timbre suggests a visceral bodily presence lying behind the problems of mental representation; this compensatory immediacy can be seen as relating to the composer's belief that Beckett criticism is generally too bound up with linguistic stylistics, tending to forget the unpalatable directness of the texts[124]. Feldman's works, on the other hand, strive for a purity of sound beyond the limits of instrumentation. For Feldman, the intervening role of performer destroys the direct relationship between composer and sound; he attempts to bypass the bodily obstruction of performer and instrument, thereby creating an almost pure sound which corresponds to the absence of bodily existence in the shadowy world of Beckett's later prose: the instrument and performer are reduced to shade-like presences comparable to Beckett's protagonists.

Perhaps, through the transparency of Barrett's development and gradual abandonment of his gestures, an allegorical effect is more apparent in Barrett's work; Paul de Man suggests that music is naturally oriented towards the future, its limitless play of signifieds effecting the constant striving towards unattainable completion[125], and *Ne songe plus à fuir* clearly enacts this. In this way, Barrett invokes the endlessness of Beckett's entire project. Thus Barrett here realises the implications of Beckett's frustration with words - the greater abstraction of music could potentially

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[124]Richard Toop, "Four Facets of the New Complexity," *op. cit.*, 31. Additionally, Barrett is at pains to point out that he views Beckett as far from a cold writer. See Richard Toop, "Richard Barrett in Interview with Richard Toop" *op. cit.*, 29.

[125]See Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness," *op. cit.*, 129.

provide a welcome release from the constraints of reference. On the other hand, as has become clear, *Ne songe plus à fuir* also demonstrates the limitations of exploring such concepts in musical terms, limitations which result, ironically, from the need to generate quasi-semantic effects.

Finally, then, Beckett and Barrett exploit the resistance of their material, each pushing towards the meeting-point of music and language but from opposite directions. This central point will never actually be located - it probably does not even exist - but these processes expose the fundamental contiguity of the two systems. Whether in music or language, what is articulated is the fundamentally textual condition of being and its infinite deferral of self-presence. Thus the attempt to push beyond the limitations of the materials is recognised as that to ascribe transcendental significance to existence, futile but inescapable, and central to this is the acknowledgement of the fundamental interdependence of music and language in the process of constituting significance.

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