

*Beckett's Middle Period: Authority, The Quest and Dualism*

*By David Tucker*

I

In the following discussions I want to trace through Samuel Beckett's works from *Watt*, through *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* to *Waiting for Godot*, the themes of a Quest, an Authority, and Dualism. Beckett's work is well known for being characterised by its repetition with variation, and this is how I conceive of these themes as manifesting from work to work. As Vladimir and Estragon return over and over again to dwell on their shoes, their place by the road, their meetings with others, each time with slight variation, slight degradation, so the works navigate the themes of authority, dualism and the quest repeatedly and differently. Quantitatively and qualitatively each work alters these themes.

The sections below, divided according to separate works, discuss in different ways these themes/variables as they occur in each work. The section on *Watt* focuses predominantly on Watt's motivations in the novel as a quest, an attempt to transcend dualism. It discusses the nature of the Cartesian world Watt occupies and his place in this world as subservient. The *Molloy* section will concentrate on the detective Moran, and will compare two interpretations of the separation of the novel into two sections. It will continue the method which follows throughout of tracing the progression of themes, their alteration as they move into a different novel or medium, and will discuss the treatment of birth conceived as a sin. With *Malone Dies* the discussion comes from issues raised by the quest inherent in the fleeing from self which results in Malone's narratives: How this constitutes a self-reflexive shift in the novels, and the undermining of authorial autonomy. This section will also engage a critical argument by Marie Danziger about the motivation for Malone's/Beckett's perpetual revaluation and alteration of narrative. The final section will discuss how Beckett's

concerns are altered with the move into the theatre. It is in this transition that the themes find their most radical alteration.

Occasionally there will be reference to a Beckett/Joyce split. This is because I have found it useful to bear in mind an underlying aesthetic direction in Beckett's work, and the contrasts between Joyce and Beckett seem a suitable place to situate this. If everything has been included in the novel by Joyce the encyclopaedic taskmaster, if not literally then so effectively metonymically that to seek to include the world, to reach out for it and fit it all together, is an exercise which is bound to fall short. Perhaps even further short when attempted by a student of the master. So Beckett as I read him plays to his strengths, as the loner, and pushes out the world instead of drawing it in. Whereas both authors seek to unify form and content, they take contrasting routes, corresponding to their world-inclusive and exclusive requirements. Joyce's amalgamation of form and content appears to me predominantly as a collapsing of form into content, whereas Beckett often takes an alternative route and collapses content into form, this reversal of an order of priority yielding different results. Joyce has not as utterly severed connection with the surrounding world as Beckett has. It is precisely Joyce's immersion in the world that is his wellspring, not only for the motivations of his characters and the styles of their experiences but for his own working method of mass-collation of information. The form is collapsed to the level of the experience of the world. This is where the interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness find their fame. In Joyce's case the experience of the world is the determining force on the rendering of this experience. Interior monologue in Joyce, while necessarily apart from a world, is always that of an immersion in the world, hence the monologue is in a sense 'of the world'. When the words dance it is *because* the sense dances<sup>(1)</sup>. The words are intended to represent the chaos of the world in that they approximate and render it.

In contrast, much of the formal qualities of Beckett's prose and drama appear as the primary, determining force of the content. We are presented with the foregrounded formal qualities of repetition and finite and infinite exhaustion of alternatives in *Watt* for example, where reference is made not to a singular actual world but to possible worlds. Where characters prone to such methods of reasoning are forced to exist in one world this world is always ambiguous. Whether this is because the central character himself is confused about their world, or the narration has been subject to a series of unreliable narrators in a "Chinese whispers" scenario, unreliability in some form is ever-present. In Beckett, the world is of the narration.

The worlds that the texts map are massively ontologically reduced compared to the Joycean world. This allows for the text to shape its world in the way Beckett requires: it can be absolute authority if its jurisdiction is minimized. This reflects Beckett's concerns with a pared down, post-Descartes mankind of mind/body dualism. The individual has retreated from frontiers of the world into the skull and Beckett's texts follow while simultaneously prescribing this world. In Beckett's work the world corresponds to the word. The narrators are continuously at the mercy of their own narrations, and thereby form is content in that form determines content, brings content to the level of form. The ambiguity of Godot for example provides one of the clearest manifestations of an emptiness being offered up to form. Godot serves a functional, formal end. He is a part of the world that avoids transposition into intelligibility by virtue of his mass of potential meanings, and so comes to 'just exist', at the mercy of text and audience to tell what or who he is.

## II

***Watt: glimpsing past dualism***

*Those long chains of reasoning, each of them simple and easy, that geometers commonly use to attain their most difficult demonstrations, have given me an occasion for imagining that all the things that can fall within human knowledge follow one another in the same way and that, provided only that one abstain from accepting anything as true that is not true, and that one always maintains the order to be followed in deducing the one from the other, there is nothing so far distant that one cannot finally reach nor so hidden that one cannot discover.<sup>(2)</sup>*

As with many of Beckett's characters, the perambulations of the protagonist Watt are the manifestation of a simultaneous leadership and subjugation. Watt is both engaged in a quest and accordingly moves from one place to the next, from nearby the train station, to Mr Knott's house, to the train station and eventually to an asylum, seemingly all this time in control of this fate, while he is also very much at a kind of mercy to himself, his inclinations and the Cartesian perspective he finds himself 'subject' to. As I read it this simultaneity is the ontologically reduced version of Joyce's twinning of a 'grand' and a 'plain' movement through time personified by the Ulyssean hero Leopold Bloom. Similarly to Bloom, the grandness of Watt's quest is implicit rather than explicit. It is as much incidental to the actions of the quest as it is constituted by these actions, and can only really be understood in reference to an other, 'high' literary source: In Ulysses this is the poetry of Homer, with Beckett it is the mind/body split of Cartesian origin, yet become pandemic. In Beckett's writing of course such supervening sequences often become the object of farcical exposition, of ironic commentary on notions of truth as grand in contrast to a Joycean generosity towards character, and Watt has accordingly been taken by many critics as being some of Beckett's most nihilistic writing on what he considers a doomed epistemology. I will return to the idea of an underlying grand quest after a discussion of its manifestations in complementary aspects of the novel: the serial nature of the world Watt finds himself in, and the protracted Cartesian reasoning he elaborates about this world in order that there be nothing "*so hidden that [he] cannot discover*".

Watt's movement between levels of the house, his period of what we might consider to be purgatorial time, is passed as a part of an indefinite series. Watt is 'intended' to fulfil such a role; it is implied as somehow being his destiny. Or, if nothing so connotative of coherence and 'cosmic order' is intended by Beckett such a role is at least Watt's hope for himself. At Mr Knott's house he is "*in his midst at last, after so many tedious years spent clinging to the perimeter...he has arrived*"<sup>(3)</sup>. Watt is there to perform service as one among others in a potentially infinite lineage: "*And I, I mean Arsene, am not here any more either...when you came in I went out, just as when I came in Vincent went out and as Walter went out when Erskine came in*"<sup>(4)</sup>. The theme of servants in a serial relationship perpetually replacing each other shows itself in both the physical 'action' of Watt and Erskine and in digressions such as Arsene's tale of parlour maids Mary and Ann. This hypodiegetic story emphasizes the interdependence of servants upon servants, giving a more sinister and fatalistic context in which to understand their cycles. Such explicit physical dependence as Mary's eating "*first an onion, then a peppermint, then another onion, then another*

*peppermint*”<sup>(5)</sup> etc. reflects the nature of Watt’s place in the world he occupies: as one among equivalents, not simultaneities. That is, he is of equivalent value as other servants, as the onions and peppermints complement each other such that no other food is necessary. Mary does not eat the two foods simultaneously but rather each is left to serve its purpose alone, complementing, in this case amounting probably to no more than erasing prior taste, the previous mouthful. Watt is to be devoured in a perpetual purgatory of doomed Cartesian epistemology.

As both a virus and as a joker this epistemology riddles the novel. The Joycean call to responsibility for the artist to reveal and revel in coincidence, in transferability and arbitrariness of meanings often finding outlet in puns and word play is a fundamental concern of Beckett’s and in *Watt* this often manifests in extreme constructions and deconstructions in a metaphysical vein. Satirising post-Cartesian attempts to know and order the chaos and coincidences of their environment Beckett elaborates the serial nature of Cartesian knowledge by relentlessly listing and describing scenarios and possible scenarios of the world as experienced by Watt. For example when Watt is considering the various problems and ramifications of imaginary famished dogs we find proliferation of series becoming a perpetuation of series as one problem spawns another in his determined efforts to know (i.e. arbitrarily order) the chaotic nature of the world around him.

Watt’s enquiries in this regard begin after a discussion of his delivering food to Mr Knott with the simple directive to “*give what Mr Knott left of this dish, on the days that he did not eat it all, to the dog.*”<sup>(6)</sup> There is however no dog in the house to serve as a self-evident ‘solution’, and so enters an ignorance, and so begins the enquiry to effectively ‘fill in the gaps’ of an intended structurally cohesive knowledge. From there on this passage contains many of the elements that typify the novel. Watt’s reasoning dramatizes Cartesian doubt in its employing the most radical doubt it is able to conjure: “*Was there any guarantee...might not...supposing...was there any assurance...and perhaps*”<sup>(7)</sup>. Such undermining qualifiers are the virus which is Watt’s post-Cartesian condition. They are the necessary accompaniment to the subject-object binary that prescribes the majority of his experience because such a binary precludes self-evidence with regard to all but the most basic self-consciousness, and of course even this self-evidence is contentious. Such forms of doubt perpetuate the discourse, sabotaging closure in the name of the logic as a route to truth much revered and depended upon by the non-artist Watt. There are chinks in this pristine logical armour though, often comical traps awaiting Watt when he gets desperate or just goes on too long.

*Passing on then to the solution that seemed to have prevailed, Watt found it to be roughly this, that a suitable dog-owner, that is to say a needy man with a famished dog, should be sought out, and on him settled a handsome annuity of fifty pounds payable monthly...before witnesses...and of his then taking himself and his dog off the premises without delay...<sup>(8)</sup>*

The fanatical accompaniments to Watt’s reliance on logical sequences and possible alternatives are exposed here as he begins to attempt to assert a control over the possible outcome of his reasoning which in its way is as determining and definitive as that of the logic he speciously relies on as ‘objective’ governance. Watt is at pains to produce a scenario that satisfies him and once he succeeds in imagining it he proposes to offer payment presented comically as bribery to both bring this situation about and to prevent it from being altered. Watt is desperate to shore up against the

possibility of change because change implies contingency beyond his control. Incongruously Watt offers fifty pounds out to the world in order that it will stay as he understands and establishes it to be. That is, once Watt has thought up the scenario which he sees as answering the doubts such as the possibility that the dog might die, that the dogs' owner(s) might die, that a wrong signal might be offered to the pair regarding the availability of food and communication misinterpreted, the scenario which is eventually composed of an indefinite series of dogs and their owners, he is shown up to be playing a kind of frustrated God role, and to compensate for his lack of omnipotence proffers bribery and dependency. The families with a preferably large number of grandchildren "*passionately attached to their birthplace*"<sup>(9)</sup> will be dependant on this scenario of Watt's for "*fair words and occasional gifts of money and old clothes*"<sup>(10)</sup>. Watt will seek to bring about charity cases, treating the necessary constituents of his ordering of the objects of the world as subservient to a sequential scheme of his devising. He will show disdain and avoidance to these underlings: the owner must take "*himself and his dog off the premises without delay*"<sup>(11)</sup>. This language of formal, legal dominance establishes Watt's authority in comic ironic terms. It conjures an image of the hapless Watt behind gate or door or some such threshold, his language in so far as it establishes his authority serving only to establish division rather than unity between himself as subject and his objects. The implication of legal ownership in "*premises*" and the connotations of control in "*without delay*" show Watt adopting a role of contrived hypocritical aristocratic dominion, shooing away those he has himself called near, a leitmotif familiar throughout much of the middle period work as characters bring objects towards themselves and put them away again.

It seems that in his pleasure at creating such an image of authority for himself, the results of which he praises as "*regular as clockwork*"<sup>(12)</sup>, Watt forgets his own place as contained in, rather than governor of, this series. He wants "*everyone to see, and admire*"<sup>(13)</sup>. Such a type of hope coming from Beckett, well known for his seclusion in both life and work I would preferably read as implying subservience rather than pride. If this is the case such a reading accords with the fact that Watt is of course literally himself a servant. He is not really governor of this scenario of dogs and their owners. He is rather just extending the proliferation of series of which he is one part, one stage. He is a servant creating servants, with the implication in wanting his work admired that he is only creating these servants who will serve himself in order then that he might better serve others. This is the squalor and delusion Beckett appears to be claiming as characteristic of the condition of post-Cartesian man.

On my reading of Watt's perambulations it is a natural consequence of his division from his surrounding world that he reasons as he does. Because it is only his own consciousness that he cannot doubt and which is therefore allotted authority, his consciousness resorts for its tools to using that which most closely approximates itself, namely the blank faceless routes of reason and logical possibility. What is in question throughout the novel however, I read as not being *the* uses of reason per se, but only *Watt's* uses of reason. The subject/object division propagated by Cartesian philosophy requires logic to perform a particular role of a framework of control imposed on chaos because separated from almost all forms of self-evidence and identification the Cartesian self relies upon division, implicit to which is subservience and dominance.

Leaving this example of Watt's elaborations on the solution of how to dispose of left over food, of the typifying patterns of reasoning endemic to the subject/object division which serve as a framework for the greater proportion of Watt's mediation

between himself and the world, I want now to look at an alternative in the novel to life lived according to such a binary.

*...I felt, that Tuesday afternoon, millions of little things moving all together out of their old place, into a new one near by, and furtively, as though it were forbidden. And I have little doubt that I was the only person living to discover them. To conclude from this that the incident was internal would, I think, be rash, for my – how shall I say – my personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw.<sup>(14)</sup>*

Arsene is speaking to Watt as Arsene is leaving Mr Knott's house to make way for Watt. Taking into account the proliferation of series and the abundance of repetition entailed by the situation of the replacing servants it seems a likely conclusion that such perception as described by Arsene, is the object of Watt's quest. The collapse of Arsene's distinction between *inside* and *outside* appears to be the collapse of a Cartesian subject/object division, eschewing dominance of one over the other in favour (albeit uncontrolled by the 'subject') of a conflation or collapse of both into each other: "...a change, other than a change of degree, had taken place. What was changed was existence off the ladder. Do not come down the ladder, I for, I haf taken it away."<sup>(15)</sup> Taking the situation of Leopold Bloom to its Beckettian conclusion Beckett continually foregrounds the method of Watt's quest but only gives us coded glimpses of a context situating this methodical reasoning. If though a hope for *existence off the ladder* is Watt's quest, how is such an aspiration to perception related to the more explicit aspiration to serve Mr Knott? Is this *what* serving *not*, this question pursuing and serving its own negation, the quest for a transcendence of Dualism?

There is a clue I think in the serial nature of the servants. By replacing a servant who has experienced this state of subject/object collapse Watt is implicitly attempting to recover a prior state, and this is an indefinitely repeated mission corresponding to the indefinite number of servants. Watt is involved in a serial attempt at recalling a state prior to a subject/object dialectical modality, and Mr Knott is the presence of absence 'representing' such possibility. He is the existence of a negation of Cartesian division, potentially glimpsed only occasionally.

The critic Richard Begam draws out of Watt's various proximities to Mr Knott a vision of "*an Eden that does not stand immutably outside time but occasionally, if erratically, bursts forth into it.*"<sup>(16)</sup> Watt is both eager to and afraid of a meeting with Mr Knott face to face, and thereby manifests his twin attitude to the existence off the ladder. Watt is conditioned by the serial nature of the world he finds himself in, and as such does not, as one might expect him to do when supposedly searching for relations face to face, stop himself from extensive digressions. Rather than following a linear line to a single-minded goal, Watt operates more elliptically. Accordingly his Eden of subject/object collapse will occur to him fleetingly. To again recall Bloom as a basis for comparison it seems to me that Beckett exaggerates the division between Bloom's (and thereby *Ulysses*'s) twin modalities: the classic/grand and the everyday. In *Watt*, the everyday is the elliptical reasoning of Watt. The grand, higher purpose is the (apparently separate from this everyday) search for a subject/object synthesis. The division is exaggerated, typically of Beckett according to the many critics who describe him as working at borders and limitations, in that the everyday is indeed almost all-pervading. Unlike the continual accompaniment of the

grand by the everyday in *Ulysses* the, everyday in *Watt* comprises the vast bulk of the text which has variously been called “all surface”, “reasoning” etc. where the ‘grand’ search for a surpassing of the Cartesian dialectic is hidden and fleeting, disguised in the text, as occasional and indeterminate as the experience itself.

### III

#### ***Molloy: Following orders***

In the first book of the famous trilogy the quest which in *Watt* was the search for servitude and a tentative face-to-face identification with a non-identity conceived beyond the confines of dualism, becomes in *Molloy* a more explicitly prescribed search, introducing a different kind of quest and a different kind of authority to that of Mr Knott. The quest of the private detective Moran is for another remarkably similar to himself. Moran is ordered to carry out this search and it will take him on a fatalistic quest for a not-I which in this case, more ambiguously than in *Watt*, might also be a twin existent I rather than an effacement of I. One of the facets of this difference between the two quests (that *Watt*'s is underlying and assumed where as Moran's is explicit and prescribed) is a difference of physical contiguity, an issue we can claim to be of significance for Beckett considering the frequency of ambiguous presences/non-presences throughout his work. For example the borderline between presence and non-presence where *Not I* is played out, and the incantatory prose of *The Unnamable* where the narration in parts seems to be trying to will itself onto the page, into simultaneous linguistic and physical manifestation, blurring boundaries between these two categories and thereby raising ambiguities about the presence of an autonomous narration, and by implication an autonomous self. Where as *Watt* occupied the house of Mr Knott, and could perhaps thereby afford the luxury of the tentative nature of his quest by virtue of his close physical proximity to the object of his quest (he could afford to oscillate at the border as he was guaranteed to be inhabiting this border for a certain time, so the closure of meeting Mr Knott face-to-face could be continually and safely postponed), *Molloy* and Moran are separated by a much greater distance, foregrounded by their separate narratives.

At one level *Molloy* and Moran are mutually antagonistic, at least such is the surface level ‘story’ of the pair. *Molloy* is the cause for Moran's middle class suburban Sunday to be interrupted by the agent Gaber instructing Moran that he must seek out *Molloy*. Though neither professes to care much about the other, Moran says “*what I was doing I was doing neither for Molloy, who mattered nothing to me, nor for myself, of whom I despaired, but on behalf of a cause which, while having need of us to be accomplished, was in its essence anonymous...*”<sup>(17)</sup>, they cannot avoid each other unconcernedly as *Molloy* is the cause of Moran's actions in that he is the object of the search. Reluctantly Moran obliges, and so assents to following the actions of his nemesis though a purpose of his hunt/quest as more than a mere locating of *Molloy* is not given him. After much apparently rather random wandering, increasingly in a similar spirit to that of *Molloy*, Moran is visited in the woods by Gaber who informs him that Youdi, the primary authority over this particular series of servants, is not angry with Moran for having failed to locate *Molloy*, but rather that Youdi “*keeps rubbing his hands from morning to night...and chuckling to himself*”<sup>(18)</sup>, indicating Youdi's omnipresence. A further inference we might take from Youdi's apparent delight in his scheme is that if all is going to plan then

Moran's physical degradation to a state comparable with that of Molloy is intended. Youdi is instigating, at the expense of Moran's previous self-respect and discipline, a transitional degradation thereby crossing the Cartesian border separating the two characters whereby one character is object to the subject of the other. At the behest of the absent authority figure Youdi, Moran will become almost identical with the object of his own quest. Molloy becomes then closer to being an 'inspiration' for Moran rather than a resented distraction as he was in the beginning of Moran's narrative.

Such transition leads naturally away from thinking in terms of the plot level antagonisms between two distinct characters to an implicit underlying reversal of temporal order where the second narrative of Moran's is 'in actual fact' the precursor to Molloy's, the conclusion being that Moran is a younger Molloy. Ruby Cohn writes that Moran and Molloy are indeed "*two facets of the same personality*"<sup>(19)</sup>. Cohn further claims there is good reason for taking seriously a notion of a contrast between the two protagonists as being between "*the Apollonian Moran [and] the Dionysian Molloy*"<sup>(20)</sup>. Taking these two points together we might want to say that by searching for Molloy, Moran emulates the wandering Dionysian. However, riven by weather as his result of being exposed to the elements of the earth, and being denied the propriety previously his bitter and indulged domain (and indeed when he returns to his house he finds it vacated of his son and house-maid whom he tried to enslave), Moran becomes a kind of emasculated Dionysus, a description perhaps fitting for a Beckettian hero. Such a description recalls Watt's comical contrived authority and brings other protagonists such as Hamm to mind: Lord of his indoor refuge/domain Hamm is denied the possibility of surveying his kingdom because he is blind. He is denied a connection to his jurisdiction, and so cut off from his world he is a dependant ruler, dependant on those he claims as his servants and impotent to police their actions.

I would also add to the claims made by Cohn that the two narratives being ambiguous in terms of character identity illustrates perhaps not just an implicit progression of one to another, of Moran to Molloy, put in reversed order to show the irony and ambiguity of blurring a boundary between progression and degradation, but also dramatizes a power relationship, an ongoing struggle. Situated as the two narratives are, as independent of the other's temporal system (that is, neither explicitly reference the others contents *as* the contents of the other, the inference from Moran to Molloy being based rather on a hypothesised logical progression of Moran considering his degradation and consequent increasing physical similarity with Molloy), the reader is free to place them in whatever relationship they might wish. In which case is it not justifiable to claim that placing them in any temporal relationship is arbitrary as such a relationship would be wholly invented by the reader? The two narratives then can perhaps be said to be as much in a struggle as they are complementary, in a subtle competition as to which is the primary story of the book. We know that Beckett continually undermines previous assertions or quests, so is it not more familiar of him to be experimenting with validating the narrative of Molloy rather than with adding preface to it? What do we have if we do not go along with the reversed time scheme idea as a means of connecting the two narratives?

We are left with two self-assertive narratives, the means of connection between the two being correlations of leitmotifs such as the hat tied with string, the faulty walk and degraded legs, characteristics reducible to the brooding character image not dissimilar from the pictures of Beckett himself, now, after his death, adorning the covers of so many of his works. If we were therefore to interpret the two narratives in this way, as essentially independent of each other, with unification coming only in the form of Beckettian evocation and imagery this would perhaps be to say that try as we might to unify (as Watt did), we will be left only with a

smattering of characteristics, amounting not to a unified 'heap', but rather to an unstable and unhealthy coalition.

Such a result is precisely the fate of Moran himself who fails in finding Molloy and has to be contented, if he is to be contented, with merely emulating Molloy's tattered state, with becoming the degraded state he was searching for in another. The point I would like to make of this is that while Beckett's ambiguity might lead to different interpretations, in this case the divergent interpretations yield the same kind of conclusion: If the narratives are a unity then the end state of the single central character is the decrepit state of Molloy. If they are independent then we are left with only what the characters have in common if we must attempt to unify, and considering Moran's degradation finds him almost identical with Molloy's, the character that emerges is an amalgam of two identical states, hence it does not matter if the narratives are a unity or are separate. If our concern is with the condition our central character is in, we will find a Beckettian protagonist subject to degradation and ruin either way. The tension between two independent narratives yields just the same picture of the emasculated hero as thinking of them as a single narrative.

*Molloy* continues the use of an absent character as in *Watt*, and again this is a figure of authority. Recalling Kafkaesque bureaucratic systems Beckett draws a comparable picture of authority, though the two author's conceptions diverge along what might be considered as horizontal and vertical elaborations respectively. That is, Kafka's bureaucracies are composed of an indefinite extension of components in a linear, simultaneous mode. Kafka implies that 'they' are all here, or nearby, all working away now in their private spaces. This is a type of image Beckett develops through the trilogy but which becomes much more basic and Kafkaesque in later work. In *Rockaby* for example the dying woman alone in what was once her mother's rocking chair looks from her own window, her "*only window, facing other windows, other only windows*"<sup>(21)</sup>. Similarly in *A Piece of Monologue* the speaker tells of standing before a window looking out "*Beyond that black beyond. Ghost light. Ghost nights. Ghost rooms. Ghost graves.*"<sup>(22)</sup> In *Molloy* however the presence of mysterious unknowable others is not of an indefinite number of parallel existences, but of a lineage of single authority figures. At present we are still concerned with a semi-religious single unknowable presence of an absent authority.

Youdi, this absent authority, has apparently ordered Gaber to enlist Moran to search for the author of the first chapter, Molloy, and to prepare a report to be given over to Gaber once the mission (as mentioned above: defined as no more than to find Molloy) is complete. This report is disclosed at the end of *Molloy* as being the preceding narrative. However, rather than leading to the brief glimpses beyond Cartesian subject/object dialectics found by Arsene and Watt this quest under authority leads to degradation, and paves the way for more of the same to continue through *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*. Why this difference, we might well ask. Is this not a similar search for a subject/object synthesis? I would put forward in regard to answering such questions that it may be useful to bear in mind again a Joyce/Beckett split and recall, to put it hopefully not too simply, that Joyce expands, Beckett contracts. Beckett's novels are self-cannibalizing, continually to the point of perpetually reducing their own ontology. They do not continue the same quest, but devour previous quests in the names of new ones. Joyce builds layers upon layers where as Beckett continually razes and erases, undermining or just brutally attacking previous assertions. The remnants of realist prose character and situation found in *Watt* are in *Molloy* devoured by a narrator narrating a process of narration. The quest is no longer for the still, static and occasional glimpse beyond mundane repetitive separation from the surrounding world. It is now a quest for a moving object, a mirror

image. It is a narrative in search of its own object, which according with Beckett's nihilism leads to entropy.

The quest of Moran for Molloy then is not of Moran's own devising. We are free, as readers, to assume in contrast such free will on the part of Watt as we are told no different. Though Watt is as mentioned above victim to his surrounding world because of the way he conceives of this world, the ambiguity regarding his overall motivation for seeking out the Knott's residence, made so ambiguous by having little elaborated about it by the narrator, leaves the reader free to assume character conventions reminiscent of realist fiction, namely that Watt is autonomous. Moran shows us an alternative search, one he is forced to do and which he does rather badly, certainly rather distractedly. Thereby absent authority has shifted from being that which is sought to be obeyed (Knott) to being that which seeks out and will be obeyed (Youdi-Gaber), serving as a part in a progression through Beckett's middle period work of undermining notions of characters autonomy both in their own worlds and as creations free from their creator, the author.

The critic James Fletcher relates the omnipresent punishing tyrant Youdi and the punished protagonists to the theme running through *Molloy* and indeed the majority of Beckett's work, of birth as a sin. Fletcher writes:

*Molloy is undergoing what he calls 'the immemorial expiation' in which all men are his 'fellow-convicts'; not, as Beckett said in Proust, "the miserable expiation of a codified breach of a local arrangement, organised by the knaves for the fools...[but] the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin...the sin of having been born."*<sup>(23)</sup>

Man has fallen from grace Beckett seems to say into all the filth and slime of the world of corporeality conceived of in Cartesian terms. This will naturally lead the protagonists to all the horrors of the body that are found throughout their 'adventures'. This why Moran detests his son and will continually be dissatisfied with his every exploit. Moran is always one cynical and comical step ahead him. "He would be!"<sup>(24)</sup> is Moran's reaction on getting word his son is well, and why Hamm calls his father "Accursed progenitor!"<sup>(25)</sup>, and why the narrator of *The End*, upon catching sight of his son, sees him "bustling along on his duck feet, bowing and scraping and flourishing his hat left and right. The insufferable son of a bitch."<sup>(26)</sup>

This sin is the reason for the tasks allotted the Beckettian heroes from *Molloy* onwards, and it is the factor necessitating the omnipresent tyrants who dispense these tasks. Fletcher deconstructs the names of the tyrants in *Molloy*: "Youdi (from the Arabic yahudi) is the colloquial French word for Jew, from which it is only a step to Yahweh, the Old Testament God. Gaber, of course, suggests Gabriel, God's emissary..."<sup>(27)</sup>. These icons become infinitely cruel in the Beckettian world, though ambiguously because there is always the doubt of the narrator through whom the narrative is refracted as to where blame lies, if indeed there is to be blame apportioned at all. Increasingly the protagonists become the architects of their own tragic fates as atonement. The narrator of *The Unnamable* will attempt to speak a "pensum", this apparently the final stage of a punishment become a product of the punished, self-imposed rather than imposed upon them. Prior to this however is *Malone Dies*, where authority undergoes a further transition from *Molloy* towards this self-imposed and textual form, where Beckett brings under his spotlight more acutely than in *Molloy* the idea of the 'narrator-narrated', and self-reflexively punishes and effaces his own creations in a battle for narrative authority.

## IV

*Malone Dies: I, say I*

The protagonist of *Malone Dies* is a step further away from the external omnipresent authorities of the type which lorded over Watt and Moran, demanding reports and service from their underlings. This is ambiguous though. While Malone claims to have free creative reign on his thoughts, the system he imposes is that of the omnipresent authority and it comprises of narrative construction, as did Moran's report and Watt's arbitrary reasoning. Also, Malone is to an extent looked-after in his room. He is brought food and cleaned up after, "*dish and pot, these are the poles*"<sup>(28)</sup>. This keeper comes occasionally and beats Malone until the point Malone writes:

*It is some days now since my soup was renewed, did I mention that? I suppose so. It is in vain I dispatch my table to the door, bring it back beside me, move it to and fro in the hope that the noise will be heard and correctly interpreted in the right quarters, the dish remains empty.*<sup>(29)</sup>

Perhaps Malone has resigned himself to the correctness of the verdict of his accuser and does not now need to be explicitly told to produce his pensums. Perhaps habit the great deadener has let him forget of a life beyond pensums. It seems likely that our interpretation of the source of authority in *Malone Dies* will determine to an extent our sympathy towards him. By leaving the extent to which Malone is architect of his own fate ambiguous Beckett thereby 'interferes' with a reader's reaction to him, simultaneously inviting a confusion of scorn and sympathy.

Decrepit in bed and dying, Malone produces his own narratives in a further progression from *Watt* where there was only one story and *Molloy* with its ambiguously competitive/complementary pairing, to a multitude of narratives fading into and out of each other. Malone says:

*Now it is a game, I am going to play. I never knew how to play, till now. I longed to, but I knew it was impossible. And yet I often tried. I turned on all the lights, I took a good look all round, I began to play with what I saw. People and things ask nothing better than to play, certain animals too. All went well at first... but it was not long before I found myself alone, in the dark.*<sup>(30)</sup>

Denying authority to the previous narratives of *Watt* and *Molloy* Malone claims a further vantage point of valid perspective and proposes to play as he should with his objects and characters. And if it so happens that he is left alone this time, as of course he will be, "*then I shall play with myself. To have been able to conceive such a plan is encouraging*"<sup>(31)</sup>.

Malone will attempt to constitute the majority of the novel with his stories, with only the occasional slippage back into the setting of his room, bed and almighty pencil stub. When Malone is jolted back to his physical reality, be this by visitors, his dissatisfaction with his storytelling or by faults of his own memory, he will often attempt to weave these 'disturbances' back into his notebook narratives, thereby

continually denying his own presence, instead choosing and desperately trying to manifest the other, the not-I.

So *Malone Dies* is yet another stage in Beckett's self-reflexive and nihilistic commentary on the author writing. Fletcher writes that Malone shows a longing "very similar to that of the nameless hero of the *Textes pour rien*, to lose his own persona completely in someone else's; in Sartrean terms, we have an instance of the *pour-soi* seeking metamorphosis into an *en-soi-pour-soi* that will give it permanence"<sup>(32)</sup>. Malone fictionalises, 'projects' himself into others in an unspecified hope of learning something. He is en route to himself via the other. Herein lies the framework for the narrator-narrated aspect of this work of narrative exuberance, in the blurring of boundaries between fictional and autobiographical construction. Where as *Watt* was more concerned with the ambiguity of boundary between truth and fictional construction, suggesting that there is no truth, or at least what scant truth there is is worthless beyond being arbitrary reasoning and therefore is fictional construction, *Malone Dies* continues the nihilistic descent and suggests in turn the questionability of fictional construction. The implication seems to be 'in the end' that all is a projection of a nameless, truth-less chaos, and indeed the end of the trilogy becomes, in an extensively self-conscious and stylised way, just such a projection in *The Unnamable*.

Malone flits from one narrative to the next, connecting them according only to his whim rather than to any pre-ordained system of meaning. He might change the character's name (as from Sapo to Macmann) if he feels them slightly changed, might replace one with another (e.g. Lemuel in place of Moll, who has become ill and according to Lemuel has died), and might just kill them all off, employing this Lemuel to hatchet the others to death, this time doing the killing out in the open, though not openly enough for it to be admitted that it is in fact Malone who wields the weapon.

Such fleeing from selfhood in the form of authorial instantiation and alteration of a Not-I identity marks a further reduction of the quest scenario of Watt and Malone. They were only explicitly searching for another where as Malone readily admits he is able to call up another as he wishes, thereby further distilling illusions about the real locus of omnipresent authority, and revealing that in fact this search-for/instantiation-of other is no more than a flight from self and responsibility, from the consequences of birth.

I want to turn now to some of the issues raised by the themes discussed above interpreted as surface level, textual means by which to subvert the actual reading and writing processes. The trilogy has been considered a transition in Beckett's work from a modernist to a postmodernist paradigm and the oscillations and corrections of Malone seem a good place to cite this shift. Malone is the first of the Beckettian narrators to invoke the postmodern descriptor "*play*". As mentioned above this is the paradigm Malone aspires to, though of course such overall governing principles will come under scrutiny and become negated/denied when their turn comes.

Marie Danziger writes an interesting interpretation of *Malone Dies* as being essentially composed of a "*text/countertext*"<sup>(33)</sup> dialectic, Danziger's term to describe both Malone's corrections internal to particular narratives and his inter-narrative flitting and fleeing. I myself am not as convinced as Danziger appears to be of Beckett's consideration of an importance for the text of his readers. Basing her reading on a reception of the book consisting of a context of informed, postmodern readers who will take from a text what they want and rearrange it to suit their own ideas as to how it should be constructed Danziger considers *Malone Dies* to be a novel essentially about "*the disapproval of conventional storytelling*"<sup>(34)</sup>, an

embarrassed author in the face of the new authority of the reader. I agree with the result here, but question the cause. What I doubt, or at least find little evidence for considering Beckett's character's apparent detestation or ambivalence about the world of other men and things not directly involving the characters, is that this is motivated by a fear, a respect or anything approaching an awe in the face of the prospective reader. I would say rather that the battle is not with a prospective reader but with the self of the narrator. Although there is much, as indeed I have discussed above, to indicate the conceptual importance of servitude and producing a text for another to read throughout much of Beckett's work, I consider this to be done not with a particular type of reader in mind but rather with models of literary authority and paradigm as predominant. I would rather interpret these elements as consisting of the need to be satisfied oneself rather than with the difficulties of satisfying another. After all, the omnipresent authority who demands the pensums, implicitly throughout and brought into the open in *The Unnamable*, is the self, the narrator standing behind the fictional narrators.

Danziger writes:

*Fragmentation, duplication, contradiction, startling juxtapositions, alternate versions of characters and events, deviations from established norms – and ultimately, violent confrontation – can all be interpreted as natural consequences of decreased confidence in the ability to convey meaning.<sup>(35)</sup>*

Whether this “*decreased confidence*” is a result of trying to convey meaning to a reader or to manifest satisfactory meaning to oneself is perhaps not the most important factor, of a higher priority is the way this decreased confidence plays itself out on the page. There is after all perhaps room for both mine and Danziger's readings to be validated, as the ongoing corrections indicate that the texts are being constantly re-read, with Malone playing the part of the reader. And so it is perhaps true that the texts are simultaneously wary and disregarding of their readers: wary of their internal readers, but disregarding of external judges. Whatever the nature of the reader the novel attempts to second guess and sidestep by constantly altering its direction, it seems plausible to say that Malone wants to simultaneously occupy a reader's and a writer's space. Danziger writes that this is in order to establish a passive reader, where as I would say it is more to do with a narrator wearing themselves down in order to accept their own work as their own.

*Malone's not-so-secret weapon – the special power he proposes to tap that was unavailable to his luckless predecessors – is narrative control.<sup>(36)</sup>*

It is narrative that allows Malone the authority previously the domain of earlier omnipresent figures. It is Malone who most explicitly of the protagonists discussed so far amalgamates authority and authorship. Previously authority figures demanded authorship, where as here we can see that authority *is* authorship, pointing the way to *The Unnamable* where the attempt to avoid self by continuously asserting the existence of other, while also being more alone than previous narrators, being dead and occupying some sort of half-life half-light world, provides a contrast which thereby makes the most overt continuous statement of self in the trilogy, significantly at its culmination.

However, while the authority of authorship appears to be inculcated by Malone, the autonomy of authorship is radically questioned. To recall mention above of the photographs of Beckett now widespread and occasionally constituting books in their own right, Beckett's work is both readily understood as a form of autobiography and is published and sold as such. The seemingly endless train of bedraggled heroes who echo the characteristics of Beckett himself: the greatcoats, the monochrome colour scheme etc., serve to perform just this function of blurring the boundary between fiction and autobiography external to the texts. Internal to them and indeed intrinsic to them is a blurring of this same boundary between the narrators fictional constructions and the worlds these narrators occupy. This situates the protagonists in a series, recalling the series of servants of which Watt was a part. For many readers no doubt this goes part way to cementing Beckett's 'authenticity'. If authenticity is to be defined in terms of a self-regard rather than a living in terms of others, this is just what I have argued for above in criticising Danziger's reading. However, the books of the trilogy are, according to Beckett himself, "*a demonstration of how work does not depend on experience – [it is] not a record of experience. Of course you use it.*"<sup>(37)</sup> Fond not of ephemeral impressions but of verifiable facts, perhaps something else learned from Joyce's working method, Beckett in his life seems to make the case for separating himself and his work, yet in his work appears to give reason for allying the two.

However, leaving aside the question of the extent to which the series of Beckett's protagonists emulate himself and returning to the interior of the works, the case made for autobiography, be it Malone's or Beckett's, being subject to a vague and questionable boundary between itself and fictional constructions is most strongly made by Malone. He writes in his notebook, of which the novel consists, disillusioned with his stories: "*What tedium. And I call that playing. I wonder if I am not talking yet again about myself. Shall I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject?*"<sup>(38)</sup>, and offers more obvious glimpses of self-cannibalising narration such as the professed hope that:

*Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave. But sufficient unto the day, let us first defunge, then we'll see. How many have I killed, hitting them on the head or setting fire to them? Off-hand I can think of only four, all unknowns, I never knew anyone.*<sup>(39)</sup>

It is a plausible inference to make that Malone is the author of these previous fictions, for how else would he know these names? He is part of the series which begins and ends with Beckett himself, but which Beckett outside of the texts avoids aligning himself with. Malone denies then his association with fictional constructs while he himself is one of these fictional constructs. The ambiguity of the fiction/autobiography boundary here can be understood equationally: If Malone did know these others then fiction is the ruling paradigm, because he thereby admits to being their author, as he admits to omnipresent authority over them by virtue of his capability to kill them off. If however he did not in fact know anyone, then autobiography rules, as what else could explain the presence of their names other than that they were pseudonyms for himself? The boundary between fiction and autobiography is drawn ambiguously by allowing the possibility of both to assert themselves, negating each other without closure.

*Malone Dies* then alters the themes of authority and the quest by undermining one with ambiguity involving autonomy, and the other by constantly revising the time

scheme in which action takes place. Malone's methods of narrative control reveal him to be 'tied' to a self he wants to avoid by claiming to want to learn about by writing stories of others. His own time scheme will intrude eventually and categorically as he dies, and he can no longer go back and revise the nature of his quest. Only death will halt the simultaneous search and avoidance of self.

## V

### *Into the Theatre: Physicality and Presence*

Beckett's decision to turn to theatre I understand predominantly as a further imposition of specific limitations upon his work, reflecting continuing adherence to self-imposed constraints which began with the turn away from Joycean inclusiveness into the bareness of the skull. The change of form also reflects retrospectively on the authenticity of the narrators' claims developing through the trilogy regarding their own exhaustion and entropy of these selves that were constituted by narrative. Already in the opening lines of *The Unnamable* there seems nowhere to go for the desperate narrator: "*Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on.*"<sup>(40)</sup> Written around the same time as *Waiting for Godot*, *The Unnamable* proclaims finality as disintegration and is Beckett's closing diatribe in full-length novel form.

The theatre provides elements key to its form which Beckett would exploit, particularly the physicality of presence on stage, a prescribed time scheme (an imposition of temporal system on an audience can be more precise and controlled on a stage when the author knows how long the play will last than in a novel which can be picked up and put down according to the reader), and theatre brings with it a whole different history than that of the novel. I will discuss in this final section how these elements alter and develop authority, the quest, and briefly dualism. This will be mostly in reference to *Waiting for Godot*.

Placing Beckett's particular brand of the tragic-comedy of *Waiting for Godot* in a historical context Michael Robinson makes the intriguing claim that this play results in some of the best that theatre has ever offered. Beckett manages to amalgamate the twin theatrical traditions originating in Greek theatre of tragedy and comedy, as did Shakespeare's work "*Which drew heavily for its extent and vitality on the tradition of the juggler, clown, acrobat and fool.*"<sup>(41)</sup> Robinson claims Beckett "*restored the theatre to its lost unity wherein the religious and the irreverent once again combine to confront man with his ultimate reality.*"<sup>(42)</sup> While Beckett's own writing would have him turning to theatre seeking only to rescue his own writing capability rather than theatre per se, these ideas of unity in a historical context can be useful to bear in mind as a background to more idiosyncratic dramatising methods and particular scenes. This tradition of theatre of course recalls Joyce's Ulysean quest and Beckett's ontologically reduced interpretation mentioned above, the twinning of 'high' and 'low', their ambiguities and interrelationships being more integral to the history of theatre than to that of the novel.

The problem of a lack of viable direction for Beckett in the novel form is undermined by a transition to physicality. Where as Moran went in search of his nemesis in his own narrative, and Malone continually re-defined the parameters of the Other in narratives which stood in contrast to his own physical stasis, the theatre

brings a physical immediacy to the idea of contemporaneous or ambiguous Self/Other. Malone could not occupy the same space as that of his narratives and Moran could only possess the Other by slowly, transitionally, degrading to become him. While I and Not-I have existed alongside each other in Beckett's novels, in the tenuous meeting of Watt and Mr Knott for example where they struggle to touch over an unstable bridge, the theatre seems to have provided for Beckett the context required in order that present tense be the governing paradigm, and so that complementary parts of a whole can exist simultaneously. Also, where the authority of language in the novels was questioned and undermined this was necessarily done with language, resulting in exhaustion. In the theatre however language can be undermined by gesture, the physical nature of which foregrounds, often comically, the immediacy of non-linguistic meaning as when our two protagonists discuss the theme of birth as a sin:

*Vladimir: Suppose we repented.*

*Estragon: Repented what?*

*Vladimir: Oh... [He reflects.] We wouldn't have to go into the details.*

*Estragon: Our being born?*

*[Vladimir breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, his hand pressed to his pubis, his face contorted.](<sup>43</sup>)*

The transition to the comic and concise as the dominant means of expression from the lengthy penums give to *Waiting for Godot* I would say the playfulness which was the hope of Malone. We knew reading his hope that he would fail, and we knew he would fail unhappily in bitterness. The comic-tramps however, with their vaudeville routines and dialogue mark the play with the kind of *jouissance* the previous narrators could barely even dream of.

In a development of the narrator-narrated aspect of *Molloy* and *Malone Dies* the self-reflexive form alters from manifesting as the anger and frustration of these novels protagonists anger and frustration at themselves and the nature of their novelistic enterprise (though such attitudes do find outlet in places such as Lucky's speech), and often comes through comically in references to theatrical rather than novelistic or narrative form:

*Vladimir: Charming evening we're having.*

*Estragon: Unforgettable.*

*Vladimir: And it's not over.*

*Estragon: Apparently not.*

*Vladimir: It's only beginning.*

*Estragon: It's awful.*

*Vladimir: Worse than the pantomime.*

*Estragon: The circus.*

*Vladimir: The music-hall.*

*Estragon: The circus.<sup>(44)</sup>*

Similarly in *Endgame* where there is in the following tête-à-tête reference both to theatrical devices and to potential ambiguity resulting from the staged, physical contiguity of the pair:

*Hamm: ... And me? Did anyone ever have pity on me?*

Clov: [Lowering the telescope, turning towards Hamm.] What?  
 [Pause.] Is it me you're referring to?  
 Hamm: [Angrily.] An aside, ape! Did you never hear an aside before?  
 [Pause.] I'm warming up for my last soliloquy.<sup>(45)</sup>

Robinson writes that Beckett's theatre is "*a theatre of situation, of what is there, as opposed to the theatre of events in sequence.*"<sup>(46)</sup> That is, Beckett builds on the transition into physicality which transposes his familiar concerns and perspectives into new, concise physical and dialogical manifestations, and creates a theatre of present tense, where displaying changelessness is less of a battle than it was in the novels. With recourse to the unchanging stage set itself the characters reflect their stasis is space with a stasis in time. Of course a play must progress through time, but Beckett keeps to a minimal and pure form and we surely understand plays such as *Waiting for Godot* only if we understand them as essentially static. They elaborate an idea not in terms of linear progression but in terms of circularity, the characteristic repetition with change.

In *Waiting for Godot* this central idea is waiting. The *truth* of Vladimir's and Estragon's situation, if such can be properly spoken of, is that they will wait and continue to wait, tomorrow a little degraded but still bound to this essential fact. They revolve around this truth as their dialogue and action continually reflects in repetition, occasionally touching upon, colliding with this central truth momentarily before continuing their orbit. Vladimir says in his final monologue in one of the instances during the play where truth raises itself to a level of language, and someone collides with it:

*"At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on. [Pause.] I can't go on! [Pause.] What have I said?"*<sup>(47)</sup>

This mirrors a similar ending to *The Unnamable*, the infamous "*I can't go on, I'll go on.*"<sup>(48)</sup> However, forced to live up the authenticity, the reality of existence as presence on a stage, Vladimir cannot disappear ephemerally as the novel's narrator can and so must continue to physically manifest the thesis/antithesis of not going on and going on.

This waiting is the theatrical rendering and further development of the quest. Beckett situates the action of *Waiting for Godot* on a country road, a synecdochic reference to a world of transitory truths, an "*emblem of movement, future and progress [which] also suggests that other people might 'come along'*"<sup>(49)</sup> which develops the actual movements of Molloy, Moran and those of Malone's fantasies into a theatrically defined space of suggestiveness. The characters remain at their particular spot by this road. They are stasis in transition, an idea panning out in present tense rather than following the road, plot and time. Lawrence Graver claims that it is the transitional elements in the play which elicit audience empathy with the spectacle on stage. He writes "*the action seems to be taking place at some transitional point in modern history when many old customs, references and beliefs are residual, existing only in fragments and without the power to give form and coherence to human lives.*"<sup>(50)</sup> I would say the country road is just such a transitional element, situating the characters and the audience in a flux which underscores the nature of time as held still by the play, time stopped and opened out to reveal a hollowness. Graver later writes: "*Thoughts about the interim, the provisional, what happens 'in the meantime' are more relevant to the adventures of Vladimir and Estragon than notions of termination, attainment and closure.*"<sup>(51)</sup> Although of

course a novel is capable of carrying stasis, as in the case of Malone in bed, with a move into theatre an audience is continually viewing this stasis. It thereby becomes an integral part of all other action. Rather than in a novel where it might continually be referred to, though on stage comparable devices foreground the stasis, all action is carried out *in this state* of stasis, visually continually present it underlies the entirety of the play.

If the quest is now a wait, a shift from evolving time scheme to perpetual present, still there is the figure of authority lording over the protagonists: the ever-absent yet omnipresent Godot. It is the omnipresence of this absence that specifically develops the progress in the novels towards an admittance that the omnipresent authority is I. Unnamable I projecting itself into an-other and thereby devolving responsibility. Godot as a specific figure/character is wholly absent from the entire play, however Graver makes the point that this authority is all around our central characters in various linguistic ways. He points out that many French words beginning with the three letters g-o-d have connections with the play:

*Godillot is French for 'hobnailed boot' or 'shapeless old shoe'...  
Godailleur is 'to go pub-crawling', and Goddam is French slang for  
'an Englishman' (who according to Estragon had drunk a little more  
than usual on the way to the brothel). Goder means 'to pucker'...  
[and] is also slang for having an erection. Godiller, the word for 'a  
scull' or 'small racing boat', has a vulgar connotation: 'to fornicate'.  
And godenot is 'a juggler's puppet', 'a joker', a 'misshapen little  
man'.<sup>(52)</sup>*

Throughout the play there are references to almost all these things, perhaps justifying the assertion that Godot in 'his' many forms suffuses rather than avoids presence in the play. The diminutive suffix bringing "God" into a smaller, personable and almost comical realm accords with this extension of Godot as being throughout present tense rather than as a state to come. As the play 'progresses' and establishes itself more and more as an extension through an endless present tense, the many things 'made in God's image' are all around. Recalling the confessed contradictory beliefs of previous narrators in the efficacy and uselessness of language, a language solely responsible for its constructions (all is language and all language is nonsense, therefore all is nonsense), the things made in God's image are these seemingly random associations, cohering together to form the homeless clowns and their degraded, depopulated and circular existence.

*Waiting for Godot* then develops, reinterprets again, what was an active quest for another: it has become a wait for the already present. It is doing nothing in the face of nothing. Littered all around in a chaos of present tense, that which we search for we can only really wait and hope for, our hopes themselves moulded out of this authority which we have moulded in turn from our selves and our world.

This interpretation of Godot as ever-present linguistically constructed association finds evidence in the play of a singular identity as being mere distraction, for example when Estragon and Vladimir discuss Godot's possible reasons for not coming:

*Estragon: And what did he reply?  
Vladimir: That he'd see.  
Estragon: That he couldn't promise anything.  
Vladimir: That he'd have to think it over.*

*Estragon: In the quiet of his home.*

*Vladimir: Consult his family.*

*Estragon: His friends.*

*Vladimir: His agents.*

*Estragon: His correspondents.*

*Vladimir: His books.*

*Estragon: His bank account.*

*Vladimir: Before taking a decision.*

*Estragon: It's the normal thing.<sup>(53)</sup>*

One of the points being made here is surely that the two are constructing an identity for Godot. They project into him a middle class life reminiscent of Moran, which of course was drastically undermined by the more Dionysian Molloy. They attempt to tie their ephemeral authority to a world of objects of organisation, and thereby allow room for a Marxist interpretation of the pair as victims of a class struggle where their hope is an aspiration for themselves rather than an expectation of saviour. On the other hand however a boy comes, the most solid signifier in the play of Godot's real existence. Without the boy there is nothing to prevent understanding Godot as a figment of the protagonists' imaginations. Beckett as we have seen with Mr Knott and Malone's keeper(s) is never content to let such figments exist or not-exist unambiguously. The protagonists have good reason for making up Godot, and this is how I interpret the boy's presence. He is a statement to the effect perhaps of "do not dismiss their imaginings quite so easily", another layer of scepticism. Robinson succinctly writes: "*Godot's existence is the result of man's inability to be a nihilist: he is the creation of man's profound need for meaning.*"<sup>(54)</sup>

In contrast to this ephemeral implicit authority figure of the play there is the more explicit demonstration of an authority: Pozzo, and his charge Lucky. Arriving as a pair they are another example of the world conceived in terms of interrelationships and dependence. Pozzo and Lucky reflect the concerns of Vladimir and Estragon as regards subservience. Where as the two protagonists present their friendship as one of the few positive values coming out of the play and so avoid a relationship of dominance/subservience between themselves, Lucky the crestfallen intellectual has as his name suggests been lucky and found for himself a substitute Godot/authority figure. Pozzo flamboyantly presents himself as a leader "*with a mix of callousness and civility that appears to reflect a thousand years of inherited rule.*"<sup>(55)</sup> Pozzo is clearly not a natural leader, whatever one of those might be. Extending the idea described above of Godot as linguistic permutation we can see that Pozzo fits into this as well:

*Closest in sound is godet, the name of a popular cognac, but also the French word for 'a wooden bowl' or 'mug', which in different usages refers to the bowl of a pipe (smoked by Pozzo who carelessly refers to Godot as Godet) and a small glass of wine (which washes down Pozzo's chicken. ...Inevitably, as Colin Duckworth has concluded, the receptacle called a godet might in the broad sense hold any meaning put into it.<sup>(56)</sup>*

Parading these various holdings of the kind of middle class authority ascribed to Godot by Vladimir and Estragon, Pozzo attempts to convince others of his dominion. However, his fragile and unsteady grip on an authority contrived and imposed by himself is shown up when he proceeds to lose his pipe, atomizer and watch. That is,

he loses the linguistic permutations of the word *Godot* which were his temporary jurisdiction. If we read these three elements metonymically we might want to say that Pozzo loses his grip on self, substance and time respectively.

This impression of a loosening, a degradation, and a falling is continued in Pozzo and Lucky's return in the second act where all four characters fall together and also all fall apart, separating even from each other, hinting perhaps at a progression through exhaustion to solipsism. For example Estragon having previously relied on the more ruminative Vladimir for verification about what the pair of them were doing (*We're waiting for Godot*) now says "*I'm waiting for Godot*"<sup>(57)</sup> when Vladimir asks what he is doing. Also Vladimir's final monologue has him speaking predominantly of "*me*", "*he*" and "*I*"<sup>(58)</sup>.

The end of the play has Vladimir and Estragon repeat their final hope of the possibility of wresting their fate from an external authority by hanging themselves. Ironically of course all this would do were they to achieve death would be to end their fate rather than alter it. However Vladimir enters the ever present proviso into the proposition: "*We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. [Pause.] Unless Godot comes.*"<sup>(59)</sup> They will however only be aware of Godot's non-arrival tomorrow at the end of the day, and once having reached this place of perspective we know from their action today that they are liable to offer again their fate to the absent authority, and put off until tomorrow again a regaining of their fate. This answers Estragon's question early in the play:

*Estragon: [Chews, swallows.] I'm asking you if we're tied.*

*Vladimir: Tied?*

*Estragon: Ti-ed.*

*Vladimir: How do you mean tied?*

*Estragon: Down.*

*Vladimir: But to whom. By whom?*

*Estragon: To your man.*

*Vladimir: To Godot? Tied to Godot? What an idea! No question of it.*

*[Pause.] For the moment.*<sup>(60)</sup>

They of course are tied to Godot, are bound to him as an absence. Their attempt to replace this bond with their own brand of rope results only in Estragon's trousers falling down. The rope they have is strong enough only within a defined domain. It can preserve dignity to a limited extent only if used for a minor purpose. Attempt to step outside this domain and establish a self-responsibility will result only in failure and indignity. They are tied to Godot and to each other by the invisible bond which is made literal by the rope between Pozzo and Lucky.

The last of the progressive themes I want to discuss in regard to *Waiting for Godot* is the play's treatment of dualism. The progression which through the novels has increasingly manifested the subject of dualism as integral to the structure and perspective of the novels, in *Waiting for Godot* reaches a point of stability which is in sharp contrast to the crises of previous narrators and protagonists. Dualism underlies the whole play as its foundation, is responsible for it as a dualistic perspective determines what is perceived. Dualism of course sees more than just dualism, it sees the world conceived in terms of dualism. Increasingly this formed the novels and in the theatre Beckett progresses his preoccupation further, the stability perhaps resulting from a transcendence of crisis to some kind of resignation. A hope of such has certainly previously been expressed by narrators, that peace entering in upon realisation of not knowing anything. This is the kind of tragic peace which pervades

the play: Peaceful because the two protagonists are friends and tragic because they are the two sides of dualism, Vladimir the mind and Estragon the body. When confronted by Lucky and Pozzo for example it is Vladimir who wants to hear Lucky think where as Estragon would have him dance. Vladimir stinks from his mouth and Estragon from his feet. It is Vladimir who dispenses food to Estragon, turnips and carrots which evoke an image of carrot and stick held out to a donkey, the rider perpetually teasing the ridden, the mind persuading the body to stay on side. This behaviour is a microcosm of the pair's relationship to Godot. Godot in turn is the carrot held out to dualism, the promise of meaning.

This particular pair then exist simultaneously, something previous interdependent characters either found hard to or due to their essential separation as with Malone and his creations could not do. This allows the pair to work together, as in the instance of hat-swapping they enact the same motions, and when they both attempt to "*do the tree*" at Vladimir's behest they both undermine the mind's attempt at a lofty poise by staggering about unable to hold their balance. This kind of a synthesis between the mind and the body, a portrayal of a dualism existing as a comical clownish interdependence between its elements, contrasts with the tenuous Self/Other meetings of Watt and Mr Knott. Instead of manifesting as the result of determined effort Vladimir and Estragon's synthesis appears much more random. It falls apart and comes together again repeatedly, not as an end point but as perpetual transition. Much less is made of these moments than was the case with Watt, Moran and Malone. The moment of synthesis is still fleeting but it is not also placed on a pedestal. It is as much a result of the farcical repetitions and situation the pair are subject to as is the fact that it will again collapse.

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- <sup>1</sup> Beckett, 1972, in Waugh (ed.), 1997, pp. 211-216
  - <sup>2</sup> Descartes, 1637, p. 11
  - <sup>3</sup> Beckett, 1963, p. 39
  - <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 55
  - <sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. 49-50
  - <sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 87
  - <sup>7</sup> Ibid. pp. 91-92
  - <sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 95
  - <sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 97
  - <sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 96
  - <sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 95
  - <sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 97
  - <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 41-42
  - <sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 42
  - <sup>16</sup> Begam, 1996, p. 75
  - <sup>17</sup> Beckett, 1959, p. 156
  - <sup>18</sup> Beckett, 1959, p. 164
  - <sup>19</sup> Cohn, 1962, p. 124
  - <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>21</sup> Beckett, 1980, in Beckett, 1990, p. 437
  - <sup>22</sup> Beckett, 1979, in Beckett, 1990, p. 429
  - <sup>23</sup> Fletcher, 1964, p. 145
  - <sup>24</sup> Beckett, 1959, p. 175
  - <sup>25</sup> Beckett, 1958, in Beckett, 1990, p. 96
  - <sup>26</sup> Beckett, 1977, p. 19
  - <sup>27</sup> Fletcher, 1964, pp. 147-148
  - <sup>28</sup> Beckett, 1959, p. 185
  - <sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 253
  - <sup>30</sup> Ibid. pp. 180-181
  - <sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 181
  - <sup>32</sup> Fletcher, 1964, p. 168
  - <sup>33</sup> Danziger, 1996, p. 1
  - <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 29
  - <sup>37</sup> Knowlson, 1996, pp. 371-372
  - <sup>38</sup> Beckett, 1959, p. 189
  - <sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 237
  - <sup>40</sup> Beckett, 1959, p. 293
  - <sup>41</sup> Robinson, 1969, p. 236
  - <sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 237
  - <sup>43</sup> Beckett, 1959, in Beckett, 1990 p. 13
  - <sup>44</sup> Ibid. pp. 34-5
  - <sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 130
  - <sup>46</sup> Robinson, 1969, p. 241
  - <sup>47</sup> Beckett, 1959, in Beckett, 1990, pp. 84-85
  - <sup>48</sup> Beckett, 1959, p. 418
  - <sup>49</sup> Fletcher, 1985, p. 43
  - <sup>50</sup> Graver, 1989, p. 29
  - <sup>51</sup> Ibid. pp. 43-44
  - <sup>52</sup> Ibid. pp. 44-45
  - <sup>53</sup> Beckett, 1959, in Beckett, 1990, p. 20
  - <sup>54</sup> Robinson, 1969, p. 259
  - <sup>55</sup> Graver, 1989, p. 48
  - <sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 44-45
  - <sup>57</sup> Beckett, 1959, in Beckett, 1990, p. 81
  - <sup>58</sup> Ibid. pp. 84-85
  - <sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 88
  - <sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 22

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