"the Impossible Voice": Hermeneutics And Narrative In Samuel Beckett's Novels

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"The Impossible Voice": Hermeneutics and Narrative in Samuel Beckett's Novels

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
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ABSTRACT

Samuel Beckett's early to middle novels thematize what Gadamer calls the hermeneutic nature of being. The novels figure the process of being as articulating the non-coincidental self in a discursive space itself denying the very grounds of meaning. This dissertation explores the philosophical implications of an aporetic hermeneutics in relation to the narrating subject, whose readings of his world are always articulated en abîme, and to the actual reader, who is obligated to measure the economy of her own reading against the specular hermeneutic of the narrating subject. The question of interpretation in the novels is attenuated by the reader's awareness that her hermeneutic desire is always figured as a simulacrum of an originary reading itself logically "impossible" because never fully grounded.

Each chapter discusses one novel in terms of its thematization of concepts specific to a philosophical hermeneutics. Chapter One discusses Watt in relation to a Gadamerian reading of Aristotle's conception of phronesis, and suggests a link between ethics and interpretation. Chapter Two analyses the relation between narrative and narrator in Mercier and Camier and suggests an anxious relation between narrative and hermeneutics. Chapter Three analyzes Gadamer's articulation of the "dialogical" function in relation to Molloy to suggest that the paradox of the Beckettian narrator
is the paradox of "aporetic dialogue". Chapter Four explores the hermeneutical function of "play" in Malone Dies as a specific function of narrative to suggest that Malone's desire for death is playfully—though impossibly—rehearsed in his acts of narrative. Chapter Five discusses The Unnamable as a self-interpreting (or "metahermeneutic") text that reads itself through the definitional and ethical thresholds of beginning and ending while simultaneously denying the possibility of any ethical grounds. Chapter Six explores the relation between memory, desire, death and the constitution of the narrating subject in How It Is and theorizes the implications of being in the space of repetition. I conclude the thesis with an examination of the dialogical function of hermeneutics in Endgame and the second trilogy, Company, ill seen ill said, and Worstward Ho.

Key Words:
Hermeneutics
Narrative
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I thank my sister Sandra, my brother Stephen, and my mother Maggie for being constant presences during these years. My mother’s delight in Mercier and Camier was vital independent confirmation of Beckett’s importance.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife Mitra Foroutan whose love simply makes all things meaningful.
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"The Impossible Voice": Hermeneutics and Narrative in Samuel Beckett's Novels

Introduction

And things, what is the correct attitude to adopt towards things?

--The Unnamable

It will be my purpose here to demonstrate how the Beckett text, as it engages in and facilitates a species of hermeneutic inquiry, places a specific and onerous burden on its reader. Beckett's texts confer a complex set of obligations to the reader: the obligation to understand the horizon ("world") of the text, the horizon of self as reader, the understanding of reading as phronetic "event." The concept of phronesis, or practical judgement, has had a place in hermeneutic theory at least since Gadamer's Truth and Method. 1 My purpose is not to read Beckett "through" the interpretive lens of phronesis, but to suggest the degree to which his texts--and reader--are always already engaged in a form of ethico-interpretive judgement. My argument, therefore, will attempt in as pragmatic a manner as possible to place a consideration of Beckett's texts "outside" the space of mere textual analysis and exegesis: I wish to suggest that the ethical component of Beckett's hermeneutic ultimately lends his texts a wider cultural resonance. The critic of Beckett i.
engaged in much more than mere exegesis. He is participating in an interpretive "conversation"? which compels him ultimately to theorize the fundamental premises and consequences of the hermeneutic gesture.

My particular interest in Beckett's hermeneutics has its impetus in a reading of his protagonists' contextualised interpretation of their world. The Beckett "world," and I use the term in the sense that Heidegger, Gadamer or Ricoeur do to indicate the essential linguisticality of experience, is one which will not "disclose." The central problem faced by Beckett's characters—or perhaps barely understood by them—is the desire for meaning in a context which by its nature resists that desire. This difficulty is often compounded and protracted by the characters' very unawareness of the terms of the hermeneutical problem: "I can think of no word, said Mercier, nor of any set of words, to express what we imagine we are trying to do" (Mercier and Camier; 83). Indeed Mercier's phrase indicates the complexity of the hermeneutic—his problem is not simply to define what he is trying to do, but it is to define what he "imagines" he is trying to do. There is a sense of a potential for endless deferral here, as if the imagination threatens always to stand between quester and (definition of) the quest. At another point in Mercier and Camier, a text important as it defines early in Beckett's career the structure of his hermeneutic, Mercier again indicates the difficulties inherent in his quest; it, like
many sites of aporia in Beckett, is a supremely comical moment:

"I should like to ask some simple questions", said Camier.

"Simple questions?" said Mercier. "Camier, you surprise me..."

"Let me tell you, said Mercier, before you go any further, I haven't an answer to my name. Oh there was a time I had, and none but the best, they were my only company, I invented queries to go with them. But I sent them all packing long ago." (87)

Mercier indicates a time when, it seems, surety existed (a premise we deeply suspect). We notice, moreover, the strangeness of his earlier hermeneutical procedure: Mercier had answers prior to the questions. Either Mercier here practices a version of the Heideggerean Vorgriff (fore-conception), or, as is more likely Beckett is indicating the absurdity of the inquiry. At any rate, the whole procedure is abruptly thrown out and Mercier's earlier formulation, "Certain things shall never be known for sure" (10), stands as the quintessential definition of this and other Beckettian quests. The central problem for the character, as I indicated, is the lack of meaning or disclosure (but perhaps to call it a "problem" is even to overstate the matter). The very real
problem for the reader is of course analogous to that of the character: Mercier's puzzlement with his world is our puzzlement with the Beckett text; his world refuses to disclose in a similar manner to Beckett's texts. How then do we read and interpret texts that seem to deny the very premise of reading? How, to state it bluntly, do we read a text that may very well be "unreadable"?

I take the point raised by P.J. Murphy in his recent Reconstructing Beckett as a challenge: "We obviously lack clearly worked out methodologies for dealing with Beckett's art" (xiii). Gary Handwerk raises a similar point in his article "Alone with Beckett's Company": "Beckett assaults our readerly capacities in such a way as to force us to relearn how to read and how to interpret" (65). The underlying purpose of this project is to account for the experience of reading Beckett's prose works. A central premise here is that the hermeneutical processes of both his characters and readers is the central topos in the oeuvre, and while this notion is hardly startling in itself, what is, I hope, new in my project is the close and detailed attention given by me to the specifics and problematics of that reading process. H.P. Abbott, in his The Fiction of Samuel Beckett, was one of the first to notice the strange homology between character in the text and the reader; I propose here to expend the greater portion of my project in a specific examination of that homology (and of the reading process produced within that
homology) in an effort to demonstrate how and to what degree the Beckett text actively resists what I call a "hermetic hermeneutics"—that is, a hermeneutic that simply re-duplicates, mirrors, and echoes the complex internal workings of the Beckett text without theorizing that re-duplication. The fundamental impetus behind my work is the sense that although some critical attention has been given to a description of the way in which the Beckett text is technically structured to evoke an affective response, too little attention has been given to an interpretation of, first, the contexts (philosophical, semiological) of that structuring, and, second, to the responses themselves. My project may be termed thus an exercise in both affective hermeneutics, as I am firstly concerned with the semiological effect of the various scenes of reading in Beckett's texts, and secondly in what I will come to call "metahermeneutics," a term I use to define the manner in which the reader of the Beckett text comes to a final and obligatory reading of his/her own reading.

Part of my purpose here is to demonstrate in as practical a manner as possible the confluence of certain critical/philosophical theories and Beckett's textual praxis. My intent in using the hermeneutical theories of Gadamer or Ricoeur, for instance, is not to foist a specific theoretical "approach" onto the text, but is rather to observe how Beckett and theory engage in a mutual interpenetration or mutual
resistance. It has often been observed that Beckett's work seems always to have already anticipated the manner of its own reading. As Handwerk puts it (not without a hint of frustration), "what can be said about Beckett's texts seems all too often to have been articulated already in Beckett's own critical writings or in the texts themselves" (65). Handwerk's frustration can in fact be usefully seen as an initial observation of a basic hermeneutical principle: the text under scrutiny must be seen as providing the means of its own decipherment. The critic's role is to attempt to illustrate the interaction between the Beckett text and the reader so as to demonstrate precisely how textual praxis and theory engage in what may be called (somewhat laboriously) mutual self-articulation. One might suggest, in fact, that if our theories of reading seem to be anticipated by Beckett, we are penetrating to the heart of the interpretive matter. As Gadamer puts it with his usual disarming simplicity in Philosophical Hermeneutics, "The real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable" (13).

I am interested in exploring the genesis of Beckett's manipulation of what semiotologist Marco de Marinis in The Semiotics of Performance calls the "perceptive-interpretive" processes of his reader, and will thus move "beyond" the schema of the text into a pragmatic analysis of the techniques of engagement, that is, an analysis of the perlocutionary
effect of the semiology of the Beckett text. A crucial contention here is that it is out of his early experiments in prose that Beckett finds and refines his very specific techniques of reader/audience engagement. It is in such texts as Watt, Mercier and Camier, the texts comprising the trilogy, and How It Is, that Beckett, moreover, presents the self’s discovery of the fundamental textuality of experience, or, to put it in other terms, the self’s discovery of the fundamental hermeneutic character of experience. It will be here at this early stage that I will outline the basic "shape" of the Beckettian hermeneutic, a hermeneutic that takes its impetus from the revelation of world "as" text. As Gadamer puts it in Truth and Method:

Not only is the world world insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it. Thus, that language is originally human means at the same time that man’s being-in-the-world is primarily linguistic...hermeneutical experience is verbal in nature." (443)

Gadamer’s premise here, that man’s being-in-the-world is primarily linguistic, is one useful to a reading of Beckett’s characters’ own formation or (self)articulation as reading subjects. Part of my interest in this project is to explore
precisely the hermeneutical articulation of the narrating/knowing subject, that articulation, that is, of subjectivity in the fictional semiotic of the narratives. My readings of the novels of the trilogy and How It Is are especially concerned with the intimate connection between narrative hermeneutics and the formation of the narrating subject. It will be my contention that the articulation of the subject in narrative will inevitably produce a disruptive aporia, as the subject is always articulated in the gap between his own narratological claims as to the 'truth' status of the text, and the ontological facticity of what I call a disruptive semiosis, which serves always to cast doubt on all such truth claims even as such claims are formulated. The narrators of all the texts studied here are, as the narrator of Beckett's thirteenth Text for Nothing puts it, "born of the impossible voice" (140), a voice at once creating and created, speaking and spoken. The narrator is both subject of and to discourse: more precisely, he is discourse.8 And it is precisely the status of the subject as discourse, thus as hermeneutic subject, that precipitates such an aporia:

I am in words, made of words, other's words...I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their setting. (386)

Given my announced interest in Beckett's hermeneutic, it
is not surprising that a guiding theoretical light for this project is the work of Wolfgang Iser. In fact it is the confluence of reception-hermeneutic theory that provides the conceptual and, most importantly, the pragmatic framework of my analysis. As a species of what may be called "applied" hermeneutics, the work of Iser is important in its explicit foregrounding of the reader of the Beckett text. His conception of the processes of "materialisation" and "concretisation"—borrowed in fact from Ingarden—are ones I find useful to describe the initial affective process of reading Beckett. In his discussion of Molloy in The Implied Reader, Iser describes the semiology of what Catherine Belsey, adapting Benveniste, will later call the interrogative text:

Such texts act as irritants for they refuse to give the reader any bearings by means of which he might move far enough away to judge them. The text forces him to find his own way around, provoking questions to which he must supply his own answers. (Iser 175)

In The Act of Reading Iser suggests that it is essentially an absence or a "negativity" in Beckett's prose that impels the reader to construct "meaning," and it is here that Iser makes clear his indebtedness to Ingarden who, in The Literary Work of Art, discusses in a philosophical context the affective power of "spots of indeterminacy" in the "schematic formation"
(251) of the text. Ingarden posits ultimately that the literary work is never fully present unto itself. And while this suggestive observation is based on a comparison of "real" objects to the textual object (that is, on the fact that they are "ontically" distinct), his notion is useful in its application to Beckett's works, which as "schemae," subject the reader to oblique, often incomplete disclosures of elements of plot, to disordered time sequences, to the absence of useful orientation markers. Ingarden suggests, borrowing from the Phaedrus, that language qua language can never fully re-present, as it always and for ever will require qualification. This is a notion perhaps satirized in Beckett's Watt, where endless pedantic commentaries on seemingly irrelevant (or at least "simple") occurrences point to an anxiety over language's power to re-present, to capture precisely the essence of the matter, to provide what the narrator calls "semantic succour" (79):

Then Watt said, Obscure keys may open simple locks, but simple keys obscure locks never. But Watt had hardly said this when he regretted having done so. But then it was too late, the words were said and could never be forgotten, never undone...And although it sometimes happened that a moment's pensiveness was sufficient to fix his attitude, once and for all, towards words when they sounded, so that he liked them, or disliked them,
more or less, with an inalterable like or dislike, yet
this did not happen often, no, but thinking now this, now
that, he did not in the end know what to think, of the
words that had sounded, even when they were plain and
modest like the above of a meaning so evident, and a form
so inoffensive, that made no matter, he did not know what
to think of them, from one year’s end to the next,
whether to think poorly of them, or highly of them, or
with indifference. (122-23)

Watt’s aporetic sense of the deficiency of his discourse
accompanies his very real sense of the refusal of the world
(i.e., Mr Knott) to disclose its meaning. And it is this
premise—the world’s refusal to disclose—that marks a gap
between Ingarden’s account of the literary object and
Beckett’s philosophy of world. For Beckett’s characters there
can be no "ontic" difference between text and world as both
resist disclosure, a point emphasised by Molloy who cannot
understand his own textual productions: "When he comes for the
fresh pages he brings back the previous week’s. They are
marked with signs I don’t understand. Anyway I don’t read
them" (7).

Ingarden, while providing a useful heuristic tool in his
notion of textual schema, is of only limited use to the reader
of the "modern" fictional text. His argument is fully
applicable only to the classic realist text which qua text is
ontically different from reality and thus always "in need of further supplementation" (251). Texts which, however, refuse even to make a gesture towards depicting "reality" are beyond the pale for Ingarden. My intent is to account for how we read texts that are both ontologically indeterminate (qua texts) and logically indeterminate—that is, texts which follow the logic of a post-realist fictional discourse. Ingarden's refusal to interrogate this kind of fictional discourse is disheartening:

We are then dealing with a grotesque dance of impossibilities. To what extent such an "impossible" world can be exhibited, and what aesthetic qualities and values it affords, are questions that introduce entirely new points of view, which without doubt require strictly regulated bounds for the allowable completions of the spots of indeterminacy. (252)

Ingarden's anxiety of this "grotesque dance of impossibilities" is the anxiety fully embraced by the Beckett character, for his world never fully discloses and cannot be presented.

I think ultimately this failure to disclose is the basis of the old argument regarding Beckett's "nihilism," a notion that if understood in strict terms seems philosophically inappropriate, and, if read in terms of the semiology of the
Beckett text, seems ironically out of place. I prefer describing the Beckett ontology using Iser's term "negativity" because, first, it accounts for the initial experience of the Beckett text, texts which can be as superabundant in detail as Watt and the trilogy but reveal themselves in their absences or in their negativity. Second, Iser's term provides the framework within which we can observe the articulation of the central irony of Beckett's oeuvre, an irony resulting from the conflict between what I will call ideology and semiology. In Prospecting, Iser writes that "Negativity brings into being an endless potentiality" (141). The question the Beckett critic must answer is: How is the ideological (religio-philosophical) ethos of the Beckett world compromised semantically by the text's/reader's production of systems and structures of (provisional) meaning? The question is further complicated, as I indicated earlier, by the fact that productions of systems of meaning are produced within a context which would seem to defy meaning a priori. The narrator of Watt puts the problem nicely: "But what was this pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning? And to what did it tend?" (72). These are fundamental questions to my project. I am interested in exploring how Beckett's oeuvre articulates itself in this critical aporia. Semiology always seems to threaten ideology in a way that makes difficult the final expression of negativity in a textual form. I hasten to add, however, that my observations here are not aimed necessarily at reading
Beckett against himself--Beckett is far too canny a thinker not to perceive his own irony. I am working out a theory of reading Beckett that attempts to account fully for the fundamental elements of his semiologico-ideological praxis.

As this project has as its basis a hermeneutic of Beckett I should like at this point to outline those aspects of strict philosophical hermeneutic theory I will find useful. Although Iser's and H.R. Jauss' Rezeptionaesthetik is important to me, I have fundamental difficulties with their latent structuralist epistemologies, specifically as they apply to the notion of the "implied reader," the reader "scripted" into the text. For Iser, the implied reader contains "the necessary requirements of the act of reading as indicated in the text" (8); his role is "noted in the text" (92). The implied reader is nothing more than a posited ideal structure: the actual reader as s/he is historically figured is distrusted and ignored. In his "Theses on the Transition from the Aesthetics of Literary Works to a Theory of Aesthetic Experience" H.R. Jauss extrapolates from Iser using an explicit structuralist discourse:

To contrast the role of the actual with the implied reader--or in other words the code of a historically determined reader with the role as indicated in the text--is an indispensable prerequisite to a hermeneutically enlightened analysis of the reader's experience. The
implied reader's role may be discerned from the text's objective structures...Therefore, the role of the implied reader deserves methodological preference. (142)

The sympathy with the premises of structuralism is evident in this talk of codes and structures and the decision to favour the text's embedded reader over the analysis of the historically figured reading subject.

My difficulties with this structuralist ethos are a result partially of my preference for a Gadamerian hermeneutics which explicitly locates the historical reader within the reading dynamic. At a basic level the critic of Beckett who would place himself within the corpus of criticism must have an acute sense of the weight of history on his endeavour: no critical moves can be made, no hermeneutic offered that does not acknowledge, agree or disagree with, the preceding reception of the text. My notion of reading Beckett thus obviously involves an acknowledgment of the history of the reception of the texts: no reading can exist in a critical vacuum. More precisely, however, it is structuralism's explicit denial of the subjectivity of the reader that I find troublesome. It is a basic hermeneutical principle (at least since Gadamer) that any reading is a confluence of text and historically located reading subject. The "meeting" is one characterized by its conversational or dialogical nature. The reader will come to the text with all
his prejudices and fore-meanings, but:

a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained mind must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's quality of newness. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" in the matter of the object nor extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. (238)

A Gadamerian hermeneutic thus preserves the autonomy of both reading subject and read object. The reading subject is understood to present itself as a full member of the hermeneutical conversation: "Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding" (385). The meeting is a "fusion of horizons" (388) in which both parties in the dialogue respond actively; the reading subject does, however, logically maintain a priority:

But this means that the interpreter's own thoughts too have gone into reawakening the text's meaning. In this the interpreter's own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that he maintains or enforces, but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into
play and puts into risk. (388)

Thus, though the reading subject's horizon is decisive, a true hermeneutics "is not 'knowledge as domination' i.e., an appropriation as a 'taking possession of' but rather a subordination to the text's claim to dominate our minds" (278).

Gadamer is important to my project as he provides the theoretical basis of my view of the relation between text and reader, which is properly understood in terms of mutuality and, importantly, dialectic. Gadamer writes: "There is a plurality of familiarity and strangeness on which hermeneutic work is based" (262). This dialectic of familiarity and strangeness is one which is always at work in our hermeneutical conversation with the Beckett text. Semiotic moments of familiarity (moments when, for instance, Beckett's texts meet our generic expectations) hook the reader; however, threaded through these moments, for instance—and this is only one avenue Beckett will follow to "distance" his reader—are metatextual moments which, like Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt, force the reader, firstly, into a new awareness of the ontology of the work and concomitantly into an awareness of his own role as reader/spectator. These moments of "awareness", crucially, exist simultaneously with moments of active hermeneutical inquiry to produce a vertiginous dialectic. We are drawn to the text in our desire to flesh out
and give meaning to it; but we are simultaneously "distanced" by these metatextual moments and forced to see and read our interpretations, to use the term I used above, "metahermeneutically," that is, only as interpretations, only as ethereal versions of a protean story. There is thus an odd specularity produced as the instability of the text begins to reflect the instability of the reading experience. The reader is, in fact, made into a shadow version of the characters within the novel or play whose own grasp on reality and meaning is tenuous and radically unsure.

It is at this moment that the reader begins to perceive fully the strange disquiet produced by the experience of reading. Concomitantly, it is at the moment of the reader's awareness of the provisional and protean nature of his interpretations that Beckett succeeds fully in destabilizing the reading subject as reading subject. The point I want to emphasise here is the absolute proximity of the reader to the text in the reading experience, a proximity noted both by Gadamer and Ricoeur and effected by Beckett. In his essay "What is a Text?" Ricoeur notes: "What the interpreter says is a re-saying which reactivates what is said by the text" (164). This re-awakening, and Gadamer too insists on this point, always already involves the reader's self-evaluation; my notion of metahermeneutics is in a way analogous to Ricoeur's notion of "appropriation":
By 'appropriation' I understand this: that the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself. On the one hand, understanding the text is not an end in itself...in hermeneutic reflection--or in reflective hermeneutics--the constitution of the self is contemporaneous with the constitution of meaning. (159).

We might thus here be allowed to suggest that Beckett's texts, if they are "about" anything are initially about the reader who will ineluctably "find" himself "within" the text as (or in) the emblematic and specular reader.

Appropriation for Ricoeur is, as he notes in his essay "Appropriation," a "letting go" (191) of the subject: "it is always a question of entering into an alien work, of divesting oneself of the earlier 'one' in order to receive, as in play, the self conferred by the work itself" (190). Ricoeur's point is not to "lose" the self forever, but to realize the degree and extent to which texts confer various reading subject positions. As philosopher G.B. Madison notes in his The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity, Ricoeur theorizes a "desubjectivised" (92) subjectivity. Ricoeur and Beckett both realize the degree to which the subject as reading subject, that is, an hermeneut offering a reading of world, is always
mediated to itself. Says Madison: "The presence of the subject to itself, which is the very definition of subjectivity and self-consciousness, is an indirect, mediated presence" (93). If I read Ricoeur and Beckett properly, the self (and text) can only know itself through its readings of itself, readings which can only be readings, thus provisional and subject to all the vagaries of any textual expression/interpretation. As Gadamer says, all experience—whether of text, of self, of world—is inevitably bound in the form of language: any understanding of text, self, and world (all of which in-form the others) thus is linguistic in nature, hence the seeming endlessness of the hermeneutical conversation. Says Madison: "The reflecting subject in search of meaning, self-understanding, is a linguistic subject, a subject which is given to and which knows itself by means of the language it inhabits" (95).

Thus it seems important to use a strict hermeneutical approach when reading Beckett, as hermeneutics always theorizes the reader's processual self-consciousness as reader. It remains to highlight again the fact that the theoretical approach to texts defined by hermeneutics—its assignment of status to text and reader, its awareness of the subject as "text"—is always anticipated in Beckett's work. Thus a hermeneutical reading of Beckett will "simply" allow the text to "disclose" itself to the reader in the explicitly dialectical manner I have posited.
Beckett's texts provoke a number of questions the answers to which the specular reader is obliged to supply. What is the ontological status of the art work and the audience's reading of that work? Can we place any firm trust in our readings of Beckett's fiction if the source of our readings reveals itself progressively to be fundamentally unstable? What are the implications of self-consciousness for Beckett's work and for a reading of that work? It is my contention that these questions--common enough in Beckett criticism--have not been properly contextualised. It is not enough merely to see the text as the site of an exploration of these questions. The Beckett text, precisely as its own hermeneutic is specular, obliges the reader also to address these questions to him or herself and to his/her own hermeneutic. The point I wish to outline here finally is the degree to which our response to the Beckett text is an obligatory response, a response that, as it involves the reader's intimate awareness of him or herself as hermeneut, involves what I call an ethic. I am interested in exploring and expanding on the idea, suggested by Gadamer in _Truth and Method_, that hermeneutical action shares a qualitative similarity with ethical action. In a Beckettian context, in which as I wish to suggest, an ethic is defined by its obligatory nature, and in which action undertaken by characters is in a very real sense echoed by the reader of that action, any hermeneutic will almost by definition, as it is obligatory, be "ethical."
"Obligation as ethic" is an idea little touched on by critics of Beckett, or, if it is, "obligation" is merely thematized, as in Martin Esslin's "What Beckett Teaches Me." So defined, ethics perhaps has little relevance to a hermeneutical reading of Beckett's oeuvre. If, however, we focus on ethics as "action"--and this is a basic Aristotelian notion--we can begin to see a larger site of theoretical and practical interest. Given the basic premise of this project--that the interpretive act is the central topos in Beckett--a homology between ethical and interpretive action begins to define itself.

Like a great number of critics I find Beckett's Three Dialogues to be of central importance to an understanding of the Beckettian ethos. It is of course the word "obligation" that is important here, a word used numerous times in the course of the "dialogue"; "B" prefers:

The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (139)

Too often, I think, it is Beckett's "nothing" which is emphasised; his "obligation"--a crucial counterfoil to his nothing--is not given the priority it deserves. To posit the artist's expression as an obligation is of course to posit
expression as at least partially an ethical act, as Esslin rightly points out. An obligation is, as J. Hillis Miller puts it in *The Ethics of Reading*, a matter of a "must" (we will return to this point). The interesting thing here is "B's" coyness when it comes to articulating precisely the moral force which impels the expression: "D: Why is [the artist] obliged to paint? B: I don't know" (142). Nevertheless the obligation to act—an obligation, crucially, shared by a great deal of Beckett's characters (Watt, the unnamable, Mouth, Krapp), and qualitatively different from the "compulsion" to act—is there: the obligatory act is an ethical act. And the ethical act in Beckett, I wish to argue, is always an act orienting itself towards the possibility of meaningfulness.

I arrive at this idea via the notion that (obligatory) action qua action is unreadable (meaningless) separated from its context: an action cannot logically be separated from context—any action thus has the possibility of being meaningful. As Madison points out, action and discourse (or as I will put it, action as discourse) are linked to meaningfulness:

The phenomenological fact—confirmed by economic observation—is that existence is meaningful in that it is unintelligible except in terms of meaningful action. No discourse, therefore, is possible which rejects the "postulate of meaningfulness." It is logically impossible
to deny meaning, just as it is logically impossible to
deny one's own existence as a subject. (101)

It will be my contention that the "context" of Beckett's
meaningful or hermeneutic action (as discourse) is the reader,
or, more precisely, the interaction between text and reader.
Beckett in the Three Dialogues places the expressive concerns
of his audience alongside those of his artist: "among those
whom we call great artists, I can think of none whose concern
was not predominantly with his expressive possibilities, those
of his vehicle, those of humanity" (142). Beckett's linking of
the expressive concerns of the artist and those of his
audience (humanity) allows me in part to suggest the degree to
which the obligation of artist is not qualitatively distinct
from the audience's obligation to interpret expressively, in
short that the obligation to express by the artist is met by
the reader's obligation to interpret.

Here of course we arrive at the crux of the reader's
critical aporia: the obligation to interpret texts that often
and systematically resist any kind of more than provisional
understanding. I might formulate this obligatory dilemma
borrowing from Hillis Miller who, in Versions of Pygmalion,
asks what one's ethical-interpretive responsibilities are
towards something that "cannot" be understood. This is a
question often bypassed by the Beckett critic who leaps
wholesale over this very central semiological-epistemological
problem and offers readings towards which only a gesture of that reading’s instability is made. That is, it is conventional to suggest that readings of Beckett are difficult; it is more infrequent for one to acknowledge that this difficulty is the end of reading and that the problematics of reading are the critical-hermeneutical crux of the matter.

This project may be seen as an extended exploration of my conviction that an historically located hermeneutics is a foregrounding of the "act-consequence" (ethical) aspect of the critico-performative gesture. Gadamer himself acknowledges this foregrounding in his discussion of Aristotle in Truth and Method. He takes the Aristotelian notion of phronesis or practical judgement (moral knowledge) and combines it with the Platonic model of the dialogue to arrive at his paradigm of hermeneutical understanding. The concept of phronesis fits the tenor of Truth and Method’s resistance to a rigorous methodological (read "scientific") understanding of world, as phronesis must adapt itself to ever changing (non-quantifiable) situations. Moral knowledge is part of the human sciences whose object

is man and what he knows of himself. But he knows himself as an acting being, and this kind of knowledge does not seek to establish what is. An active being, rather, is concerned with what is not always the same but can also
be different...the purpose of his knowledge is to govern his action. (314)

Gadamer works through an analogy between ethical action and hermeneutical action which I believe can be extended beyond its structural similarities: both courses of interpretive and ethical action involve the notion of obligation, in that the situation, ethical or textual, itself demands to be read, demands a response to "the moment" (322). As ethical action is guided by application to the moment, so too is interpretive action:

...the interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal, the text--i.e., to understand what it says, what constitutes the text's meaning and significance. In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all. (324)

The point Gadamer makes about phronesis adapting itself to the moment can be extended into the sense that the understanding of text--as moment or "event"--is articulated precisely within a "dialogue" unique to a specific historical temporality: the hermeneutic situation must to a degree facilitate and dictate the means of its own particular reading. It is precisely here
that we can begin to unravel the implications of Beckett's "obligation." The hermeneutical response to Beckett is, as I will posit, an ethical response in that it articulates itself precisely within a continuing critical dialogue, both with preceding criticism and with the reader's ongoing "self-conscious" metahermeneutic: the affective power of the Beckett text obliges continual response. It is the responsibility of the critic to make sense of the semiological-philosophical contexts from which and to which this response orients itself.

The Beckettian reading subject, whose readings always appear "merely" as readings and hence whose meaning status is provisional, is not thus one I wish to figure as mere product or producer of words "with no ground for their setting." I disagree, therefore, with some deconstructive readings of Beckett that claim Beckett has effected, as Ileana Marculescu claims in her essay "Beckett and the Temptation of Solipsism", a "systematic deconstruction of language and of meaning" (55). Although I am comfortable with placing a provisionality within the hermeneutical conversation, I wish to emphasise that an ethical reading of Beckett, while not final, is, as active reading orienting itself to a particular semiological instant, nevertheless always potentially "meaningful."

The thesis begins with Samuel Beckett's Watt and ends with a discussion of the second trilogy and thus does not analyze the very early Dream of Fair to Middling Women, Murphy, or any other of the later short works such as
Imagination Dead Imagine. Part of the scope is dictated by pragmatic concerns about length--this is the reason for the exclusion of Imagination Dead Imagine--and partially by a sense that the specific formulation of the subject as aporetic hermeneutic being--the subject as subject to language--is fully articulated, and thus open to fruitful analysis, in the novels following Dream of Fair to Middling Women and Murphy.
1. It is in Part Two of *Truth and Method* that the concept of phronesis is provisionally applied to the hermeneutic act. Gadamer borrows the concept from Aristotle's *Ethics*, where phronesis means moral knowledge as "practical action." Gadamer thus expands the idea into hermeneutics, giving hermeneutics a specifically ethical turn:

This is the point at which we can relate Aristotle’s analysis of moral knowledge to the hermeneutical problem of the modern human sciences. Admittedly, hermeneutical consciousness is involved neither with technical nor moral knowledge, but these two types of knowledge still include the same task of application. (314)

It is thus Gadamer’s sense of a structural or formal homology between ethics and interpretation that is immediately pertinent to a reading of Beckett’s works. Because of the specific exigencies of the structure of Beckett’s work--its peculiar semiology--any hermeneutic act will always already be an ethical act if ethics be understood as a kind of obliged interpretive “action.”
2. The concept of the hermeneutical "conversation" is Gadamer's. Hermeneutics as conversation or dialogue is central to the argument of Part Three of *Truth and Method* and thus to my own project:

Thus it is perfectly legitimate to speak of a hermeneutical conversation. But from this it follows that hermeneutical conversation, like real conversation, finds a common language, and that finding a common language is not, any more than in real conversation, preparing a tool for the purpose of reaching understanding but, rather, coincides with the very act of understanding and reaching agreement. (388)

Hermeneutics as dialogue or conversation is one of the few methodological apparati that does allow the reader fully to appreciate her own role in "actualizing" or "concretizing" the text. It is of course part of my interest to explore precisely how Beckett's texts instantiate a resistance to the hermeneutic logic of the conversation by instantiating a decomposition of the specular or reading subject.

3. Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" is a central statement on art as "disclosure":
What happens here? What is at work in the work? Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the "air of peasant shoes, is in truth. This being emerges into the unconcealedness of its Being. The Greeks called the unconcealedness of beings aletheia. We say "truth" and think little enough in using this word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth at work. (164)

My purpose here is of course to examine the particular relation between the narrating subject—the creator of the work of art—and the work itself. The revelation of the "being" of the work is always already the revelation of the "being" of the narrating subject: if one cannot "disclose" to himself his precise ontic status, the precise status of the work itself necessarily becomes questionable.

4. Beckett's texts often articulate themselves in the structure of the quest. I read this structure as a thematization—or allegory—of the hermeneutic act itself. This idea is explored most elaborately in my third chapter which reads Molloy in part as a deconstruction of the detective procedural genre. Molloy, I argue, dismantles the very epistemologico-hermeneutical "grounds" that support the structure of the quest (detective) genre.
5. *Vorgriff* (fore-conception) is part of Heidegger's notion of how the hermeneutic is always in a sense articulated by what it already knows: "Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought" (*Being and Time*; 24). Gadamer's notion of hermeneutical "prejudice" (see especially *Truth and Method* 269-77) builds on Heidegger's notion, as does Jauss' notion of the "horizon of expectation".

6. This hermeneutical principle is one that a great number of Beckett's texts parody. In my chapter on Watt my argument is intended to explore precisely the interpretive problematic of a text that always already anticipates--and parodies, thus dismantles--its own reading.

7. Unless I indicate that I have added the italics in a quotation, the italics are the author's.

8. It is I think the failure to grasp the precise discursive ontology of the narrating subjects that has led and still leads critics into readings of Beckett that emphasize form (allegory) over content. The history of Beckett criticism is founded, it seems, on a kind of anxiety of discourse, an anxiety over the precise ontology of text. It is not difficult to trace a history of anxiety in Beckett criticism; the following is a short list of some works that avoid the issue
of subject-as-discourse, or the entire problematic of language, in favour of allegorical frames (I use the term "allegory" to describe any reading that explicitly re-frames the text "as" something else (allegorisis: other speaking); this is a particular issue in chapter one): Philip H. Solomon, The Life After Birth: Imagery in Samuel Beckett's Trilogy; John Pilling, Samuel Beckett; Mary A. Doll, Beckett and Myth: An Archetypal Approach; Frederick J. Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self; Josephine Jacobson and William R. Mueller, The Testament of Samuel Beckett; Laura Borge, God, the Quest, the 'hero: Th·matic Structures in Beckett's Fiction; Helene L. Baldwin, Beckett's Real Silence; Angela B. Moorjani, "A Mythic Reading of Molloy".


10. My reading of Watt is consciously structured around this "orthodox" approach to textual hermeneutics. The chapter's argument articulates itself out of a conflation of the text's own self-hermeneutic (see above, Note seven), the critical (historical) response to the text, and my own theorizing of my participation in the hermeneutic conversation.
Chapter One: Watt

This fragility of the outer meaning had a bad effect on Watt, for it caused him to seek for another, for some meaning of what had passed, in the image of how it passed.

---Watt

I

Samuel Beckett's Watt is commonly acknowledged in the corpus of Beckett criticism as signalling a departure from the heady precocity and slightly jejune indulgence of Murphy. Some notable exceptions aside, the text is generally categorized and framed somewhat dismissively as an "experiment," an experiment with new discourses, philosophies, ideologies. The text is, moreover, understood as being in some ways a kind of mere preamble or prologue to the swelling scene of the trilogy, and as such, does not receive the specific hermeneutic treatment it deserves. I want to place myself against this interpretive current by figuring Watt as Beckett's crucial turn into a fully "hermeneutic" mode of writing, a writing, that is, which thematizes, and ultimately parodies, the problematics of interpretation even as it offers itself as interpretable object. Watt has as a central concern the struggle with language and the essential linguisticality
of experience. Language in this pivotal work acts as a barrier to any "fullness" of understanding: disclosure of meaning is, therefore, either deferred or acknowledged through a variety of strategies to be a priori unavailable. Nevertheless, the pursuit of meaning begins because the obligation framing that pursuit cannot, or will not, be elided even under despair or acknowledged absurdity. A hermeneutic reading of Watt's reading of his world (one mode of what I will call the metahermeneutic gesture) acknowledges the degree to which Watt expresses, however oddly, the force of a desire: desire and hermeneutics, this text suggests, are the two faces of the same coin.

A hermeneutic reading of Watt is as complex as the plot of the novel itself is simple: Watt, for unknown reasons, makes a journey to a house owned and inhabited by a Mr. Knott; Watt enters into the service of Knott; Watt replaces an outgoing servant just as he will be replaced when he leaves; Watt eventually works his way up to the first floor from the basement to attend personally on Knott; Watt begins to experience what appears to be a mental collapse after beginning to perceive that Knott's "world" seems not to correspond to generally held notions of "reality"; Watt leaves Knott's house. During his residence at Knott's establishment Watt begins to communicate in increasingly bizarre ways (for example, speaking backwards): his spoken discourse thus begins to reflect the peculiar "ontology" of
Knott's world.

It has been generally accepted that Watt's residence at Knott's establishment is the cause of his radical mental/linguistic collapse. This observation, however, has not led to any full interrogation either of the rhetorical structures of this discourse of "madness," or of the effect on the reader of Watt's increasingly bizarre language. It has not been fully appreciated that, regardless of the "fact" that Watt is losing rational control, the reader is nevertheless constrained by the aesthetic boundaries of the text to attempt to make sense of his experience. The ideas I will explore here build on Roland Barthes' comment in his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" that in a text "everything has a meaning or nothing has" (107): the discourse of madness is still a discourse and, moreover, as it is "framed" by narrative, demands to be read. Barthes points out that our reactions to any fictionalized, hence aestheticized, discourse are determined by the context of that discourse. The aesthetic object contains elements meaning to be read: it thus confers an obligation on its reader. In this sense to label Watt a madman is useful, if at all, only as a description, since we must make use of his language as we attempt to make "sense" of it.

My interest here is, ultimately, to explore Beckett's manipulation of the "meaning to be read" aspect of this text. Beckett consistently interrogates the boundaries of the
aesthetic to the point that every reading of his work is compelled to question the entire notion of the aesthetic and thus the hermeneutical apprehension of the aesthetic object. This process of challenging aesthetic boundaries with its concomitant thematization of reading and reader begins with Watt: I see the text thus as an extended allegory or parable of reading, an announcement by Beckett of a shift into a writing that theorizes itself as hermeneutic object as it proceeds. In my analysis, anticipated but not exploited fully by H. Porter Abbott in The Fiction of Samuel Beckett and Hugh Kenner in A Reader's Guide to Samuel Beckett, Watt will stand as an emblem of the reader. Both Watt and reader begin, but perhaps do not end, in a similar posture of ignorance. Framed as such, my reading moves away from attempting to ascertain "meaning" to one that continually shifts from a reading of specific scenes of interpretation to my own theorizing of the reader's encounter with those scenes of reading. The process of "reading through reading"--a process I call metahermeneutics--ultimately places the reader in specular relation to Watt, ultimately compels the reader to balance his or her hermeneutic desire against the exigencies of Watt's own interpretive praxis. More concretely, this chapter is an attempt to account in hermeneutic terms for the anxiety produced in the reading of this text, anxiety that arises in the reader's own self-conscious awareness of his/her proximity to the radical "otherness" of Watt, the parodic hermeneut.
A reading of the history of the critical reception of Beckett's *Watt* demonstrates the degree to which this protean, enigmatic, and interrogative text seems consistently to demand a reading that puts an end to the text's potentially endless play of signifiers. There is an almost universal acknowledgment that the text is concerned with matters of language, but an equally universal failure to acknowledge the manner in which the text implicates, seduces and obliges the reader's own hermeneutic discourse. *Watt* is an extraordinarily difficult text to read: to enter fully *Watt*’s world means, as I wish to suggest here, to come into close contact with a mind in absolute crisis. Such an experience is the cause of some anxiety in some critics, whose readings of *Watt* demonstrate ultimately a desire for a comfortable interpretive distance from this altogether disconcerting work.

Michael Robinson’s *Long Sonata of the Dead* acknowledges *Watt* as "the opening encounter with the disturbing meaning of the imponderables that have occupied [Beckett] ever since" (101). He frames *Watt* as a rationalist (a common enough gesture) confronted by the void attempting desperately to define his situation. Robinson makes a connection between *Watt*’s increasing "madness" and the "collapse" of language:

As a rationalist faced with the inexplicable, *Watt* resorts to the enumeration of every logical possibility implicit in a given situation, hoping to find in the sum
of all the data a permutation of the facts that will include the correct assumption and so set his mind at rest. (105).

Robinson reaches the end of his analysis by framing Watt as a humanized clown or Christ-figure in an allegorical gesture symptomatic of the need to "end" the play of the text.

H. Porter Abbott also suggests that Watt's difficulties stem from the inability to secure meaning in an aleatory universe. Abbott makes the leap beyond the text to suggest, valuably, the homology between Watt and reader. His analysis, however, is carefully qualified as if he is fearful of the full implications of his own idea of "imitative form":

I am not claiming the reader's experience is precisely that of Watt, nor through it he comprehends the ineffability of all things and experience. But the point is that the form...is used to generate in the reader an experience approaching the experience that is its "content" (61)

Abbott's analysis falls short of fully interrogating the inevitable implications of what he calls imitative form. Though he moves to acknowledge the reader through Watt-as-emblem, he seems content, in a perhaps New Critical sense, to delineate the "form" of the relationship between text and
reader. Abbott concludes his analysis of Watt in a manner remarkably similar in shape to that of Robinson. He maps out an allegorical, archetypal reading of the text, positing Watt, finally, as a kind of anti-Romance.

Angela Moorjani's complex analysis in Abysmal Games in the Novels of Samuel Beckett outlines merely the form and theme of the text: "thematically the novel's embedded games can be linked to a retrospective testing of the philosophical categories that through the ages have been applied to the human condition" (84); she sees the novel dismantling "the monuments of Western thought" (84)--an onerous task indeed.

The point I wish to emphasize here is the degree to which readings of this text concentrate merely on the text, fail to give adequate attention to the philosophical implications of hermeneutics (including Watt's own), and merely, through varying degrees of complexity, trace the outline, shape, or form of the novel without interrogating either the gesture itself, or the fact that the novel seems only readable through this tracing. The novel often reduces the critic to extremely local or discrete biographical or allegorical readings; hence John P. Harrington's attempt to stabilize Watt through a reading of its Irish geography ("The Irish Landscape of Samuel Beckett's Watt"), Gottfried Buttner's bizarre reading of Watt as an extended intrauterine fantasy (Samuel Beckett's Novel Watt), Leslie Hill's emphasis on Knott as an elusive, elided father-figure whose absence provokes the dispersal of meaning
(Beckett’s Fiction: In Different Words), David H. Hesla who in The Shape of Chaos writes: "Watt’s journey to Knott’s house is a fairly close parallel with the stations of the cross" (62).

These critics employ a hermeneutics of cessation. If they acknowledge that their readings are provisional, there is still a sense in which the insidious play of the text, by being framed, for instance, in allegory, has ceased or has been stilled. A reading of the importance of reading in the text might in turn be questioned as being yet another allegorical framework—Watt being "about" the reader’s relationship to Watt as text. I will argue that reading qua hermeneutic reading—a reading conferred by Beckett’s text itself—is never, and can never be, a stilling of text precisely because it theorizes reading as phronetic "event": a hermeneutic reading thus is fundamentally processual, fundamentally dynamic as it orients itself from and to various scenes of interpretation. A phronetic hermeneutic interpretation will acknowledge that there is no finality to any reading; judgements are made in relation to discrete events in texts, and thus any work cannot be reduced to any totalizing allegory.

A hermeneutic reading finally acknowledges textuality so as to effect a precarious balance between constraints of discrete textual event and the larger, and in the case of Watt, protean, processual whole. My purpose in the following analysis is to trace Watt’s own processual hermeneutic through
three discrete interpretive scenes in order to suggest a number of things. First, by reading the specific modes of Watt's interpretive praxis against some specifics of Gadamerian theoría, I wish to trace the development of Watt's own hermeneutic, from its initial articulation as a kind of aporetic allegory, to its final status as a resigned acquiescence to the unreadable, the unnamable.' I will suggest, ultimately, that Watt's interpretive anxiety stems as much from a refusal to follow through on his own hermeneutic insights as from any congenital difficulties he may have. Second, I am concerned with touching briefly on the implications of Gadamer's notion of understanding as "dialogue" and "appropriation," as outlined in his essay "On the Problem of Self-Understanding" and Truth and Method. He suggests that understanding occurs only as the interpreter makes his or her own the discourse of that which s/he attempts to understand. I want to suggest that Beckett heightens our awareness of understanding as appropriation through his manipulation of Watt. Beckett compels the reader--in a process I will call "conferred appropriation"--to make his own a discourse of baffling and deliberate complexity by compelling him literally to translate Watt's increasingly bizarre and already specular language and ultimately to act, in Derrida's sense of the term, as a kind of hermeneutic "supplement" to Watt's refusal of hermeneutics, his "anterior default of a presence" (Of Grammatology 145). Reading Beckett is as much
about the process of reading itself as it is about making specific interpretations of the meaning of the work. Indeed, I see this chapter as a step towards understanding the logic of a text that paradoxically "denies" the logic of interpretation by inscribing--and parodying--its own reading en abyme: "But what was this pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning? And to what did it tend? These are delicate questions" (72).

II

The initial and initiatory act of reading in Watt is Watt's attempt to frame the incident with the piano-tuning Galls within a consistent metastructure, that is, within a frame that makes sense of the structure of the Galls' mutterings. The Galls, father and son, have arrived at Knott's house to "choon" the piano. They engage in the following esoteric exchange:

The mice have returned, he said.
The elder said nothing. Watt wondered if he had heard.
Nine dampers remain, said the younger, and an equal number of hammers.
Not corresponding, I hope, said the elder.
In one case, said the younger.
The elder had nothing to say to this.
The strings are in flitters, said the younger.
The elder had nothing to say to this either. The piano is doomed, in my opinion, said the younger. The piano-tuner also, said the elder. The pianist also, said the younger. This was perhaps the principal incident of Watt's early days in Mr. Knott's house. (69)

This "principal incident" shares a homology with "all incidents of note proposed to Watt" (69) during his tenure with Knott. The incident of course is not precisely clear either to Watt or his reader; what has occurred during this entirely linguistic exchange (if indeed "exchange" is the word)? It is an incident the semantics, if not semiotics, of which give way in Watt to an emotional response to, or desire for, form: "For the incident of the Galls father and son was followed by others of a similar kind, incidents that is to say of great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport" (71). Any potential meaning is elided as the hermeneutic begins:

It resembled them ["all incidents of note"] in the sense that it was not ended when it was past, but continued to unfold, in Watt's head from beginning to end, over and over again, the complex connexions of its lights and shadows, the passing from silence to sound and from sound to silence, the stillness before the movement and the stillness after, the quickenings and retardings, the
approaches and the separations, all the shifting detail of its march and ordinance, according to the irrevocable caprice of its taking place. It resembled them in the vigour with which it developed a purely plastic content, and gradually lost, in the nice process of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal. (69)

This is for Watt an initiation into the hermeneutic (of the void). Watt, the man who "had not seen a symbol, nor executed an interpretation, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen" (70), and who has lived among "face values" (70) until now, has stepped precariously into a reading of a kind of deep structure. Here "face value"--the incident, if we can even locate the incident--is elided figurally into shape in a conscious process of substitution. This process originates with Watt's complete inability to maintain the crucial dialectic between surface (face) and depth as he reads various incidents. Each element of any reading acts as counterbalance to the other; to lose sight of the surface meaning (or affect) of a given word, theme, symbol, is to plunge headlong into a form of allegory which has as its final effect a complete inability to orient the reading to the "real" from which the reader must orient himself: this process of ill-reading defines Watt's predicament here precisely. Hermeneutics for Watt takes the form of an expression of a desire for mastery
over the given event (text), a mastery which removes the event from a context of potential meaningfulness to one in which the reader frames the event from a position of supremacy: any dialogical interplay between text and reader is suppressed in Watt.

I here emphasize a particular dynamic of Watt’s early reading that few critics care to notice. Most are comfortable suggesting simply that meaning is unavailable to Watt because of a congenital difficulty or philosophical bent (but perhaps they are one and the same?). Few care to notice the mode of his reading in its particular hermeneutical context:

And Watt could not accept them [the series of similar incidents] for what they perhaps were, the simple games that time plays with space, now with these toys, and now with these, but was obliged, because of his peculiar character to enquire into what they meant, oh not into what they really meant, his character was not so peculiar as all that, but into what they might be induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity.

(72; my emphasis)

Watt, as indicated in the epigram to this chapter, seeks not an understanding of the event; he refuses to allow the event to speak its meaning to him. Rather he engages in a species of reading by deferral, or reading by simulacrum: he seeks for
some meaning of what had passed, "in the image of how it passed" (70). This particular mode of reading, as mentioned, is predicated in the void: where the particular instance has no particular image, to make sense of it necessarily, it seems, means that one has to speak of it in other images. The narrator defines this hermeneutics of alterity:

For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man, which to be sure he was, in a sense, for a time, and as the only way one can speak of man, even as anthropologists have realised, is to speak of him as though he were a termite. (79)

The aporia, for the reader as for Watt, begins with the narrator's delicate qualification of Watt's success in reading the Galls incident: "But if Watt was sometimes unsuccessful, and sometimes successful, as in the affair of the Galls father and son, in foisting a meaning there where no meaning appeared, he was most often neither the one, nor the other" (74). Watt is neither successful nor unsuccessful, neither the one, nor the other. Beckett presents a (negative?) binary here the interplay of which defines Watt's--and our--predicament precisely. It seems rather uncomfortable though perhaps inevitable to assume that as Watt is neither successful nor
unsuccessful he lies somewhere in the middling range of success. But is this a correct gauging of the choice? It seems rather more likely that any kind of rigidly logical reading of this ("he was more often neither the one nor the other") leaves us nowhere at all. Beckett opens up, as Paul Davies suggests in The Ideal Real, a new "ontology" where the logical constraints of and on the linguistic fall away or apart into a new sensibility, neither rational, irrational, logical, or absurd. We are in a precarious no man’s land in our readings of Beckett’s characters’ reading where a vertiginous blurring of sense into nonsense, or nonsense into sense, defines our reading posture.

I have suggested here that one response to this new ontology is to engage in a species of reading that this text, as far as I can gather, would seem neither to condemn nor praise but slowly to dismantle. The critical mania for allegory is, I think, subtly parodied by Beckett here, who suggests that to substitute something for nothing (allegoria: "other speaking"), no matter the desire for what the narrator will call "semantic succour" (79) and no matter the comfort it may bring, is still to substitute something for nothing. To begin to read correctly Beckett’s "nothing" means, as I have suggested, that we have to re-frame it affectively. I think most critics accept that Beckett’s texts are "nothing" in substance, the most famous formulation of this idea "nothing" in Vivian Mercier’s categorization of Godot as the play in which
nothing happens, twice. Nothing of "substance" may occur in Beckett, but affectively these texts have volumes of occurrence, and it is precisely in and out of a thematization of this affective response to "nothing" that our readings must begin.6

And it is affectively out of "nothing" that our reading of Watt's reading appears. We are constrained to follow his laborious, and somewhat disconcerting, descent into interpretation; his interpretive acts, however, seem never to orient themselves to anything tangible. It is the peculiar nature of this text that our tracings of Watt's reading are always already tracings of tracings. Moreover, our interpretations tend not towards events themselves but towards interpretations of interpretations of nebulous events: the event in Watt is always already receding temporally. Beckett signals this with his use of the deictic "now":

But generally speaking it seems probable that the meaning attributed to this particular type of incident, by Watt, in his relations, was now the initial meaning that had been lost and then recovered, and now a meaning quite distinct from the initial meaning, and now a meaning evolved, after a delay of varying length, and with greater or less pains, from the initial absence of meaning. (76)
An effect of the narrator's discourse here is at least double; as metaintepretation (precisely: an interpretation of Watt's account of interpretation to the belatedly identified narrator "Sam") the initial incident is at least at a second remove. As such, "interpretation" here will involve the idea that temporal distancing of event will occur even as the event is recounted. These ideas turn on the word "now" which seems to exist here in at least two or three distinct temporalities: Watt's at the time of the original incident; the narrator's at the time of this re(ac)counting; ours at the time of our reading. The fabric of the textual recounting of this event itself points—as deixis—to the difficulties of locating the events temporally. The event, as it is framed, slips beyond the reach of the narrator's rhetoric. Again, we are in an aporetic moment here as we trace the processual nature of meaning formation in Watt: it is, moreover, a moment doubly aporetic as we remember, as we always must, that the original (or "initial") meaning was never defined precisely.

I have spent a great deal of time with the Galls incident because it is the initiatory act of reading in Watt for Watt and the reader. More important, perhaps, is the degree of specific theorizing of reading which surrounds the scene itself (the theorizing of Sam, who may be "translating" Watt's interpretation of his formal (non)interpretation). This incident is thus vital as it theorizes itself as interpretation at the moment of its articulation;
narrator's theory of aporetic allegory sees the merging of hermeneutic theoria and praxis. Moreover, by suggesting that these scenes of reading be read en abyme I am acknowledging how often the implications of Beckett's parody of allegory are passed over in the critical reception of this text: the Galls incident is at once a mise-en-abyme of the hermeneutics of the entire novel and an anticipation of the critical reception of the text. Beckett perfectly represents in Watt the anxiety of the critic who when confronted with disjunctive form must frame that form in different terms, allegorically. There is thus a certain desperate irony in those readings that see Watt, the character, as a Christ-figure or an elided father figure, or the novel as an extended intrauterine fantasy or a dismantling of the categories of Western thought. I am proposing here that an alternate reading is to see the text as an allegory of reading, for to do so is to acknowledge how the text activates the reader's own self-consciousness as it focuses attention on the (hermeneutic) substance of the text itself.

III

The second scene of reading informed by the specific problematics of (meta)interpretation is Watt's reading, or more precisely, the narrator's description of Watt's reading, of the painting of the fractured circle. This scene of reading compels the reader of Watt into a qualitatively different
interpretive posture because here the reader is confronted with Watt's reading without clear (meta)interpretation by the narrator: like the dot, freed from the circle in the painting, this reading floats independent of any constraining commentary. The theora are no longer inscribed within the scene of reading and thus we begin to sense a divergence between Watt and reader. The reader is aware of him or herself "as" Watt—in the sense that s/he too is making sense of the painting "through" Watt—but the scene begins to confe a new posture on the reader who now must him or herself theorize Watt's readings rather than, strictly speaking, theorizing the narrator's (or Watt's) theorizing of Watt's reading. Both Watt and reader enter the novel from a position of some ignorance; the reader, however, accrues, or is reminded of, his or her activity as reader as the novel proceeds (Watt, as I will attempt to demonstrate, never gains any degree of real "self"-awareness).

Beckett's manipulation of the distance between specular reader (Watt) and actual reader is perhaps not as insidious as it will be in later texts, the trilogy, for instance. A crucial aspect of the relationship between specular reader and reader in the later texts is the identical interpretive posture each must assume; it is a posture, I suggest, of identical ignorance about the ontology of the textual world. In Watt, however, the reader is able to read Watt against the deficiencies of his interpretive praxis. We can see where Watt
cannot. This divergence allows the reader a degree of comfortable separation from the specular reader whose violation is, but is not, our own. The reader is thus only "incrementally" involved in Watt as s/he traces Watt's discourse: the mediating layers of metahermeneutic theoria give way as the text proceeds to the reader's own increasing obligation to make sense of Watt's interpretive discourse. Given the previous theoria and the sense that it is "missing" in the later scenes of reading, the reader moves in to fill in the schemata of Watt's interpretation, but is always aware of the degrees of separation between himself and Watt.

The painting has been variously interpreted as a discrete emblem of the relationship between Watt and Knott, as Watt attempts to locate himself (as the separated "dot" in the painting) in the larger order of (Knott's) things. I wish to make sense of Watt's reading of the painting as an interpretation of affect as much as of form. At the moment of Watt's account of the painting, the reader, who receives an image of the painting only through him, begins his or her own interpretation and evaluation of Watt's reading. The painting is described thus:

The only other object of note in Erskine's room was a picture, hanging on the wall, from a nail. A circle, obviously described by a compass, and broken at its lowest point, occupied the middle foreground, of this
picture. Was it receding? Watt had that impression. In the eastern background appeared a point, or dot. The circumference was black. The point was blue, but blue! The rest was white. (126)

Watt's reading of the painting is as complex as it is plodding. It touches on a variety of modes of interpretation, from formal, "historiographic", to a kind of prosopopeia, to allegory that speaks as much to our own readings of this specific text as to Watt's attempt to reach any kind of "semantic succour" in the painting. Watt begins with a formal analysis of parts: "By what means the illusion of movement in space, and it almost seemed in time, was given, Watt could not say. But it was given" (127); he continues by reading the parts prosopopeically: "Watt wondered if they had sighted each other, or were blindly flying thus, harried by some force of merely mechanical mutual attraction, or the playthings of chance" (127) as if, perhaps, humanizing these abstractions would be to understand them better. Still anthropomorphizing, Watt begins a list of all the "logical" permutations of relations that concludes with one of Watt's few overt displays of emotion in the novel:

...and at the thought that it was perhaps this, a circle and a centre not its centre in search of a centre and its circle respectively, in boundless space, in endless time,
then Watt's eyes filled with tears that he could not stem, and they flowed down his fluted cheeks unchecked, in a steady flow, refreshing him greatly. (127)

From this moment of expression Watt contemplates the picture at different angles to conclude that its original hanging position is superior. Watt moves to platitudinal conclusions on the "human condition" which I, perhaps perversely, am tempted to read as a savage attack on humanist interpretations of art. Watt here calls upon the artist as the final arbiter of meaning in his nostalgia for origins. This is a supremely comical mockery of the "intentional fallacy":

And the thought of the point slipping in from below at last, when it came home at last, or to its new home, and the thought of the breach open below perhaps for ever in vain, these thoughts, to please Watt as they did, required the breach to be below and nowhere else. It is by the nadir that we come, said Watt, and it is by the nadir that we go, whatever that means. And the artist must have felt something of this kind too, for the circle did not turn, as circles will, but sailed steadfast in its white skies, with the patient breach forever below. (128)

Watt concludes that all things at the Knott establishment
are part of a process; there is no fixity, no surety—only flux. Watt’s conclusion here dovetails nicely with a hermeneutical analysis of text because, as I mentioned, a true hermeneutics emphasizes the processual nature of understanding, precisely as it is a dialogical "fusion of horizons" (Truth and Method 388): the hermeneutic encounter is a dynamic, never fully closed "conversation" (the word is Gadamer’s). Understanding is not fixed and rigid, but rather it evolves and builds upon a series of incremental steps, much like Watt’s reading of the painting. Watt makes a judgment here regarding Knott that theoretically should lead to a degree of succour. What we notice, however, is that Watt’s readings of Knott and his establishment do not end here. Unsatisfied with this particular hermeneutic judgment, Watt blunders logically on. I say "logically" because I read Watt’s reading of Knott through the logic of the question that informs our reading of Watt as a whole (thus a question that encompasses Watt’s own reading): How does one understand process (or the process of understanding understanding as process) without halting that process, without parcelling out the process in a manner which ceases the forward movement of understanding? Watt is, if we follow the logic of Gadamer’s understanding of understanding as process and tracing (or appropriation), inevitably to disrupt the original movement of that event: to appropriate finally is to alter.

It is of course impossible to understand process without
in some ways halting that process. Watt's difficulties begin ultimately when the logic of this understanding is not fully grasped. A hermeneutics involves the reader's intimate conjunction of interpreter and event (Watt and Knott): for the interpreter to understand event or the discourse of event s/he must in some ways disclose (to) him or herself, as s/he "translates" event/text into his or her own discourse, a gesture which will inevitably disrupt the structurality of event/text. The event, as Gadamer suggests, does not exist in splendid isolation: the reader must bring it to him or herself in self-understanding. In Watt's process of reading the painting—which is ultimately a reading of Knott—he never does violate Knott's discrete autonomy as "text", never does effect a balance between the separated part and the representational whole of this hermeneutical circle, the painting. Watt's problem is finally a problem of self-understanding; his refusal to place the spectre of Knott in intimate relation to himself is ultimately a refusal of interpretation. Knott cannot, the text suggests, be understood sui generis.

IV

The crux and capstone of hermeneutical difficulty—or as I have posited, refusal—in Watt is, of course, the tangled Knott himself. I am aided by Watt's own characterization of his relationship with Knott in my reading of Watt's refusal to
read Knott. Knott’s need of Watt is the Other’s ethical need of being witnessed:

For except, one, not to need, and, two, a witness to his not needing, Knott needed nothing, as far as Watt could see...And Mr. Knott, needing nothing if one, not to need, and two, a witness to his not needing, of himself knew nothing. And so he needed to be witnessed. Not that he might know, no, but that he might not cease. (202)

We must remember that it is Watt who articulates these ideas: he himself finds his "conjecture not entirely gratuitous" (202) and defines his responsibility to Knott in what can be read as ethical terms. The narrator asks, anticipating perhaps the reader’s question: "what kind of witness was Watt?" (202):

A needy witness, an imperfect witness.
The better to witness, the worse to witness.
That with his need he might witness its absence.
That imperfect he might witness it ill.
That Mr. Knott might never cease, but ever almost cease.
(202-03)

Watt, by "witnessing" his text (Knott), keeps that text from ceasing. Watt is, however, called on to "witness" the unwitnessable for Knott is, as the narrator suggests
(transcribing Watt's words) protean. Watt catches sight of Knott as he is framed in his "eastern" window:

Add to this that the figure of which Watt sometimes caught a glimpse, in the vestibule, in the garden, was seldom the same figure, from one glance to the next, but so various, as far as Watt could make out, in its corpulence, complexion, height and even hair, and of course in its way of moving and of not moving that Watt would never have supposed it was the same, if he had not known that it was Mr. Knott. (146).

Knott's figure is essentially polymorphous and polysemous: "For one day Mr. Knott would be tall, fat, pale, and dark, and the next thin, small, flushed and fair, and the next sturdy, middle-sized, yellow and ginger, and the next small, fat, pale, and fair..." (209). He sings in a voice equally capable in "all male registers" (208) in a language "either without meaning, or derived from an idiom with which Watt, a very fair linguist, had no acquaintance" (208): he speaks, finally, in a language "meaningless to Watt's ailing ears" (208).

Confronted by this radical "meaninglessness" Watt refuses to attempt to make a "reading" of Knott. Even to suggest Knott's need of summer or winter clothing is, for Watt, "an anthropomorphic insolence" (202); he is, and surely the word "anthropomorphic" recalls this, unwilling to
substitute "something" for the nothing of Knott ("For the only way one can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something, just as the only way one can speak of God is to speak of him as though he were a man" [74]). This phrase casts the eye back to Watt's initial articulation of the process of anthropomorphization—the substitution of something for nothing—and demonstrates a development in Watt's "mode" of reading. Where earlier "to explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt" (74-5) and where his practice had been to "induce" to meaning ("with a little help of a little patience, a little ingenuity" [72]) that which resisted meaning, here with Knott it seems the free play of the sign(s) is simply acquiesced to.

It might be argued that by refusing to witness, Watt, from the premises of his own "conjecture," will cause the death of Knott. And indeed, it is this framework of witnessing the unwitnessable that Watt refuses when he departs the services of Knott:

Watt suffered neither from the presence of Mr. Knott, nor from his absence. When he was with him, he was content to be with him, and when he was away from him, he was content to be away from him. Never with relief, never with regret, did he leave him at night, or in the morning come to him again...So that when the time came for Watt to depart, he walked to the gate with the utmost
serenity. (207)

In my reading of Watt's (non)reading of Knott I am playing on two meanings of the word "witness." Watt is an imperfect "witness" in two senses. Although he does observe (witness) Knott, he eventually simply leaves the establishment, ceasing his witnessing of Knott (he being one of a long line of employee-witnesses). Second, by refusing to "tell" (witness) the full narrative of his experiences, Watt again fails in his witnessing. Watt's final comment on Knott thus is crucial and substantiates my idea that Watt's inability to make sense of Knott is at least in part a refusal to make a fully hermeneutic reading of him:

Other traits, other little ways, little ways of passing the little days, Watt remarked in Mr. Knott, and could have told if he had wished, if he had not been tired, so very tired, by all he had told already, tired of adding, tired of subtracting to and from the same old things the same old things. (212)

Watt's expression here is similar to that expression (of "Beckett"?) in the Addenda to the novel: "The following precious and illuminating material should be carefully studied. Only fatigue and disgust prevented its incorporation" (247). Fatigue and perhaps disgust prevent Watt from telling
fully what he has observed of Knott. The point I wish to suggest here is partly a reaction against prevailing readings of Watt which see him fundamentally as passive victim, either of the mysterious process of Knott’s order of things, or of his own mental incapacity. I want to posit that this text, if read carefully through hermeneutic lenses, suggests that Watt too plays a large role in his decline. I do not wish to suggest Beckett’s condemnation of Watt (such extratextual musings seem almost perversely out of place) but only another avenue of making sense of Watt’s encounter with Knott. Watt does not finally take responsibility for his own readings in the sense that he simply allows the free play of signifiers to take its toll.

Watt’s experience with Knott is thus one of continual bafflement and puzzlement. This bafflement produces in him a discursive "reaction" to Knott that speaks more to a desire to retreat from Knott than to understand him. Watt begins to speak in a kind of specialized language which, in my reading, accomplishes two things. Instead of "translating" Knott’s discourse—a discourse which perhaps is beyond Watt’s understanding—Watt turns himself discursively into an analogue of Knott by mirroring the linguistic confusion he hears in Knott’s own language; Watt, in perceiving the utter non-self-coincidence of the Other (Knott), dismantles grammatical and syntactical "logic", thereby dismantling the articulating self:

(166)


In our examination of Watt’s specular discourse we have to consider the rhetorical effect of the exigence of "translation" on the reader. In his essay "On the Problem of Self-Understanding" Gadamer notes that understanding can only occur when the discourse of the event/text is "translated" into the interpreter’s own discourse. This is a moment initiated by what I have called "tracing":

To understand a text is to understand oneself in a kind of dialogue. This contention is confirmed by the fact that the concrete dealing with the text yields understanding only when what is said in the text begins to find expression in the interpreter’s own language...One must take up into himself what is said to him in such fashion that it speaks and finds an answer in
the words of his own language. (Gadamer 57)

Gadamer articulates here a sense of the constraints of the text upon the interpreter's understanding, an understanding that must initially concretize that text. Of interest to the reader of Beckett's Watt—if one takes seriously Gadamer's proposition regarding understanding—is the manner in which the text imposes and impresses itself upon its reader and thus attempts to forge a link, to use Levinas' terminology from Totality and Infinity, between the same and Other through acts of discourse. To understand this text, and specifically to understand Watt's increasingly strange language, is in some ways to be forced to "appropriate", to borrow from Paul Ricoeur's essay "Appropriation", a discourse, to put it plainly, that may resist understanding as it resists reason as the discourse of "madness" (the Other): we are in a very real sense constrained to understand something that may construct itself ex nihilo. If one takes seriously the "meaning to be read" aspect of the aesthetic, however, a translation is inescapable, indeed obligatory: we are compelled by the exigencies of desire for understanding literally to translate Watt's discourse here (as I have done in the above quotation). We "speak" (appropriate) Watt as we translate, just as we speak Watt as we read the text in its entirety. These moments of heightened translation are crucial, however, precisely because we are here made fully conscious of this process of
conferred appropriation. As we trace the complexities of Watt’s discourse we begin to feel the full impact of the strangeness of his thought processes: it is here that Beckett succeeds most masterfully at violating and closing rapidly the discrete distance the reader has from this text: Watt as Other, or the Other’s discourse, no longer functions as the alien, the Stranger (again to use Levinas). And of course, a final effect of this process of translation is our heightened awareness of Watt’s own failure to translate Knott’s discourse: the reader is compelled to effect what Watt is entirely unable or unwilling to do.

My metahermeneutic reading of Watt is a conflation of two sources: Watt’s interpretive development and the critical reception of Watt. My reading is orthodox hermeneutics in the sense that I have taken seriously Gadamer’s notion that readings are "historical" insofar as they are made up from and react to previous readings. Watt’s development as reader takes direction initially from a reading of substitution of form for content to a gradual acquiescence to semiotic free play. At the opposite pole from this is the general critical recourse to allegory which, as I have suggested, expresses formally the desire to halt the insidious free play of Watt; allegory expresses the force of a desire for exorcism by explanation. These two poles of reading, I suggest, shift between reading of part (Watt’s reading of Knott) and whole (allegory reducing
the text wholly to one frame) without ever meeting successfully. My notion of allegory of reading and phronesis effects, I think, a successful dialectical negotiation between part and whole: it plays the dialectic between discrete event and whole in a way that at once acknowledges process (whole) and moment (discrete scenes of reading). Allegory of reading and hermeneutics are interpretive lenses that can make "sense" of individual acts of reading within the larger context of the narrative, in a way that "simple" allegory (Watt as Christ, for example) cannot do: simple allegory can never fully explain discrete acts of reading as intrinsic elements of the larger allegorical movement of narrative. Allegory, in short, can never fully maintain the crucial balance between surface and depth that Beckett's texts continually demand; we can never lose sight of the "facticity" of the Beckett text in the haze of allegory, for to do so is, I suggest, ultimately to lose sight of the reader.

Watt's hermeneutic interaction with Knott and Knott's world raises the interpretive questions that will of necessity haunt the reader of the Beckett oeuvre: it is a question of the limits and boundaries of interpretation. The relationship between Watt and Knott "translates" (as metaphor) into the reader's own interaction with the Beckett text. I do not wish to read Watt entirely as a hermeneutic cautionary tale, but Watt's reading and ultimate refusal of reading should alert the reader of Beckett to the specific problematics of
interpretation as they arise in the dialogue or hermeneutical conversation with the Beckett text. Do we read the text allegorically: do we assert that this text really "is" about this or that? Or do we assert that nothing can be asserted and place the text simply in endless free play? The alternative is the one I have suggested above, that is, that we see in the text an allegory of reading itself. This reading is not mere allegory, however: as a phrasonic hermeneutic process, it acknowledges simultaneously the internal coherence of the thematics of reading as it acknowledges our own continually shifting reading of that reading. I have attempted to demonstrate through my analysis of three "scenes" of reading that Watt's hermeneutic develops over the course of the text: within these readings we hear echoes and see shimmers of all major modes of reading that have in fact been applied to this specific text, Beckett's Watt. Part of my understanding--my metahermeneutic understanding--of this text is that it posits itself, as a kind of allegory of reading, both as mirror and parody of the modes and means of its own decipherment: Beckett's well-known habit of inscribing the text's reading within its own discursive space is, I think, writ parodically large in Watt, and thus any one mode of reading, from allegory to a positing of semiotic free-play, is always already inscribed and to a degree neutered or threatened with redundancy. The result is, I think, a text that compels the reader away from asserting a specific hermeneutic even as it
makes the reader complicit in the hermeneutic act. And it is finally the reader's task to acknowledge the "logic" of a contradictory, aporetic hermeneutic. Indeed, the text, by inscribing its own reading, collapses the hermeneutic distinction between Watt and reader who, like Watt, must sift through mediating layers of polysemy and who is "thrown" by Watt's estranging discourse into an awareness of this conscious process of reading. But it is, finally, precisely this awareness of reading that begins to demarcate the ontological gap between Watt and reader, the reader who by effecting readings impossible for Watt, acts as a kind of specular hermeneutic "supplement", the supplement that works in the excesses of the semiotic void to articulate that void.
Endnotes

1. I use the word "disclosure" with a nod towards Heidegger’s use of *aletheia* in "The Origin of the Work of Art": the problematic of hermeneutics in Beckett’s oeuvre--specifically in the characters’ own processes of interpretation--is not that of imposing meaning but of discovering the failure of "world" to disclose or reveal itself. Concomitant with this difficulty is the characters’ own discovery of the intimate relation between hermeneutics and ontology. The unnamable’s "Where now? Who now? When now?" (Three Novels 291) is the quintessential Beckettian understanding of hermeneutics as the hermeneutics of *Dasein*, what Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls the "analytic of the existentiality of existence" (62).

2. I say "appears" because I don’t wish to emphasize overmuch the mental condition of Watt. Whether Watt is a madman or not is irrelevant to a hermeneutic reading of this text; if, as Raymond Federman suggests in *Journey to Chaos*, Watt is without a doubt a madman, the reader still is obliged to sift through his discourse (of madness).

3. Wolfgang Iser’s ground-breaking efforts in *The Implied Reader*, specifically his work on Beckett, are important to any attempt to formulate a "metahermeneutic" reading of Beckett.
4. I may here provisionally posit allegory as the discursive/rhetorical "reflection" of hermeneutic anxiety, that anxiety that results from the intimate contact with disjunctive form in the textual object.

5. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is important to an "affective" reading of Beckett precisely because it explicitly locates an historical, i.e. actual, reader within the reading dialectic. The historically affected reader is thus one who must engage both the text and the critical reception of the text in the hermeneutical "dialogue". Contrary to the understanding of some of Gadamer's detractors, this appeal to a historically located reader is not an appeal to any essentialist ("metaphysical") notion of autonomous subjectivity. Gadamer's theorizing the exigencies of reading-as-translation, his notions of the continually shifting responsibilities of the reader, his explicitly non-metaphysical conception of the "ontology" of text, make it clear that Gadamer's hermeneutics is not a radical form of theological hermeneutics. For lucid and energetic explorations of Gadamer's place within the post-structuralist debate on hermeneutics, I refer the reader to Gary Madison's essay "Beyond Seriousness and Frivolity: A Gadamerian Response to Deconstruction" and James Risser's "Reading the Text", both in Gadamer and Hermeneutics.
6. I take B(eckett)'s proclamation in "Three Dialogues" that "there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (139) as a starting point for a theorizing of the "obligation" to interpret; expression—an author's, a character's—has as a necessary and ineluctable concomitant the interpretation of that expression by the reader of the text.
Chapter Two: Mercier and Camier

By what token shall we know the truth?
—Mercier and Camier

Mercier and Camier represents Beckett's continual experimentation with what I call the discourse of specularity; where in Watt, the hermeneutic and specular quest of Watt to a degree articulates the reader into the text, in Mercier and Camier, I wish to suggest, it is not the main characters who present themselves as mirrors of the reader's hermeneutic desire. It is onto the narrative—and more precisely, the narrator—that the reader's specular hermeneutic desire is projected and, most importantly, diffused.

To explore this diffusion of hermeneutic and narrative desi. I want to trace the role of the narrative voice in Mercier and Camier, precisely in how it articulates itself in the space between narrative and metanarrative. Mercier and Camier frames itself narratologically as an expression of hermeneutic desire; this desire is imbricated onto a diegetic plane that is split, as it constructs itself in a balance between narrative and metanarrative, into two discrete semiotic "zones". I will use Benveniste's model of narrative, outlined in his essay "The Correlations of Tense in the French Verb", specifically his opposition between histoire
(narrative) and discours (metanarrative) as a means to "locate" the affect of this text. In histoire, writes Benveniste, "events seem to narrate themselves" (208): the transparent narrative occults any sign of a narrator. In discours the narrator "proclaims himself as speaker" (209) and thus removes the illusion of transparency in the metanarrative act. Part of my interest here is to gauge the effect of these differing "planes of utterance" (Benveniste 209) as they function within the single diegetic space of Mercier and Camier. Taken together both modes of narrative express a doubly-encoded desire for what I call "order", or what Ricoeur in " Appropriation" calls "directedness"; yet both serve to undermine the respective authority of the opposing discourse: this vertiginous modal (self) contradiction makes up the rhetorical effect of the novel. Through an examination of three instantiations of the metatextual figure in the novel, I suggest that the narrator inaugurates a decomposition, if not deconstruction, of the narrative opposition between histoire and discours even as he attempts to maintain the autonomy of both semiotic zones.

Mercier and Camier thus enfolds the reader in a doubly encoded desire, the main textual expression of which is found not so much within a single character expression but within the metanarrative coding within chapters, and between chapters, in the summaries. It is precisely the dialectical/dialogica relationship between narrative and
metanarrative that is the crux of the hermeneutical matter here. This split between histoire and discours is perhaps the result of the text's particular narrative structure. Mercier and Camier (though not published until 1970) is the last text which maintains a split between the narrative (Mercier and Camier) and the narrated (Mercier and Camier). After Mercier and Camier we move into the increasing closeness or proximity of narrative and narrated as Beckett begins to employ the first person narrative voice: the result of this experimentation is what Beckett himself calls the "narrator/narrated". The sense of narrative anxiety in the trilogy--i.e. the desire, in part, to order events--(evident in Mercier and Camier in the chapter summaries and what I call metanarrative or metatextual "figures" or "gloss") is elided into the narrator/narrative itself and thus narrative anxiety (or desire) and hermeneutic anxiety (or desire) meet and join.

This particular status of the narrative function in Mercier and Camier is, however, given scant attention in the critical writings. The text is most often read generically as it places itself within and against the canon of all previous "journey" or "quest" texts. The generic position(ing) of Mercier and Camier is one which critics frequently comment upon because, I suggest, reading the novel, for instance, as a "journey-text," allows the critic to assert a kind of "order through intertext": again, I read the critical reception of Mercier and Camier in part as a kind of anxiety formation. In
this brief summary of critical (re)ordering of Mercier and Camier I wish to suggest that critics tend to be blind to the fact that the ruthlessly parodic nature of the text subverts at every step any hermeneutic intertextual control or ordering. I wish to suggest Beckett's placing his text within the genre of the journey-text while subverting the genre sets up a disjunction as the reader's expectations are continually used against him or her; but, as continually, the spectre of previous genres shimmers beneath this text, offering and encouraging the reader's desire for a "readerly" text. Again, although it is common to suggest that Beckett re-writes the genre, rarely are the full diegetic or semiotic implications of this fact theorized.

James Liddy in "Island Truancies: The Sauntering of Mercier and Camier" sees Mercier and Camier as "primal types" (44) whose "constant energy is transformed into a protest against all regulation" (44); the text is a parodic "anti-epic" concerned with the tracing of the saunterings of what Liddy calls "newly created souls": "Mercier and Camier bears a strange and untypical fruitfulness in the oeuvre of Beckett, in which is adumbrated the idea of an almost religious progress in the individual soul, and the patina of obsolescence that bestows elegance on random adventures" (48). The critic's recourse to allegory again appears as does the tendency to read the journey of Mercier and Camier in the (ordering) context of previous (textual) journeys. Thus Eric
P. Levy in *Beckett and the Voice of Species*, who categorizes *Mercier and Camier* as a "pivotal exercise" (39), reads the text through the *Divine Comedy* seeing *Mercier and Camier* superimposed on the earlier work. The teleological purposefulness of Dante's work highlights the essentially aleatory world of Mercier and Camier. John Fletcher in *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* writes that *Mercier and Camier* ("a kind of hiatus between [the nouvelles] and *Molloy*" [118]) is "chiefly interesting as the first thorough working out of the journey theme that crops up next in *Molloy*" (118).

What is important about these critical readings of *Mercier and Camier* is the almost universal acknowledgment of the need for a particular "deflective" hermeneutic gesture. To read this text properly, these critics implicitly argue, is to read it through the genres it artfully re-writes or subverts. Ruby Cohn in *Back to Beckett* too sees the vital link between *Mercier and Camier* and the genre of the journey text: "In the novel itself, incidents are narrated only to dissolve without sequence; the caused effects of traditional fiction disappear, though the skeletal quest remains (63). J.E. Dearlove in *Accommodating the Chaos* writes:

Although his works may never proffer completed conventional structures his pieces depend on the reader's perceptions of the disparity between the recognizable fragments he is given and the traditions they
deliberately do not fulfil. The "failures" of Mercier and Camier's trip or of Moran's report are evident only in contrast to our unsatisfied expectations about the nature of the quest or detective report. (41)

In *The Solipsistic Novels of Samuel Beckett* Susan Schurman draws particular attention away from the form of the text's manipulation of the journey topos to the peculiar nature of the narrative voice; she still, however, maintains the novel's efficacy is precipitated by and through the reader's expectations of narrative convention: "The reader's expectations are supposed to be disappointed. He is being shown the uselessness and extinction of an all-knowing, ubiquitous narrator in a world where knowledge is unattainable" (13).

It perhaps does not need to be pointed out the degree to which intertextual (or intergeneric) readings of *Mercier and Camier*, like the overtly allegorical readings of Watt (which share a genetic link to intertextual hermeneutics), are the expression of another kind of interpretive anxiety. It seems that the critic cannot leave Mercier and Camier in the throes of a "failed" journey; to do so is to leave the reader in that uncomfortable state of anxiety which arises when confronted with disjunctive form.

My difficulty with a great deal of what has been written about *Mercier and Camier* is two-fold. This deflective reading
gesture seems problematical to me in as much as it threatens to reduce this text merely to the sum of its intertextual parts; thus when Dearlove writes that our awareness of narrative "failure" (whatever that means) arises "only in contrast to our unsatisfied expectations about the nature of the quest" (emphasis mine), what I have called the "facticity" of the text is wholly ignored; the gloss (i.e. the text's metanarrative), which, according to my reading indicates in itself a precise desire for order and thus presents itself as an implicit or tacit sign of narrative "failure" (desire precisely being desire because never fulfilled) provides the means of perceiving a kind of narrative unease or potential "failure". In the critics' readings, thus, we have an explicit instance of a favouring of critical ordering over critical reading.

Any precise and sustained theorising of a Beckettian intertextuality is absent in these, it seems to me, purely formal descriptions of Beckett's "parasitical" textual praxis. Although it is not my purpose here to offer my own theory of Beckettian intertext (rather simply to read the critics' version of it), it is important to notice the inexorable "tension" between text and intertext in Beckett, the sense that parody requires the original text's "presence" in the intertext. If any subversion of the originating text (Dante, for instance) occurs, the nature of the parody dialectically requires that originating "horizon" as, paradoxically, a
stabilizing force to be destabilized. Ultimately, my suggestion is that Beckett's intertextual praxis (perhaps like all intertextuality) never fully overturns the originating text even as the process of textual "subversion" occurs (this, of course, being Bakhtin's suggestion in Rabelais). I absolutely agree that this text articulates itself in the space of the intertext. However, this tension between order and the aleatory--found indeed in the relationship between text and intertext--is one which imbricates itself into the primary level of diegesis. I would thus emphasize the need for an initial formulation or account of this text's own diegetic/semiotic splitting before deflecting our hermeneutic interests beyond the admittedly messy "stuff" of Mercier and Camier.

I have isolated in my reading of Mercier and Camier three types of narrative discours (i.e. figures of narrative self-exposure). The first type overtly calls attention to the artifice of the narrative through ostensive markers. The second is more difficult to place under a clear rubric of discours as it seems to imbricate itself as closely as possible over the mode of histoire; that is to say, in particular instances in the text, both modes of narrative seem to inhabit the same discursive space. The third type is that found within the summaries themselves and within the two lists found within the narrative proper (pages 23/72). I will
proceed to look closely at all three instances of the metatextual figure in *Mercier and Camier* to suggest the complexity of Beckett's manipulation of this textual rhetoric. Each "type" of metatextual figure is similar in that all act as a kind of "gloss" on the narrative proceedings proper (histoire), commenting on, ordering or asserting the essential instability of the entire process. Each figure too is important as it plays out within itself the crucial and, for Beckett it seems, fundamentally problematic opposition between histoire and discours. I am interested in exploring these figures of narrative self-exposure in *Mercier and Camier* precisely to examine the rhetorical effect of the narrator's reaction to his own narrative on our reading of that narrative. I wish always to keep foregrounded the precise manner in which these moments are communicated, that is, the precise narratological filter through which we are presented with the text's reading of itself. In one sense I wish to suggest how these moments provide, tacitly or explicitly, and perhaps ironically, the means for the text's entire reading.

The first sentence of *Mercier and Camier* quite perfectly sets the unstable "tone" of the entire narrative: "The journey of Mercier and Camier is one I can tell, if I will, for I was
with them all the time" (7). The sentence turns on this "if I will", a phrase giving a sense of absolute conditionality ("if") continually offset by what I read as the will-to-narrative of this oftentimes intrusive narrator. His "for I was with them" is a patent red-herring, a claim—if true, but does it really matter if it is true?—undermined at every turn by the narrator’s steady stream of doubt as to the credibility of his own narrative. The manoeuvre in this opening statement is a kind of rhetorical prelude to the entire narrative. The narrative voice here presents a willed (i.e. constructed) narrative only to suggest its instability and/or its overt constructedness. The reader is at the mercy of this slightly peevish narrator for his or her definition of the journey: I think it vital to keep the "origins" of our knowledge of Mercier and Camier fully foregrounded here, for we build upon shifting sands if we assert anything absolute about this story, a consideration rarely acknowledged in some of the more elaborate intertextual formulations of this text.

Indeed, it is precisely with the function of knowledge and knowing (as well as telling) in the narrative voice itself that this chapter is concerned. While it is true, as most commentators suggest, that this "I" seems to disappear after this opening salvo, I would suggest the importance of following his progress as he "traces" the journey of Mercier and Camier, for it is he who, if anyone, negotiates the reader’s proximity to the text: it is he ultimately who will
begin to articulate the reader's response to the story. It is his narrative which enfolds the reader in a doubly-encoded desire for narrative and/ (as) knowledge. And, contrary to critical opinion, moreover, the narrator does never fully disappear like some half-witted deus absconditus. He is everywhere "read" through his metatextual comments on Mercier and Camier's actions. It is he (I will en-gender the narrative voice for convenience) who tells us that Mercier and Camier were "driven by a need now clear and now obscure" (7); yet it is also he who, after describing the "meeting" of Mercier and Camier, writes "What stink of artifice" (9). This phrase is the first overt metatextual sign in the text and requires, I think, some consideration as it has some fairly complex resonances. The phrase follows the summary of Mercier and Camier's chance missings:

|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|

The comment seems to refer deictically to this grid (a grid semiotically analogous to the chapter summaries, in fact), and thus suggests at first that any textual ordering of occurrences is an imposition of an artificial plot. However, as the grid functions as a kind of summary—or narrative—of Mercier and Camier's saunterings to this point it bears also
an and/or analogous ontological resemblance to the entirety of the narrative the narrator chooses to tell. Thus the comment, which resounds into the entire novel precisely as it removes the illusion of a self-generating narrative, has a deep philosophical import and suggests an essential, and perhaps unbridgeable, ontological gap between action and account, between event and narrative.

This philosophical position is, however, problematized as we encounter other remarks of the narrator such as "Certain things shall never be known for sure" (10) or "In any case nothing is known for sure, henceforth" (103). The reader is caught in a double-bind between what appears to be an ordering narrative/narrator--one who tacitly suggests his own hand in the creation of the journey ("artifice")--and one who admits ignorance of purpose, meaning, and telos. The complication here is more involved, I think, than Schurman suggests in her emphasis on the extinction of an all-knowing narrator. The difficulty is that the narrator is at once able to order, structure, and form the story (however aleatory it may appear) and at the same time maintain an ignorance about certain things. The complication is precisely that the narrator is not extinct (enough). The reader's position in Mercier and Camier thus may be formulated into a question: how do we read a narrative at once tacitly self-confident ("What stink of artifice") and overtly unsure of itself? The question is further and perhaps more precisely: what do we read in this
aporetic narrative? I return to Camier's anticipatory question: "By what token shall we know the truth?"

The narrator of Mercier and Camier often returns to this particular destabilizing metatextual figuring. In chapter seven, for example, he foregrounds the text's foundational instability by offering the reader a hand in deciding certain elements of plot: "A road still carriagable climbs over the high moorland. It cuts across vast turfbogs, a thousand feet above sea level, two thousand if you prefer" (97); the passage ends with this blithe comment:

It is here one would lie down, in a hollow bedded with dry heather, and fall asleep, for the last time, on an afternoon, in the sun, head down among the minute life of stems and bells, and fall fast asleep, fast farewell to charming things. It's a birdless sky, the odd raptor, no song. End of descriptive passage. (98)

The entire passage is in fact bracketed by these two statements, the first of which explicitly offers the reader a "choice" in the description, the second which acts as a kind of jolt to the readerly sensibility that may have become lulled by the narrator's quite evocative prose.

Much has in fact been made of this text's self-undermining rhetoric and the first statement here gives the illusion of instability some credibility by imparting a sense
of a potentially protean text: it does not really matter, this statement suggests, if the moorland is 1000 or 2000 feet. What matters for the reader and for narratological purposes, however, is that the moorland could be either 1000 or 2000 feet. The second statement—"End of descriptive passage"—acts as a kind of Verfremdungseffekt, shocking the reader into an awareness of the facticity of text and the facility with which the narrator can lull the reader into a sense of "another" world. These statements then would seem, like the previous "What stink of artifice", to undermine the "reality" or illusion of the narrative, to foreground explicitly the process of (con)fabulation. It is, I think, at this point that most critics end their analysis of the semiology of the metatextual figure/gloss. It is, however, crucial to keep in mind the dialectical (one might say parasitical) nature of these moments. If the figures undermine prior description as description they still require the presence of the "prior" text—the descriptive passage, for example—from and to which to orient their rhetorical effects. There is thus a curiously interdependent quality of relationship between discours and histoire in these metatextual figures. The point I am making here originates in my reading of Beckett's manipulation of the rhetoric or discourse (in Benveniste's sense of discours pointing deictically to the present moment of narrative enunciation) of the metatext. The text proceeds—on a metatextual level—only in fits and starts; the metanarrative
voice enters at moments only seemingly to refine itself out of existence at the next. A perfect emblem of this effect—if it is not a technique—is the paragraph opening chapter seven cited above. The impression left by this rhetoric of "reader’s choice" and self-aware manipulation of the Verfremdungseffekt is not a quite total effacing of the rhetoric of (literary) realism. It seems as if each side of the equation here a<-->b (a: self-conscious narrator b: realistic detail) is given equal weight and the reader is left with each "discourse" shimmering in a kind of perpetual balance of what Gadamer in Truth and Method calls "open indeterminacy" (340).

II

The second type of metatextual figure occurs infrequently in Mercier and Camier but bears a vital relation to the thematics of the dialectic of discours and histoire. A couple of examples will serve to demonstrate the difficulty of reading these metatextual moments. At the beginning of chapter two Mercier and Camier are in the midst of a crowd "Press[ing] on as towards some unquestioned goal" (21). They pause and the following exchange occurs:

You hinder me more than you help me, said Mercier.
I’m not trying to help you, said Camier, I’m trying to help myself.
Then all is well, said Mercier.

I'm cold, said Camier

It was indeed cold.

It is indeed cold, said Mercier.

I will excerpt the second example before returning to the above; at chapter five, Mercier and Camier arrive at Helen's home:

Night was falling. They prowled about the centre, at a loss where to go. Finally, at the suggestion of Mercier, whose turn it must have been to lead, they went to Helen's. She was in bed, a trifle unwell, but rose none the less and let them in, not without having first cried, from behind the door, Who goes there? They told her all the latest, their hopes and dreams, shattered and forlorn. They described how they had been chased by the bull. She left the room and came back with the umbrella. Camier manipulated it at length. But it's in perfect trim, he said, quite perfect. I mended it, said Helen. It opens like a dream, said Camier, and when I release—click!—the catch it collapses unaided. I open, I close, one, two, click, plop, click, plop. Have done, said Mercier, before you break it on us again. I'm a trifle unwell, said Helen. (70)
In the first example, the initial "it was indeed cold" seems
discursively to indicate the presence of the narrator
unmediated by his role as narrator: it is as if, perhaps,
seeing as he was "with them all the time" (7), the comment is
the remark of the narrator at the time of the incident (story
time). Mercier's repetition of the same comment, like Helen's
"I'm a trifle unwell", down to the slightly pretentious
qualifier "indeed" (Helen's "trifle" works in precisely the
same manner to mark her comment as a "quotation") acts,
however, to suggest the absence of the narrator at that moment
(unless we wish to characterise Mercier as a congenital idiot
merely repeating what is said by others, the moment has more
complex resonances). What we have here is an uncanny--this is
precisely the term for the effect here--meeting and (seeming)
blend of histoire and discours, as if Mercier is privy to the
machinations of the extra-narrative ordering force (the
narrator), or, conversely, the narrator again is simply and
perversely exposing the processes of his creation. These
moments act to stop the forward movement of the narrative,
forcing the reader to look back on what he has read and think
through the implications of "self"-quotation. The first lines
"It was indeed cold", 'She was in bed, a trifle unwell" which
initially and fairly comfortably occupy the space of histoire,
are read retrospectively as quoted lines and thus as ostensive
markers of the narrator's discursive presence. There is a
blurring here as these lines seem--and perhaps these too are
moments of undecidability—simultaneously to occupy both spaces of histoire and discours, indicating simultaneously both the presence and absence of the narrator as he indicates the present moment of enunciation only to withdraw all markers of that presence. The effect here—and this is admittedly only a possible reading of a complex narrative device—is ultimately to suggest and place Mercier and Camier as playthings, puppets dangling discursively at the diegetic whim of the narrator.

I mentioned at the outset of this chapter that Mercier and Camier was split between two discrete semiotic "zones". I think the above analysis illustrates precisely the reader's obligation to maintain both the discourse of realism and the rhetoric of the metanarrative (which I am positing as each occupying and articulating a distinct "zone" of hermeneutic obligation) in a kind of balance as s/he proceeds through the text. Both discourses taken together represent for me the narratological crux of the matter here. I posited above that the text articulates itself on a dialectical axis of instability and a desire for order. In my reading this dialectic plays out precisely in the uncomfortable paratactical arrangement of histoire and discours: the rhetoric of realism—as traditional mode of totalising narrative—is continually "threatened" or exposed precisely as rhetorical construct and as driven by desire (for order) by the rhetorical manoeuvres of the self-conscious metanarrator,
whose discours in turn is exposed as discours by the rhetoric of realism.

III

I have demonstrated this disjunction or clash of narrative mode in the space of the "main" narrative here in Mercier and Camier. It thus remains to explore the rhetorical or discursive effect of the third type of metatextual figure on our reading of this "fractured" text. The summaries are semiotically analogous to the two lists presented (perhaps by the narrator) within the "main" narrative of Mercier and Camier. Indeed both serve similar purposes and both are as difficult to "locate" narratologically. I have thus far assumed that the summaries are presented ("spoken" seems to go too far) by the narrator himself. Is this, however, a valid claim? I think I can illustrate this problem by exploring briefly the semiotic of the two lists in Mercier and Camier using a question formulated by Barthes in S/Z. Barthes' question to Balzac's text is a vital one for our reading of Beckett's lists and summaries: "Who speaks?". The first list appears in the second chapter and serves to summarize and focus the "themes" of the text:
1. It would be useless, nay madness to venture any further for the moment.
2. They need only ask Helen to put them up for the night.
3. Nothing would prevent them from setting out on the morrow, hail, rain or shine, at the crack of dawn.
4. They had nothing to reproach themselves with.
5. Did what they were looking for exist?
6. What were they looking for?
7. They were in no hurry.
8. All their judgements relating to the expedition called for revision, in tranquillity.
10. To hell with it anyway.

(24)

This list, qua list, acts to draw attention to itself as construct, as a kind of stepping out, or aside, of the narrative proper. It is another method of calling attention to the narrative's artifice, a way of asserting one thing only to withdraw it "To hell with it all anyway". It also maintains the presence of the narrator discursively who implies his "I" through the use of "they" and "their" etc. The second list problematizes this seemingly clear relationship between narrator and "narratee". It appears in chapter seven and is framed thus: "Finally a great light bathed their understandings, flooding in particular the following
concepts":

1. The lack of money is an evil. But it can turn to a good.
2. What is lost is lost.
3. The bicycle is a great good. But it can turn nasty, if ill employed.
4. There is food for thought in being down and out.
5. There are two needs: the need you have and the need to have it.
6. Intuition leads to many a folly.
7. That which the soul spews forth is never lost.
8. Pockets daily emptier of their last resources are enough to break the stoutest resolution.
9. The male trouser has got stuck in a rut, particularly the fly which should be transferred to the crotch and designed to open trapwise, permitting the testes, regardless of the whole sordid business of micturition, to take the air unobserved. The drawers should of course be transfigured in consequence.
10. Contrary to a prevalent opinion, there are places in nature from which God would appear to be absent.
11. What would one do without women? Explore other channels.
12. Soul: another four-letter word.
13. What can be said of life not already said? Man,
things. That its arse is a rotten shot, for example.

(72-3)

The list here is, from a grammatico-semiological perspective, qualitatively different from the previous: there is (in the list proper) no grammatical indication of Mercier and Camier as "they" or "their" (I discount the general "you" in number five); consequently the narrator, as "I" seems to efface himself, as will happen in the summaries, and does happen in the discourse of the epigram. Yet both lists, like the chapter summaries, articulate a space for themselves within the narrative structure focusing the reader's attention on the narrative as "summarizable," as able to be halted for purposes of "reflection", that is, open to re-evaluation and compression at any point ("All their judgements relating to the expedition called for revision, in tranquillity").

Like the lists, the summaries—which I have suggested act as a kind of "gloss" on the main narrative—act initially to assert a spatio-temporal order or scheme over the meandering flow of Mercier and Camier's "journey": they, to use Ricoeur's phrase, attempt to assert "meaningful totalities out of scattered events" (278). As do all summaries these act to consolidate and focus the narrative placement of the characters: they "clear" a space for the narrator to proceed even as he places the characters within space and time. The scheme is ordered "imagistically": the images themselves are
arranged paratactically encouraging, perhaps, a (re)writerly response in the reader:

VII

The bog.
The cross.
The ruins.
Mercier and Camier part.
The return.

VIII

The life of afterlife.
Camier alone.
Mercier and Watt.
The last policeman.
The last bar.
Mercier and Camier.
Lock Bridge.
The arctic flowers.
Mercier alone.
Dark at its full.

(123)
Part of my reading of the summaries arises out of the
idea that the summaries stand to the original and originating text as a special type of "reading" or interpretation. We might even read the summaries using as a focus Ingarden's notion of "concretization": the summaries bring into "being" a clear scheme out of what at times appears as random schemas. The summaries do act to order, to focus and to consolidate the temporal-spatial thrust of the narrative, but even as they articulate themselves, they choose to limn, to highlight specific aspects of the narrative. The result for the reader is a text which "tells" itself twice, or, more precisely, attempts to tell itself twice: iteration always articulates itself in the space of difference. The difficulty for the reader, of course, is that, unlike instances of "reading" in Watt for instance, the summaries in this text do not overtly present themselves as "readings" to the reader. They act as a kind of laying out of material to be read, but fail to carry out that reading: the only "reading" in Mercier and Camier is the metatextual figures of type one that I discussed. If the metatextual destabilising of the narrative proper occurs, it is seemingly absent in the summaries: it is almost as if this discursive space bears all the responsibility for stabilising the narrative.

Yet, of course, the summaries qua gloss act metatextually in the same mode as the previously discussed figures "What stink of artifice" or "End of descriptive passage". It is this realization which exposes the summaries as having within
themselves the central contradiction of this text. The metatextual gloss qua gloss asserts order or directedness as it clarifies; yet, qua gloss, i.e. as iteration, the summaries expose the artifice of the text it re-writes. The text, being summarizable, thus has no real independent "priority": ("The whole question of priority, so luminous hitherto, is from now on obscure" (103)). Moreover, the summaries expose the facticity of the desire for order as they mark themselves ostensively as summaries: they articulate themselves precisely from within the space of "discursive" anxiety, tacitly acknowledging that order, or directedness, if it does not appear in the narrative proper, will appear in the semiotic zone of the summary. The summaries, thus, contain both (self-contradictory) drives that we explored in the narrative proper: the desire for order and the drive to expose that desire precisely as desire and thus as artifice to be revealed, as it indeed is, as artifice. The summaries in fact seem to contain the maximum compression of the central aporia of Mercier and Camier.

This aporia arises precisely as the narrative is split into two discrete semiotic "zones": it is only because the narrative strives to maintain this attempt to split histoire and discours that this process of "self-exposure" occurs. The problem of iterability thus is only a problem if there is an attempt made to mask the difference between each discrete instance of repetition. The narratological crux of Mercier and
Camier, as I hope is clear by now, is precisely the attempt made by the narrator to maintain the discrete "authority" of both semiotic zones even as the opposition is slowly dismantled.

The peculiar aporetic of the metatextual figure in Mercier and Camier will not be seen in the trilogy, as histoire and discours give way fully to discours precisely as any illusion of the third person is effaced. Mercier and Camier, as I have here demonstrated, turns on the crux of the absence/presence dialectic of the narrator, and the reader thus is left to speculate on any number of issues, all of which, I think, can be distilled into one question: What is the effect of a self-summarizable text on the reader? a text not merely summarized, but--and this is a crucial refinement--able to be summarized within its own narrative space.

I think we can begin to pry open this question if we focus on the relationship between narrative and hermeneutics and the a poria of the narrator who attempts to but finally cannot "order" his text. My purpose here is merely to suggest--as a kind of preamble; this idea becomes fully formed in the trilogy--an essential link between narrative and hermeneutics, a link which articulates itself in the discursive structures of Mercier and Camier. I wish to "turn" the word "narrative" back to its etymological roots to suggest a link between narrative as an expression of a desire for knowledge, hence
having an essential epistemological function, and as a desire to communicate (tell), hence having an essential narratological or diegetic function. "Narrative", as Hayden White reminds us in The Content of the Form, comes from gnarus and narro, both roots from the Sanskrit "gna", a root meaning knowing and telling. It is only after establishing the means or grounds of knowledge that a reading of that ordering can be made: thus—and I think this is precisely the narrator's discovery in Mercier and Camier—the epistemological gesture (in this case, the ordering of the narrative) is sequentially, perhaps genetically, related to the hermeneutic gesture. I am here suggesting a link between epistemology and hermeneutics positing epistemology as the initial act of a totalizing hermeneutic gesture. The difficulty for the narrator of Mercier and Camier is precisely that he cannot trust his own epistemologies: they are constructed only to be dismantled: "No knowing. No knowing such things anymore" (102). The narrator cannot bring himself to accept the "necessary illusion" of narrative as "knowing", and thus will not be able to offer any reading of "meaning" within that illusion.
Endnotes

1. The text's reading of itself by way of the summaries is a species of what may be called hermeneutic repetition. The specular nature of the summaries repeats in schematic fashion the structure of the text proper and thus functions as a kind of stabilizing "reading." The rhetorico-semiological effect of repetition will be thematized (again) in How It Is where repetition functions not as stabilizing gesture but to articulate a space where the subject can only inscribe itself as simulacra.

2. The reader here is caught in the classic Beckettian paradox where two seemingly mutually exclusive choices must be held together simultaneously: the frisson produced in such an aporia defines the reading experience precisely. S.E. Gontarski, in his essay "Molloy and the Reiterated Novel", defines this aporia as a variation of the Cretin's paradox: "Since the narrator insists that his fictions lie, he is telling the truth; therefore, he is lying; therefore, he is telling the truth; therefore, he is lying" (60). It seems to me that Gontarski has defined the paradox nicely here, but it also seems too easy to define the aporia in such seemingly "clear" terms as "truth" and "lying": the Beckettian narrator moves beyond such oppositional, binary thinking into what Paul Davies in The Ideal Real calls the new "ontology" (see above,
chapter one). There is something other than truth and lying at work in Beckett, something that utterly negates these categories a priori.

3. Barthes' question here is a variation of Foucault's question in "What is an Author?", itself an acknowledged variation of Beckett's question in Texts for Nothing 3 and a response to Barthes' own essay "The Death of the Author": "Leave, I was going to leave all that. What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking" (85).
Chapter Three: Molloy

For what happened was quite different.

--Molloy

The trilogy represents the culmination of a number of narrative/hermeneutic threads in the early to middle phase of Beckett's oeuvre. It is here that the discourse of specularity is fully articulated precisely as the reader's obligations to the text become fully formed. In my tracing of the metahermeneutic in Watt and the hermeneutic of narrative in Mercier and Camier I pointed out that the reader is always to a degree kept at a distance. In Watt Beckett had not completely formed the structure of the specular reader and thus the reader's "role" as hermeneut was anticipated and "blocked" at specific moments of active hermeneutical inquiry: Beckett's manipulation of this specularity enabled the reader to maintain a relatively comfortable distance from any potential violation. Mercier and Camier finds the desire of reader--and desire is always the motivating force of the specular reader--diffused and scattered into a variety of discrete yet interpenetrating semiotic "zones". The aporia for the reader of Mercier and Camier is precisely that a dominant "role" or "zone" of reading is not defined, a result, as H. Porter Abbott suggests, of the mediation of a third person narrator.

In the trilogy the already perhaps tenuous opposition
between *histoire* and *discours*—between first and third person narratives—is eradicated as the first persons of Molloy, Malone, and the unnamable assume diegetic control. Thus we can begin to frame the trilogy—and indeed a great deal of the post-trilogy prose and drama—as being microscopically concerned with the hermeneutics of the individual subject: these texts have as a central concern the interaction between individual and, at least for Molloy—to a lesser and lessening extent, for Malone and the unnamable—his immediate psychological and physical environment. The trilogy proceeds with the subject in increasing disintegrative crisis; the subject articulates himself along what David Watson in *Paradox and Desire in Samuel Beckett’s Fiction* calls a "sliding scale of narrative dispossession" (15). As he diminishes a concomitant desire for narrative (as) hermeneutics takes over. This process begins with narratives of external events (Molloy) and gradually proceeds to one of claustrophobic self-interpretation (Malone, the unnamable). The reader thus is confronted by three narratives of extreme self-consciousness and, as in his/her reading of *Mercier and Camier*, must continually balance between narrative and metanarrative: s/he must continually negotiate a hermeneutic space within which to read a consistently self-undermining narrative.

As the disintegration of the speaking subject occurs over the narratives of the trilogy, the reader’s role and obligation is incrementally heightened: indeed, I might posit
that one of the major "themes" of the trilogy is the increased awareness of text as read object. I must make it clear at the outset that I read these texts as a series precisely as the thematics of reading are developed. In Molloy and Malone Dies the reader is confronted with the subject in crisis but still perhaps intact (if we read Molloy and Moran as discrete individuals rather than as two aspects of the same character as has been suggested). Molloy and Malone attempt, moreover, to locate themselves in space and time; they can give specifics of geography, can trace their own progression through the narrative. In The Unnamable, however, the subject is in radical crisis, unable to fix himself precisely as subject; he is unable, indeed, to narrate a coherent story: any clarifying semiotic or narrative sign-posts give way in the unnamable's narrative. Consequently the reader is left or presented with a greater degree of writerly responsibility. It is precisely with mapping the incremental responsibility of the specular hermeneutic reader in the trilogy that the next chapters are concerned.

I

Beckett criticism reaches its maturity in its readings of the trilogy. It is here that the thematics of reading as writing (as narrative) are fully explored and exploited; it is here that scrutiny is given to the intense textuality, or rhetoricity, of text; and it is here, finally, that we see the (re)birth of the Beckettian reader. It is perhaps lamentable
that this apprehension of the reader arises precisely and only because of Beckett's explicit thematization of textuality and narrative-making. Part of my interest to this point has been to suggest that hermeneutics—which for me encompasses, or engulfs, textuality and narrative praxis—has always been a major focus in the early phase of Beckett's oeuvre. The trilogy, however, has an explicit and self-conscious academic tone (what Paul Davies in The Ideal Real calls "academic fussiness"[68]) that immediately signals and prompts "serious", perhaps philosophical, attention. Indeed, the Beckett critical community has framed the trilogy as the highest achievement in Beckett's prose fiction, not the least reason being because of its intense self-scrutiny as text and as read object.

Critics seem to focus primarily on two inter-penetrating issues arising within the trilogy and in Molloy in especial: both can be understood as dealing in some way with the thematics of the subject. The thematics of the subject will encompass the issue of narrative-making and the relationship between the two "parts" of Molloy, which really is an exploration of the "ontological" link between Molloy and Moran, i.e., a continuation of the exploration of subjectivity in narrative. Hugh Kenner, as perspicuous as ever, notes the link between the idea of the subject and the formation of narrative; in his essay "The Trilogy" he comments on Beckett's re-formulation of the narrator-narrative binary into what
Beckett has called the "narrator/narrated":

It is a device he employs in all his subsequent fiction, bringing the ambient world into existence only so far as the man holding the pencil can remember it, so that no omniscient craftsman is holding anything back, and simultaneously bringing into existence the man with the pencil, who is struggling to create himself, so to speak, by recalling his own past or delineating his own present. (33)

The thematics of self-creation as narrative creation are picked up and echoed often in the corpus of the criticism. In Accommodating the Chaos Judith Dearlove writes: "Beneath the apparent and artificial diversity of traditional associations is the universal figure of a self coming into being via its self-perceptions[...] a narrator creating himself through his own narrative" (62). Indeed, there is a tendency to read into Molloy--as indeed into Malone and the unnamable--a "universal" figure of self-creation (how far away from allegory are we here?). In his essay "Molloy’s Silence" Georges Bataille is able to frame Molloy as concerned with pure "ontology": "what Molloy reveals is not simply reality but reality in its pure state" (13); Molloy thus reveals the "essence of being" (14) as he creates himself through his narrative act. Commenting on Molloy’s famous "saying is inventing" speech, however,
Bataille posits Molloy/Molloy as going "beyond language," ignoring, I suppose, Gadamer's diction "Being that can be understood is language." Bataille writes: "This is not a school's manifesto, not a manifesto at all but one expression, among others, of movements that go beyond any school and that want literature, finally, to make language into a facade, eroded by the wind and full of holes, that would possess the authority of ruins" (15).

It is clear that the critic regards the processes of subject and narrative creation as equal and arising out of a need or desire for some kind of fixity. In Samuel Beckett: The Expressive Dilemma Lawrence Miller posits Molloy's strategy as a "response to need: scraps of memory and observations are assembled in an attempt to create an other, and even himself" (70). Desire is also a theme of Eyal Amiran's Wandering and Home: "Molloy's clever solution to desire, then, is to find himself in a place without desire, but he never does" (106). Indeed, desire motivates all action in the trilogy including Moran's own narrative which has Molloy as, in Miller's nice phrase, its "ghostly telos" (84).

The precise relationship between Molloy and Moran is another major concern of the critic. Most have a general feeling that Molloy and Moran are genetically or ontologically related. In The Novels of Samuel Beckett, H. Porter Abbott includes a chart detailing Molloy and Moran's physical and narrative similarities, but, wisely I feel, acknowledges the
difficulty of establishing firmly any true links between the
two in what he calls, perhaps pejoratively, "our obsession
with unity" (99). Steven Connor, I think, provides the most
theoretically sophisticated and satisfying account of the
problematics of the relationship between Molloy and Moran. In
_Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory, and Text_ he formulates the
issue as one of the relationship not between two individuals
but two narratives. He details the "splitting of the self into
simulacra" which arises at the point of narration: "Narration
splits the subject into two, into a past self, the object of
narration, and the present self who is doing the narrating.
One might see the problem of narration as one of trying to
enforce a bond of repeatability between these two selves"
(52). This repeatability carries over into the relationship
between the two halves of _Molloy_. Connor responds well to the
temptation of reading Moran's narrative as preceding
(temporally) Molloy's:

For one thing, Moran's narrative doesn't actually precede
Molloy's as we perhaps feel it should. This means that
the moments of _deja vu_ that we encounter in Moran's
narrative--the concern with bicycles, the wicket gate,
the confusion between green and blue, the murdering of
strangers etc--are both originals and repetitions. They
are originals at the level of _sjuzet_ in the narrative
that we construct to relate Moran to Molloy, but are
repetitions at the level of fabula. (56)

Although this criticism has reached a level of sophistication, it still seems to me to be of a strictly formal type. Rarely does the critic look beyond the hermetically sealed "boundaries" of the text to theorize affect. If Beckett's trilogy is marked by its own intense self-scrutiny, it seems a logical concomitant consideration would be that of the reader who has somehow to arrive at a reading strategy for the self-conscious text. Part of my suggestion here is founded on the sense that the Beckett oeuvre, especially as it reaches its maturity in the trilogy, is consciously fabricated with its reader in mind; indeed, as I have posited, the trilogy in one way may be understood to be "about" the "writerly" reader itself.

This is, of course, not to say that criticism fails absolutely to theorize affect. Abbott points to the trilogy, and Molloy in particular, as the beginning of Beckett's full application of "imitative form". His talk of Beckett's deliberate blocking of interpretation which "generat[es] in us the anxiety and enchantment of his narrators, who, like us, are struggling to order this material" (95) goes some way towards apprehending the affective impact of this text. Yet Abbott, strangely it seems to me, does not expend much energy in detailing the force of the punctum (to borrow from Barthes) of Molloy: he is concerned more with detailing aspects of
anxiety-producing form. Thus, although a gesture is made beyond the text, formal concerns are given more attention. The same criticism perhaps could be levelled at Kevin Dettmar, whose essay "The Figure in Beckett's Carpet: Molloy" makes a gesture toward theorizing the role of affect: "Molloy often confuses figurative and literal language...But Molloy's hermeneutic situation is ours, and his confusion is our confusion as well" (76) but is primarily concerned with offering a taxonomy of Beckett's figural language: he does not, in short, theorise his own observations.

Paul Davies in The Ideal Real has a valuable chapter on Molloy in which the important questions regarding this text are at least posed. Davies, like Dettmar and Connor, is concerned with figuraiity and rhetoric, but he frames his analysis through the perception of actual readers, instead of merely observing rhetorical effect. Regarding Molloy's habit of saying a thing only to retract it, Davies writes: "But no sooner is the information given than it is taken away again. Why, it would be reasonable to ask, put it there in the first place? How can something be declared and denied at the same time?" (70). Davies' theorizing the response to this question—a question acknowledging the interrogative, thus affective, nature of the text—is one way of acknowledging the punctum of the text, and the responsibility of reading.

The theoretical foundation of some of what follows builds on Wolfgang Iser's early work on Beckett in The Implied
Reader. Iser's analysis of affect is crucial in that it theorizes affect and response while positing philosophical reasons behind Beckett's manipulation of the reader. On Molloy's self-contradictory rhetoric Iser writes: "The technique results in a total devaluation of language by accentuating the arbitrariness with which it is applied to the objects it seeks to grasp." (165). Iser, however, follows this observation with a consideration of a response to this rhetoric: "The text forces [the reader] to find his own way around, provoking questions to which he must supply his own answers" (175). Iser goes further to suggest a kind of proto-metahermeneutic as he posits the reader's reading of his own response, a reading mirroring that of the character:

...the reader approaches the level of consciousness of Beckett's character, and he only leaves it again when he seeks confirmation of his own experience and so restricts their 'play' by imposing a meaning on it. If he enters into the movement of the text, he will find it difficult to get out again, for he will find himself increasingly drawn into the exposure of the conditions that underlie his own judgements. (177)

Iser's strength, it seems to me, lies in his theoretical foundations. His argument reaches its maximum density and impact in his purely theoretical musings on affect. Iser's
work, however, approaches the level of a kind of literary philosophy, and thus a central paradox appears at the heart of his project: in detailing textual affect Iser often seems satisfied to leave the reader in the "abstract". Thus, although I find Iser's abstract configurations of the reader/text relationship to be useful, there is an essential pragmatic element of textual analysis missing from his work on Beckett. The result, I often find, is a reader sympathetic to but not really convinced of the force of Iser's argument. The following is, I hope, an attempt not to flesh out Iser's argument but to engage in close hermeneutical readings of a variety of scenes of "affect" in Molloy.

II

All I know is what the words know.

--Molloy

This chapter attempts through a variety of means to display the complex interrelationship between the thematics of subject, narrative-making, and the breakdown of epistemological categories. Each of the two narratives in Molloy has as a central concern the integrity of the writing subject, an integrity predicated on the stability of epistemological structures that would enable a self to "ground" itself, if only in discourse, and posit answers to those questions crucial for Beckett: "Where now? Who now? When
now?" (The Unnamable 291). Yet the integrity of the logic of "subject" or "self and other"—categories configuring and seemingly underpinning the structure of the quest thematic of this novel as a whole—is one of the epistemologico-hermeneutical premises that Molloy actively deconstructs even as the characters themselves implicitly articulate the desire precisely for the stability of a totalising subject position: thus one of the responsibilities of the reader of the text is to trace how the thematic of the quest, with all its concomitant epistemological presuppositions, is undermined by what Moran, at a crucial moment in the text, calls "the dispossession of self". Second, I wish to explore the text’s creation and simultaneous de-composition of the specular, i.e. reading, subject. Molloy is crucial in Beckett’s oeuvre because, as I theorize, it instantiates at the level of its binary structure an allegory of the text/reader relationship where Molloy "acts" as text to Moran’s inexorable and hapless reading. Precisely as Beckett articulates his writing subject as reading subject (Moran)—thus thematizing or allegorizing hermeneutics—he imbricates his actual reader onto the same diegetic or semiotic plane that a reader-as-detective like Moran inhabits. Ultimately then, these epistemological questions of location, subjectivity, and temporality—where? who? when?—become our own in a manner which simultaneously suggests the urgency of response and the ultimate impossibility of responding. The following cannot possibly do
justice to the manifold complexities of Molloy but merely attempts to trace one thread of the thematics of the subject through its intimate relation to distinct "modes" of hermeneutical theoría. I am concerned primarily with how the self instantiates, and perhaps decomposes, itself texually and the concomitant apprehension of this instantiation by the hermeneutical reader.

I take Emile Benveniste's writings on the subject, pronouns, and deixis as my starting point for a discussion of Molloy's narrative. In his essays "The Nature of Pronouns" and "Subjectivity in Language" Benveniste posits the role of the personal pronoun "I" as figuring, certainly pre-supposing, a "you": the sign "I" for Benveniste thus contains within itself the essential pre-figuring of the subject-object relation, an essential epistemological category that, as we will see, Molloy and, indeed, the trilogy in toto, slowly dismantles. As is true for all of Beckett's works, Molloy's opening preamble is crucial for a number of reasons, not least for his insistent use of deixis and the consistently varying use of the pronouns "I" and "you". Deixis as grammatico-semiological figure, specifically here, the figures "here" "there" "now" work, as Benveniste suggests, to ground the writing subject/text in a temporal-spatial fixity (I emphasize the deixis I think crucial):
I am in my mother’s room. It’s I who live there now. I don’t know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind. I was helped. I’d never have got there alone. (7)

The insistent "I" works to place the self in location ("my mother’s room") and in "present" time (the five times repeated "now" in the opening paragraph). But we do notice a peculiarity as we trace along this level of deixis: Molloy works to establish himself in space and time but his use of "there" instead of, presumably, "here" suggests a division, a distance—at least at the level of discourse—from this spatio-temporal "grounding". I stress this use of "there"—a figure pointing ostensibly "away" from the self—because of Molloy’s insistent use of it (the French version of this opening shares some of these difficulties: "Je suis dans la chambre de ma mère. C’est moi qui y vis maintenant. Je ne sais pas comment j’y suis arrivé" (7)). Never once in this opening salvo is the deictic "here" used to ground Molloy spatio-temporally (although the French version has "Cet homme qui vient chaque semaine, c’est grâce à lui peut-être que je suis ici" (7) for "Perhaps I got there thanks to him"). Indeed, and this is important, Molloy uses "here" four times only to refer to the grounding of the self in the textual, rather than physical, moment. It is as if, perhaps, the textual takes precedence over the spatio-temporal:
I began at the beginning, like an old ballocks, can you imagine that? Here's my beginning. Because they're keeping it apparently. I took a lot of trouble with it. Here it is. It gave me a lot of trouble. It was a beginning, do you understand? Whereas now it's nearly the end. Is what I do now any better? I don't know. That's beside the point. Here's my beginning. It must mean something, or they wouldn't keep it. Here it is. (8)

And, indeed, Molloy asserts overtly that the "now" of the writing is different than the "here" of the written: the "now" is "nearly the end" while the "here" of "here it is" or, more importantly, "here's my beginning" keeps Molloy perpetually in a state of "nostalgia" always seemingly glancing back on what has been. The effect here—an effect we are perhaps fully expecting—is a splitting into two "presents", the time of the narrator, and the time of the narrated: both "presents", moreover, seem to bear equal authority, to exist in a kind of perpetual balance.

This temporal "splitting" (or simultaneity) is echoed in Molloy's use of pronouns in the second paragraph, especially in the seeming interchangeability of "I" and "you"; thus the thematics of narrative time and of subject-making begin to correspond:

This time, then once more I think, then perhaps a
last time, then I think it’ll be over. All grows dim. A 'ittle more and you’ll go blind. It’s in the head. It doesn’t work any more, it says, I don’t work any more. You go dumb as well and sounds fade. The threshold scarcely crossed that’s how it is. It’s the head. It must have had enough. So that you say, I’ll manage this time, then perhaps once more, then perhaps a last time, then nothing more. You are hard set to formulate this thought, for it is one, in a sense. (8)

I think this I/you opposition can be read in a number of ways. It suggests an essential split in Molloy as subject, a split echoing the temporal division of the self in narrative. Yet, following Benveniste for a moment, the I/you dialectic can be seen as a kind of interpenetrating "creation" of self, as the "I" always prefigures a "you": this "you" thus seems a logical concomitant self to inhabit the discrete temporal "zones" through which the narrative proceeds. If, as I figure it, this "you" is another aspect of Molloy, he "contains" the subject-object opposition within the same discursive space: this manipulation of the I/you dyad seems thus simultaneously to configure the subject-object category and to negate its "objective" epistemological status by interiorizing it.

I wish, however, to emphasise the degree to which Molloy and Molloy involve the actual reader in its process of narration. This I/you dialectic--the I prefiguring a you--is
a dialectic parallel in structure to the text-reader dialectical relationship. A narrative qua narrative always presupposes and, if Iser and Jauss are to be believed, prescribes (inscribes) its reader. I think Molloy inscribes its reader in a number of ways: the most important being Moran who is a literal reader of Molloy and thus a textual counterpart to the reader of Molloy (we will get to Moran in a moment). This "you", however, can also be read as an immediate appeal to, or grammatical "incorporation" of, the actual reader. Indeed, this is a point insisted on in Ricoeur's essay "Appropriation" where he figures the "you" of a direct address to the reader as incorporating the reader into the text's "poetic universe". Now, I don't wish to overburden or overread the "you-as-reader" notion here, only to suggest the inescapability of this "you": it must grammatically refer to the reader, just as, theoretically, it refers to the writer in his instance of discourse. I want to suggest this simply as a hint of larger degrees of specularity that will follow. Consider the following passage in Molloy’s monologue and the semiological force of his "me":

But it is only since I have ceased to live that I think of these things. It is in the tranquillity of decomposition that I remember the long confused emotion which was my life, and that I judge it, as it is said that God will judge me, and with no less impertinence. To
decompose is to live too, I know, I know, don’t torment me, but one sometime forgets. (25)

This "I know, I know, don’t torment me" and his "to decompose is to live" are responses to questions anticipated by the writer by himself and his own readers. Certainly we can read this passage as an instance of the mind in dialogue with itself, but it seems appropriate to this highly self-conscious narrator to see this as an anticipation of a response and an answer to a posed or self-created question. At the moment, in short, that Molloy poses the question, the reader is anticipated and created.

The temporal splitting that we noticed at the level of grammatico-semiological structures is again echoed in the peculiar and specific narrative/narratological positions in which Molloy and Moran find themselves: it is a position that unites and blends discrete temporalities, creating a discursive space described by Beckett himself as that of the "narrator/narrated". It is a position that seemingly removes any ontological differences between inventing and remembering:

Perhaps I’m inventing a little, perhaps embellishing, but on the whole that’s the way it was. They chew, swallow, then after a short pause effortlessly bring up the next mouthful. A neck muscle stirs and the jaws begin to grind again. But perhaps I’m remembering things. (8-9; emphasis
The parallel grammatical structures here emphasise a link between two discrete temporalities and modes of self-creation. Invention and the act of remembrance are here equivalent, as Molloy often suggests as his narrative proceeds: several examples will serve to illustrate the point:

Dear bicycle, I shall not call you bike, you were green, like so many of your generation, I don’t know why. It is a pleasure to meet it again. (16)

I did not let it fall, no, but with a convulsive thrust of both my hands I threw it to the ground, where it smashed to smithereens, or again the wall, far from me, with all my strength. I will not tell what followed, for I am weary of this place, I want to go. (24)

Yes, there is no denying it, any longer, it is not you who are dead, but all the others. So you get up and go to your mother, who thinks she is alive. That’s my impression. But now I shall have to get myself out of this ditch. (27)

And Lousse? Must I describe her? I suppose so. Let’s first bury the dog. (35)
Perhaps Moran characterises this blend of temporalities most effectively:

   For in describing this day I am once more he who suffered it. (122)

The intimate relationship between remembrance and experience in Molloy will become a prominent theme in especially *The Unnamable*; in Molloy it suggests a link between narrative--as a form of remembrance--and knowledge--as a form of experience. This is, however, a suggestion forwarded by Molloy himself whose "Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong" (32) suggests a link between saying and inventing (thus remembrance) but who always foregrounds the fact that as all experience is mediated by language--"All I know is what the words know"--any immediate experience of things seems always at a second's remove. Narrative thus inaugurates a particular epistemological crisis in Molloy. Molloy's "distance" from words places experience, and, indeed, his sense of subjectivity, at a remove:

   I had been living so far from words so long, you understand, that it was enough for me to see my town, since we're talking of my town, to be unable, you understand. It is difficult to say, for me. And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often
hard to penetrate, as we have just seen I think...Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names...All I know is what the words know... (31)

Molloy's epistemological (subject) position here in the opening narrative can I think be read fruitfully through the lens of Gadamerian hermeneutics. The following attempts to make sense of the peculiar narrative difficulty of Molloy--his temporal splitting, his "subjective" splitting--in terms of Gadamer's notion of understanding as dialogue. In Truth and Method Gadamer posits understanding as the result or effect of a specifically linguistic exchange or dialogue: "Language is the medium in which substantive understanding and agreement take place between two people" (384):

...it must be emphasised that language has its true being only in dialogue, in coming to an understanding...But human language must be thought of as a special and unique life process since, in linguistic communication, "world" is disclosed. Reaching an understanding in language places a subject matter before those communicating like a disputed object set between them. (446)

One way of reading Molloy's I/you split is therefore as a kind
of imaginary dialogue where understanding is attempted to be reached. The basic epistemological structure—the dialogical situation—is in place, and narrative itself thus begins to take on a specifically hermeneutical function. The difficulty for Molloy, as for his writerly counterparts, is that he is "alienated" from his own discourse. The situation here thus seemingly fits perfectly the Gadamerian understanding of the hermeneutical situation where the object to be understood inhabits an alien "world" or discourse, although, as far as I can gather, Gadamer never overtly posits the hermeneutical subject as object (Molloy) being at a remove from his or her own discourse, despite the fact that for Gadamer understanding the object is always an understanding of the hermeneutical self. For Molloy to understand through and within an alienated medium removes the possibility of (self) understanding at the outset precisely because the basic hermeneutico-epistemological category of subject-object relations is undermined, knowingly or unknowingly, by Molloy at every turn: in fact, he configures himself as both subject and alienated object, I/you, narrator/narrated. Molloy reveals the depths of his (and our) hermeneutical difficulty when he pauses to offer his species of metahermeneutic:

Oh I did not say it in such limpid language. And when I say I said, etc., all I mean is that I knew confusedly things were so, without knowing exactly what it was all
about. And every time I say, I said this, or I said that, or speak of a voice saying, far inside me, Molloy, and then a fine phrase more or less clear and simple, or find myself compelled to attribute to others intelligible words, or hear my own voice uttering to others more or less articulate sounds, I am merely complying with the convention that demands you either lie or hold your peace. For what really happened was quite different. (88)

Molloy concludes with "Molloy could stay, where he happened to be" (91), a sentence containing a maximum compression of a variety of epistemological "themes": he places himself at a third person's remove and spatially in a location ill-defined but thematically perfectly suited to the (pseudo) quest that will follow in Moran's narrative. Yet I think the major semiotic resonance here at the conclusion is sounded in the above quoted "For what really happened was quite different"; here Molloy again complies with the Beckettian convention that demands you say one thing only to retract it. The effect, an effect "worked out" in Mercier and Camier, undermines any "authority" the preceding may have had and works again to remind the reader the precise degree to which narrative-as-subject making in Beckett is a protean, ultimately ethereal--ultimately textual--event: if a subject appears, he can as easily disappear leaving the reader, herself at times incorporated into the text, to wonder
precisely what s/he saw and how to read what s/he saw.

I have traced the subject position of Molloy thus far to suggest two things. First, he is unable to locate himself firmly in space or in time. Second, as one alienated from his own discourse he admits the impossibility of himself reaching an understanding of his present situation, of answering that basic hermeneutical question: "How does it stand towards me?". Molloy's epistemological crisis is the crisis of narrative or discourse; precisely, Molloy cannot "locate" himself even in his own discursive productions. Molloy is twice lost, as it were. The irony in place here—and Molloy constructs itself in the logic of the ironic displacement of horizons of expectations—is that the ultimate object of the hermeneutical quest of Moran (and reader), Molloy, cannot even be posited: the very terms of the "quest" are confounded a priori as the end of the quest cannot even be "thought" by the pursuer and, most radically, by the pursued.

And yet the second part of Molloy will in fact thematize the reader and will work to present the hermeneutical pursuit of what cannot be thought or what exists only as a kind of "projection" of the pursuing subject. The second part of Molloy interiorizes the preceding narrative in order to place it within a coherent and cohering "frame" even as the logic of the first admits of the ultimate futility of doing so. In Moran's narrative Beckett continues to explore the limits of hermeneutical understanding based on imperfect or unclear
(self) knowledge. The irony suggested by Beckett in Moran’s narrative is that epistemological or narrative frames can only cohere if the hermeneutical subject (the reading subject) can himself maintain a firm spatio-temporal grasp on “reality”. We will find that the subject in Molloy is only ever in disintegrative crisis and that Moran’s "quest" is almost by definition always already "failing". The interest for the hermeneutical reader of Moran’s narrative thus is not whether Moran will "find" Molloy (the idea of "discovery" in Beckett being fraught with a myriad of epistemological crises) but in how Beckett consigns his reader(s) to epistemological crisis and how this is complicated by the working out of the discourse of hermeneutic specularity.

III

I am paid to seek.

—Moran

Most critics, as I have suggested, posit or intuit a genetic if not ontological link between Molloy and Moran. In the following I am interested not so much in pursuing this "essential" relationship; rather I will posit a hermeneutical ground on and through which a relationship is articulated. I take as a basic or primary fact that Moran is in pursuit of Molloy and that this pursuit is a specific aspect of an overarching hermeneutical quest: I suggest, for instance, Moran’s narrative as being in part a "reading" of Molloy’s.
This section is concerned with framing Moran's quest specifically in hermeneutical terms positing, ultimately, Moran as Beckett's first fully formed specular reader.

It is important I think to notice the seeming sharp contrast in the tone and "syntax" of the discourse of Moran's narrative to that of Molloy. Moran's narrative opens with an overtly confident tone—a tone structured, perhaps, on a kind of scientific exactitude. Where Molloy's opening paragraph articulates itself on a dialectic of deictic instability, Moran's is full of bluff self-confidence. He establishes a setting and, crucially, an identity: he is able to name himself immediately, as opposed to Molloy who remembers (or "remembered") his name only well into his narrative; Moran writes:

It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. I am calm. All is sleeping. Nevertheless I get up and go to my desk. I can't sleep. My lamp sheds a soft and steady light. I have trimmed it. It will last till morning. I hear the eagle-owl. What a terrible battle-cry! Once I listened to it unmoved. My son is sleeping. Let him sleep. The night will come when he too, unable to sleep, will get up and go to desk. I shall be forgotten.

My report will be long. Perhaps I shall not finish it. My name is Moran, Jacques. That is the name I am known by. I am done for. My son too. All unspeaking. He
must think he's on the threshold of life, of real life. He's right there. His name is Jacques, like mine. This cannot lead to confusion. (92)

The reader may feel compelled into a different position from that assumed when reading Molloy's narrative. The seeming confidence of Moran places the reader in a posture not immediately concerned with interrogating the basic signposts of either narrative or narrative subject position: in short, there seems at the outset to be little "writerly" work to be done. But this is of course only an immediate illusion, for Moran occupies a space of pure unknowing: his "ontological" position is as unsure and tenuous as Molloy's. The difference immediately apparent to the reader is that Moran seems able to frame his position precisely as a position of ignorance. Thus, Moran's relationship to Youdi and his messenger Gaber is unclear; the force impelling the quest is ill-defined; the agents communicate in a code unreadable by Moran; indeed, as he says, and will say again, "All this is not very clear" (107)

Moran's relationship to Molloy (or Molloose?) is therefore a priori ill-defined and can be read at least from one perspective as an articulation of a specifically hermeneutical type of desire. I suggest this paradigm keeping in mind the structural arrangement of Molloy which has Moran's narrative following Molloy's sequentially. Positing Molloy as
hermeneutical object of Moran allows us perhaps to tease out a structural similarity between the relationship of Moran to Molloy and the reader/text hermeneutical relationship, or perhaps as an emphatic structural echo of the I/you relation we noticed in Molloy's narrative. And, indeed, if we accept the relationship in hermeneutical terms, some of Moran's more cryptic musings, musings that are usually read as "identifying" Moran as Molloy, begin to make some sense. Consider the following in terms of the Heideggerian Vorgriff or the Gadamerian "prejudice":

Molloy, or Mollose, was no stranger to me. If I had had colleagues, I might have suspected I had spoken of him to them, as of one destined to occupy us, sooner or later. But I had no colleagues and knew nothing of the circumstances in which I had learnt of his existence. Perhaps I had invented him, I mean found him ready made in my head...For who could have spoken to me of Molloy if not myself and to whom if not to myself could I have spoken of him? (112; emphasis mine)

Most critics see in these lines a suggestion of Moran and Molloy's genetic self-identity. For my purposes it doesn't matter if Moran and Molloy are one and the same; what matters is that one is in hermeneutical pursuit of the other: "Between the Molloy I stalked within me thus and the true Molloy, after
whom I was so soon to be in full cry, over hill and dale, the resemblance cannot have been great" (115). It is here a question not so much of genetic identity, or self-identity, but rather of priority. From a hermeneutical perspective, at least as formulated by Gadamer, a true hermeneutical encounter—and I am suggesting Moran and Molloy's relationship is fundamentally a hermeneutical one—blurs the question of ontological simultaneity or priority. The two members of the hermeneutical dialogue or dialectic will meet, but the essence of the encounter takes place "'in between'" the interlocutors. More importantly, however, and the subjective transformation of Moran over the course of the novel confirms this, the hermeneutical encounter is actively transformational: it is, as Gadamer puts it, a "communion in which we do not remain as what we were" (374).

And at the moment we perceive the hermeneutical nature of Moran's quest, we can begin to unravel the specular elements of his narrative (hermeneutical) position. Because Moran's quest blends with the reader's desire for knowledge, however rudimentary, of Molloy, Moran begins to act in a specular manner: his quest is ours, ours is his. Specularity thus bridges—or, perhaps more precisely, threatens to bridge—the "ontological" gap between reader and text in a way which accents or limns the hermeneutical nature of the textual experience: specularity always thematizes hermeneutical desire.
I wish to be clear here about what I mean by the discourse of specularity: I do not mean simply that we "identify" with a certain character, i.e. sympathize or empathize with him or her in the space of the textual encounter. I mean that, as far as it is possible in the economy of the text/reader relationship, the reader is obliged to assume a hermeneutical position close if not identical to that of the textual reader, in this case, Moran. The discourse of specularity as employed by Beckett always—and this is a major contention of this project—involves a degree of violation of the specular reader or readers. What is crucial to notice about Beckett's manipulation of this specular reader's "stand in", or simulacrum, is that he or she always undergoes some sort of psychic if not physical disintegration, i.e. a particularly radical form of "hermeneutical transformation". The dialectic of reading Beckett through his specular reader is thus one of hermeneutic identification and violation. My sense here is that Beckett succeeds in imbricating or articulating his reader into the text and forces him or her via the specular reader into a space where the subject, or subjectivity, is utterly negated: if, as I contend, the reader assumes the role of specular reader his readerly subject position becomes tenuous as it too is decomposed.

Specularity, though not termed as such, is a point insisted on in the hermeneutics of both Gadamer and Ricoeur;
I have previously figured Gadamer's notion of *phronesis* (practical judgment as action) as a kind of obligation thrust onto the reader. In a specifically hermeneutic reading of a text, in this case *Molloy*, the analogical or specular relation between reader and character (Moran) is in place: I posit this relation as conferring—a word first used in this project in my reading of *Watt*—an obligatory role onto the reader, a role that transforms or translates the reader's position or posture of "distance" to one of absolute (and ultimately ethical) proximity "to" the text. The structure of specularity in its precise relation to the reader of the text thus begins to unbalance the reader-as-subject/text-as-object relationship in a way that, first, echoes the theematics of the decomposition of the category of subject/object; second, specularity demands the reader reconfigure what may be the traditional epistemological stance of reader maintaining the coherence of self, despite or even because of the effects of "appropriation", in relation to coherence of text. This transformational role is noted by Ricoeur in his essay "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology":

> To understand is not to project oneself into the text but to expose oneself to it; it is to receive a self enlarged by the appropriation of the proposed worlds within which interpretation unfolds. In sum, it is the matter of the text which gives the reader his dimension of
subjectivity; understanding is thus no longer a constitution of which the subject possesses the key. Pressing the suggestion to the end, we must say that the subjectivity of the reader is no less held in suspense, no less potentialised, than the very world which the text unfolds. In other words, if fiction is a fundamental dimension of the reference of the text, it is equally a fundamental dimension of the subjectivity of the reader: in reading, I "unrealize myself". Reading introduces me to imaginative variations of the ego. (94)

Although I agree with Ricoeur about the transformational relationship of subject to text, I wish to emphasize the degree to which in a reading of Beckett "appropriation"—the reader’s appropriation of the text’s "world"—is always a "conferred" appropriation. The reader of Molloy, I posit, has very little choice about undergoing a subjective transformation via the specular subject: the subject position is conferred onto him/her via the economy of the hermeneutical/specular subject-reader relationship.

Beckett sets up the decomposition or transformation of the hermeneutical and specular subject in a series of incremental steps; it begins at the outset as the reading subject (Moran) is placed within an hermeneutical space without any firm ontological context or signposts: his "thrownness", to borrow from Heidegger, mirrors the reader's
own who has only the non-context of Moran to orient his or her own reading. Beckett proceeds delicately to strip away the illusion of firm subjectivity ("My name is Moran, Jacques") by again playing with the first and third person dialectic so pronounced in Molloy's own narrative: "For where Molloy could not be, nor Moran either for that matter, there Moran could bend over Molloy" (111); or again:

It was then the unheard of sight was to be seen of Moran making ready to go without knowing where he was going, having consulted neither map nor timetable, considered neither itinerary nor halts, heedless of the weather outlook, with only the vaguest notion of the outfit he would need, the time the expedition was likely to take, the money he would require and even the very nature of the work to be done and consequently the means to be employed. And yet there I was whistling away...(124)

And it was not so much Moran as another, in the secret of Moran's sensations exclusively, who said, No change, Moran, no change. This may seem impossible. I went into the copse to cut myself a stick. (147)

And indeed, there is a moment in the text which acts as a perfect emblem of this narrative and subjective decomposition. It is an extraordinary complex, because extraordinarily
resonant, *mise-en-abyme* of the entire thematics of quest-narrative-subject/reader-text relationship. Moran is alone in what he calls "Molloy country" (133) after having sent his son off to buy a bike:

I surrendered myself to the beauties of the scene, I gazed at the trees, the fields, the sky, the birds, and I listened attentively to the sounds, faint and clear, borne to me on the air. For an instant I fancied I heard the silence mentioned, if I am not mistaken, above. Stretched out in the shelter, I brooded on the undertaking in which I was embarked. I tried again to remember what I was to do with Molloy, when I found him. I dragged myself down to the stream. I lay down and looked at my reflection, then I washed my face and hands. I waited for my image to come back, I watched it as it trembled towards an ever increasing likeness. Now and then a drop, falling from my face, shattered it again. (145)

The passage immediately—and ironically—evokes Narcissus attempting to embrace his own likeness and failing and dying. The Narcissus myth should be read as an exploration of the failure to differentiate self from other and the dangers of this failure. What I think is crucial about the passage is the implicit causal relationship between the act of remembrance—
more precisely, the attempted act of remembrance—and the act of self-reflection: there seems to be a definite link between Moran’s attempt to remember what to do with Molloy and the act of looking at himself in the stream, as if perhaps the clues to the means of action were written in Moran’s own face. The clues, however, if they are in place, are inscrutable; moreover, Moran’s own image of self, which may provide the means of action, is constructed in a balance of dissipation and coherence. Moran, unlike Narcissus, never mistakes his "image" for an other; but on a metaphoric level, his image of self seems always on the verge of merging into a resemblance of himself (becoming): "it trembled towards an ever increasing likeness" (145). The coherence of self is a crucial element in "tracking" Molloy, as Molloy somehow inheres in Moran. But his image of self is "shattered" (145) as the water breaks the surface of the stream. The shattering of Moran’s image of self here, precisely as it is placed within a fairly resonant mythic context and as it thematizes the notions of self, self-identity, and dissipation, thus carries a huge semiotic weight into the totality of the novel. Moran’s sense of self, as it is "mirrored" in the water—and the water becomes for me an emblem of textuality—is bound by the unsynthesizable dialectic of "communion" and loss.

This passage in fact inaugurates a series of encounters between Moran and various simulacra of himself and "abyssmal" specular (i.e. (self)-reflecting) structures, all of which
serve to highlight what Moran himself calls his "great inward metamorphosis" (163). The second specular vision in water occurs soon after the above and explicitly thematizes the loss of both the sense of subjectivity crucial for the carrying out of the hermeneutic quest, and, more importantly, the loss of a "directed" hermeneutic desire:

And then I saw a little globe swaying up slowly from the depths, through the quiet water, smooth at first, and scarcely paler than its escorting ripples, then little by little a face, with holes for the eyes and mouth and other wounds, and nothing to show if it was a man's face or a woman's face, a young face or an old face, or if its calm too was not an effect of the water trembling between it and the light. But I confess I attended but absentely to these poor figures, in which I suppose my sense of disaster sought to contain itself. And that I did not labour at them more diligently was a further index of the great changes I had suffered and of my growing resignation to being dispossessed of self. (148-49)

Following this vision which seems to portend something—and we notice the divide again in Moran's reading of this figural image, between sensing a disastrous significance and a sense of absolute dispossession—and which most clearly articulates Moran's fractured subject position, both hermeneutic desire is
lost and the self begins to find vague simulacra in the external world; it is as if as the sense of self is lost, it sets up echoes of itself shimmering about Moran; it is a perfect visual metaphor for the dissolution and dissipation of the self. Moran's encounter with the man in the woods whose face, Moran says, "I regret to say vaguely resembled my own" (151) compels an oddly disproportionate emotional response, as if having become resigned to the dispossession of self the mirror of the man's face is too painful for Moran to bear; and indeed, following his killing of the man Moran comments blithely: "he no longer resembled me" (151).

Moran's dispossession of self, which I figure as heralding the loss of the hermeneutic compulsion, makes some sense of the rambling lists of questions Moran proceeds to ask himself (154;166-67). One way of reading the rhetorical effect of these lists is as the effect of a kind of diffuse! or sublimated hermeneutic desire; where first the desire was to find Molloy, here the questions in the initial list do not concern Molloy at all; moreover, the questions themselves defy the logic of answerability even at the moment of asking: "But while looking for the answer, or the answers, to a given question, I found the answer, or the answers, to a question I had already asked myself in vain, in the sense that I had not been able to answer it, or I found another question, or other questions, demanding in their turn an immediate answer" (154). The second and third lists contain for me the maximum
compression of Moran's hermeneutical confusion. The questions
of esoteric religious significance cannot I think be easily
harmonized with the tenor of Moran's narrative, but seem
rather to contain a refraction of the hermeneutic quest:
hermeneutic desire is transposed--precisely as the logic of
the quest structure, with its integral elements of pursuing
subject and pursued object, is decomposed--onto an entirely
irrelevant semiotic plane. In fact the final list, which
begins with questions dealing precisely with the nature of the
quest and ends with asking the name of an obscure martyr,
contains in miniature the hermeneutical movement of Moran's
total narrative as it mirrors the gradual movement away from
"directedness" or significance (or the possibility of
significance) that is traced by Moran himself. It seems
finally that Moran cannot end his narrative with anything else
but specular and structural simulacra of his own abject
position as dispossessed self.

And thus the reader, who wishes to read Molloy through
Moran--or, more precisely, is seduced into believing in the
possibility of reading Molloy through Moran--is placed within
a difficult narratological or semiological "zone" where the
reading lens, as it were, becomes diffused and darkened.
Moran, and Molloy through him, becomes the reader's own "dim
man," "dim of face and dim of body, because of the dark"
(150). Moran, as hermeneutical subject, thus is in a fairly
ineluctable state of subjective decline as his narrative
proceeds. And as the subject of his quest becomes more and more ill-defined ("What it was all about I haven't the slightest idea" [113]) and the telos or end of the quest (or narrative) recedes into perpetual dimness ("What was I looking for exactly? It is hard to say" [126]): "Stories, stories. I have not been able to tell this one" (137), the narrator as subject--and specular reader--is slowly dismantled.

Thus in some fashion the final paragraph of Moran's narrative contains the maximum compression of aporia in Molloy. Where in a typical detective procedural we expect the questions posed at the outset to be incrementally answered as the narrative proceeds and concludes, Moran's narrative only winds itself down into incoherence and contradiction:

I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted. It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understood it, all wrong perhaps. This is not what matters. It told me to write the report. Does this mean I am freer now than I was? I don't know. I shall learn. Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining. (175-6)
Moran's final words circle back on the entire report and work to suggest a negation of the truth value of the entire narrative by denying the truth of the opening sentence "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows" (92). The entire narrative is thus "contained" within a framework the first premises of which are incrementally revealed as untenable. This gesture--typical enough in Beckett--leaves the reader in a difficult but by now familiar position, again wondering "By what token shall we know the truth?" The final passage, moreover, involves a strange manipulation, or dislocation, of temporal sequence as it articulates itself in the past tense problematizing the present tense of the opening "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows". The problem for the reader thus is in determining the present moment of writing and self-creation: when does/did Moran write the report? We have a narrative that begins in the present tense, ends in the present--"Does this mean I am freer now then I was?"--but casts an eye retrospectively back on what was written as if excluding the possibility of narrative progression in traditional terms of telos: the moment of writing is thus endlessly "present", if not tautological. The result of Moran's endless present is, I think, to suggest a kind of self-imprisonment in a self-imprisoning narrative, bound always in a narrative moment that denies the entire economy of "progression". Yet the fact remains that hermeneutic desire, even as it is diffused in these final
pages of the narrative, is still present, just as the narrative as a whole is still present and has been brought into existence by a writing self in search of something. Beckett's characters are formed in the space between two contradictory impulses: the desire for self-abnegation and the desire to "know": it is the inexorable articulation of this aporetic division that constitutes the central thematic impulse of Moran's narrative.

IV

*Molloy* resonates on at least three interrelated levels all of which collapse the notion of the integrity of subject under intense epistemological crisis. First, as a detective procedural, the text decomposes its generic inheritance by collapsing the structure or logic of pursuit by negating the notions of "subject of quest" and "object of quest". There is thus a double crisis of subject where the pursuing subject (Moran) cannot define the ends of the quest even as he cannot define the moment of his pursuit. Second, a reading of *Molloy* as an allegory of the hermeneutical encounter collapses under the pressure of attempting to define and delimit the "horizon" or "world" of both reader (Moran) and text (Molloy): both horizons are so ill-defined that no "dialogue" can ever take place. Third, *Molloy* works to suggest the absolute decomposition of the category of "self and other" or subject
and object, the basic premise, that is, of both hermeneutics
and epistemology: the economy of this text works to dismantle
the basic notion of subject/object relations in a way which
removes the possibility of even conceiving the logic of the
opposition. Both the narratives of Molloy and Moran, precisely
as they seem to divide the narrating subject into discrete
selves inhabiting discrete temporalities, suggest an essential
division of the self harbouring the illusion that it exists as
both subject and object, as both writing subject and object of
discourse: the point I am making here is that the division of
self is only a discursive division of the self or subject, not
the creation of an epistemologically sound "object," or
objective, category. Moreover, precisely because the writing
subject cannot locate himself discursively as subject, the
entire logic of subject presupposing object—I presupposing
you, Moran being "able" to pursue Molloy—is dismantled even
as the desire for the efficacy of the structure is implicitly
articulated. The question thus that we need to explore into
Malone Dies and The Unnamable—texts themselves thematizing
epistemologico-hermeneutical crises—is whether the removal of
the category of subject-object leaves the writing (or is it
speaking?) subject in discursive solipsism or whether the
notion of solipsism, one seemingly perfectly applicable to the
unnamable's situation, for instance, requires a perceiving
subject aware of himself as subject.
Chapter Four: Malone Dies

There I am back at my old aporetics.

--Malone

This chapter continues the exploration of the instantiation of "self" in text. In Malone Dies Beckett remains concerned with the thematic of the aporetic division of self in the textual object, and here again explicitly foregrounds the "fabrication" of text through the narrative constructions of Malone: "While waiting," says Malone, "I shall tell myself stories" (180). And indeed, it is the text's own mode of self-reflexive awareness that interests a number of readers of Malone Dies. I want here to examine the hermeneutical significance of two instantiations of self-reflexivity in the novel. The first is Malone's habit of offering commentary on the narratives he tells. This self-reflexive gesture—a gesture consciously aware of itself as metanarrative—figures Malone as the "originary" critic of his own work. The second self-reflexive gesture is the related thematic of the "game" or "play". Malone categorizes his stories as "play," and it will be suggested that a full understanding of how play is articulated in this text can only come about if the topos of play is read back into its precise hermeneutical contexts as, for instance, formulated by Gadamer and Ricoeur.
In *Homo Ludens*, a text crucial to both Gadamer and Ricoeur in their hermeneutical configurations of play, Johan Huizinga posits play as a gesture specifically related to the desire for order; indeed, for Huizinga play "is order" (29). I want to argue here that the totality of Malone's narrative, as it delimits the time remaining in Malone's life, expresses precisely this desire for order and thus can be understood as an articulation of play. But, as both Gadamer and Ricoeur suggest, "play"--as it articulates itself within the semiology of the aesthetic object: here Malone's own stories, and the totality of *Malone Dies*--will constitute the subjectivity of reader/writer (Malone is both) within a space where subjectivity itself, i.e. self-conscious awareness of "self-hood", is "playfully" placed under erasure. Indeed, in strict hermeneutical terms, the concept and operation of play explicitly negates the subject's awareness of self. Taken together thus, Malone's texts and concomitant metatext (his commentaries) designate two aporetic "roles" for the writing subject. On the one hand Malone's stories express a desire for "playful" subjective erasure; on the other, the metatext exposes a perverse and acutely painful awareness of the impossibility of achieving this kind of nullification in text, of the impossibility of writing the moment of selflessness (non-being). Malone's discovery in this text is the intimate connection between Being and (the) language (of play). Language simultaneously constitutes Being and acts to
disfigure the understanding of self "in" language: understanding of Being, in short, is mediated by that which constitutes Being a priori. Malone’s constant irruption into metanarrative, therefore, operates to signify the ineluctable process of self-scrutiny even as the priority of the writing subject is acknowledged: "And I call that playing. I wonder if I am not talking yet again about myself" (189). The difficulty here for Malone is not, as is the case for Molloy and Moran, the maintenance of the coherence of the writing subject but the maintenance of the coherence—the "objective" status—of the textual product, text which serves as both screen, onto which particular desires are projected, and mirror, reflecting back and thereby consolidating (or disfiguring) those desires. The central aporia of this text thus arises as Malone attempts to maintain the discrete economy of the space of play beside the self-conscious semiological zone of the metanarrative, indeed, in how the text defines and divides itself along two opposing and seemingly irreconcilable conceptions of "being" in play.

The critical community recognises the thematic, if not hermeneutical, significance of the game and "playing" in Malone Dies. Leo Bersani in "Beckett and the End of Literature" notes the connection between play and Malone’s intense self-awareness as teller of stories: "What destroys the resolution of the early pages [i.e. the resolution to tell stories] is Malone’s inability to talk about anything but
himself (to be able to do that would be 'to play')" (63). In "Fiction, Myth, and Identity in Samuel Beckett's Novel Trilogy", Leslie Hill notes that Malone's "oscillation between fiction and interjection [is] thematized by Malone as a 'jeu'" (92). Hill's conception of the logic of play is, however, completely at odds with a hermeneutical reading of play: the oscillation he notes is itself the mark precisely of the inability to achieve the state of play. In "The Self-Multiplying Narrators of Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable", Charlotte Renner notes merely that "By 'playing', Malone hopes to pass the time remaining until his impending death" (104), a statement, while perhaps true in the narrowest of senses, does nothing to acknowledge the problematics of defining Malone's activities as play or to acknowledge the manifold complexities of the very notion of play even separated from the context of Beckett's own work; in Renner's reading one gets the sense of the degree to which the Beckett critic often will allow the text unproblematically to dictate the terms and parameters of the critic's own reading. Wolfgang Iser in "Subjectivity as the Autogenous Cancellation of Its Own Manifestation" notes more usefully that "The stories are 'play' insofar as they are not devised for the sake of an ultimate meaning but only for meanings that will ward off the void" (75); the "diversion" of the story allows Malone to go "beyond his known self" (75).

My difficulties with these critical readings of Malone's
"play" are based again on the sense that the critic either merely thematizes (describes) the function of play, or does not push thematization far enough "into" the text. A number of critics (Iser, Bersani), for instance, note the relationship between the subject positions of Malone as writer and narrator and his "playing" but do not note, and this is strange from a critic of Iser's "hermeneutic" inheritance, the importance—for the reader, for Malone—of Malone's inability (or is it unwillingness?) to maintain the self under erasure. Moreover, and this is a crucial contention of this chapter, Malone's irruption into metanarrative always will inaugurate the reader's own awareness of text, and more specifically, his/her relation to text as reader: thus Malone's intense self-awareness must always have as a necessary and inescapable concomitant the reader's own awareness of self precisely as reader (of reader).

Malone categorizes his activity as "play" in the second paragraph of his narrative:

This time I know where I am going, it is no longer the ancient night, the recent night. 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...From now on it will be different. I shall never do anything any more from now on but play. No, I must not begin with an exaggeration. But I shall play a great part of the time,
from now on, the greater part, if I can. But perhaps I shall not succeed any better than hitherto. Perhaps as hitherto I shall find myself abandoned, in the dark, without anything to play with. Then I shall play with myself. To have been able to conceive such a plan is encouraging. (180)

For Malone his playing will take the form of story-telling, a way, as most critics note, of passing the time. The crucial thing for my purposes here is to keep foregrounded the fact that Malone makes every effort to keep the stories from being "about" himself: the narratives thus have as "purpose", in the loose sense of the word, a kind of self-forgetfulness.' Play, even as Malone understands it--and I posit his understanding as hermeneutical at its base--involves, as Gadamer posits in Truth and Method, two important interrelated components:

Play clearly represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself. It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself. (104-5)

...in playing, all those purposive relations that determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but are curiously suspended. The player
himself knows that play is only play and that it exists in a world determined by the seriousness of purposes. But he does not know this in such a way that, as a player, he actually intends this relation to seriousness. Play fulfils its purpose only if the player loses himself in play. (102)

And yet Malone interrupts the flow of his narrative with "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?" (189). At best Malone's first narrative is a stuttering affair: "Sapo had no friends--no that won't do" (189); "He boxed and wrestled well, was fleet of foot, sneered at his teachers and sometimes even gave them impertinent answers. Fleet of foot? Well well" (189); "Sapo loved nature, took an interest--This is awful" (191). The question we might ask here is: does what Malone produces, and his stand towards it, constitute "being" in the game? (Is it even appropriate, given Gadamer's notion of play being without "goal or purpose" to call a narrative a game or play at all?) The answers to these questions will, I think, determine precisely the nature of Malone's position as narrator and will enable us to read in a more fruitful way the self-reflexive, metanarrative comments by Malone as his narratives proceed.

A response to these questions requires the reader of Malone Dies to take into account the movement of Malone's
narrative as a sequential structuration. I use the word sequence to account for the processual structure of the stories that begins with the stuttering narrative of Sapo and ends with Lemuel's slaughter at the outing of the mental patients. Primarily because the structure of Malone's narrative is conceived beforehand--"I think I shall be able to tell myself four stories, each one on a different theme" (181)--the reader expects, perhaps naively, a kind of structure of order, if not meaning, to appear as the stories progress and, most importantly, as the stories conclude. The logic of sequence thus requires that Malone's final narrative resonate with a certain amount of significance. And indeed some critics see the final narrative as having precisely that kind of semio-narratological resonance; Leo Bersani, for instance, characterizes the episode of Lemuel's slaughter as a dramatization of Malone's own dying: he thus confers onto this final text an implicit teleological significance and resonance. A teleological reading of structuration founders, however, on its underestimation and denial of the cumulative rhetorical effect of Malone's intense self-consciousness and metanarrative intrusions. These narratives are all presented as "invented", consciously portrayed as constructed text, even as tedious text. As such, a homogenization of significance--a kind of semiological "flattening"--takes place over the course of the presentation of the narratives. This is an effect noted by Maurice Blanchot in his essay "Where now? Who now?".
Blanchot maintains that Malone's stories themselves "do not signify" (25) because the reader always expects something else to confer significance onto the textual productions. In fact all semiological acts in Malone's narrative are related back to one source: Malone, who himself categorizes the narratives thus:

While waiting I shall tell myself stories, if I can. They will not be the same kind of stories as hitherto, that is all. They will be neither beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm, there will be no ugliness or beauty or fever in them any more, they will be almost lifeless, like the teller. (180)

Even within those moments in the text where Malone achieves what appears to be the coherence of transparent narrative (if only momentarily) his previous categorizations of his own textual productions "frame" what appears free of the self-conscious narrator precisely as only story, only as product unable to refer "beyond" the subjective boundaries of the obsessive narrator; all narrative productions here are a posteriori coded "back" to Malone: the texts Malone produces elaborate in their semiological "neutering" the erasure of the transparent narrative act.

As there is no overriding teleological structure in place as Malone Dies proceeds and concludes we may be tempted to
harmonize the "disinterested" narrative structure of the text with Gadamer's sense that the game sees the suspension of "purposive relations": the stories of Malone thus seem to correspond with one aspect of the hermeneutical notion of play. But this is only a reading of Malone Dies along the axis of structuration: at the level of the semiology of the metanarrative—and my argument above is intended to suggest the inescapability of metanarrative in all of Malone's semiological productions—the totality of Malone Dies seems always to resist the erasure of subjectivity and thus to resist the logic of play.

And it is as we begin to read the semiology of the metanarrative as play that the concomitant issue of specularity again arises. Indeed, in Malone's irruptive commentary we have a precise articulation of what I have called a metahermeneutic, precisely, a hermeneutic of a hermeneutic, an interpretation of narrative where the interpretive stance of reader—and Malone is the "originary" reader of his narratives—is framed by a particular epistemological position. Malone makes it clear that his narratives express the desire for a kind of "ordering" of the time left to him. More importantly, his present occupation is explicitly framed in terms of self "knowledge": "And I feel a strange desire come over me, the desire to know what I am doing, and why" (194); "All I want now is to make a last effort to understand..." (199). Malone emphatically links his
writing to the process of coming to an understanding:

My little finger glides before my pencil across the page and gives warning, falling over the edge, that the end of the line is near. But in the other direction, I mean of course vertically, I have nothing to guide me. I did not want to write, but I had to resign myself to it in the end. It is in order to know where I have got to, where he has got to. (207)

Malone figures the textual product as a kind of mirror consolidating his particular epistemological desires: the production of text as "play" has a specific ordering purpose. Malone’s articulation of the function of his text thus harmonizes with Huizinga’s notion of the existential-aesthetic effect of the play function:

Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it creates order, is order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it "spoils the game", robs it of its character, and makes it worthless. The profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play, as we noted in passing,
seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics...It may be that this aesthetic factor is identical with the impulse to create orderly form, which animates play in all its aspects. (29)

Yet despite Malone's explicit articulation of epistemological desire, the narratives he tells seem always to exceed his own interpretive grasp: if the interpretive/hermeneutic act precedes or is simultaneous to epistemological understanding or "grounding", the narratives Malone tells will consistently resist his own "foreconceptions" of them. Malone's own act of reading cannot locate or fix understanding in the textual product: "I have tried to reflect on the beginning of my story. There are things I do not understand. But nothing to signify" (189). Plot events seem just out of his authorial control:

But Sapo was not expelled, either then or later. I must try and discover, when I have time to think about it quietly, why Sapo was not expelled when he so richly deserved to be. For I want as little as possible of darkness in his story...I have not been able to find out why Sapo was not expelled. I shall have to leave the question open. (190)

At a point well into Malone's narrative of Macmann--an avatar
perhaps of Sapo, as Sapo is an avatar of Malone himself—he refers overtly to the destructive power of his own discourse: "A thousand little things to report, very strange, in view of my situation, if I interpret them correctly. But my notes have a curious tendency, as I realize at last, to annihilate all they purport to record" (259). The narrative act—the very act of writing—acknowledges in itself the impossibility of recording any substantive thing. The narratives, and indeed the extended self-analysis, thus are almost by virtue of having been recorded, epistemologically inaccurate reflections of Malone’s desires: the writing moment is a moment of displacement and disfigurement of meaningful intention. If, as Gary Madison suggests in The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity "the problem of ‘personal identity’, of the unity and constancy of our selfhood, is nothing other than the problem of maintaining coherence and continuity in our stories" (162), the problem for Malone is the problem of the disfiguring text. Indeed, Malone’s own rhetorico-critical gesture (position?) here suggests the ultimate futility of attempting to "make sense" of the narrative a priori in relation to the writing subject: Malone’s narratives exceed his interpretive grasp; as they exceed his interpretive grasp they cease, even at the moment of their commission to the page, to act as the ordering gesture Malone desires.

The logic of the metanarrative irruption thus has a double-force. First, it interpellates a self-conscious
narrator into his own process of story-telling: self-consciousness thereby delimits the space of "play". Indeed one way of reading the particular hermeneutic position of Malone here as he consistently foregrounds the fabrication of his own text is as a radical (mis)application of the hermeneutical notion of distanciation. I have argued in a previous chapter that Watt is as much a victim of his own inability to follow through on his hermeneutical inquiries as he is a victim of any psychological impairment. I have suggested also that Moran's subject position over the course of his narrative is informed by a particularly radical form of "hermeneutical transformation". I have suggested these readings as an ongoing attempt to figure Beckett's texts as containing within their narrative economies an unravelling of a variety of hermeneutical "problems". One way I have approached this reading is to see how the texts, which seem to have inscribed within themselves their own mode of reading, harmonize with or diverge from specific aspects of hermeneutical theoria. Malone Dies, as this chapter attempts to suggest, places the writing subject, who is also the originary hermeneuticist of the work, within the hermeneutic logic of play. Play, as Ricoeur suggests, is the mode of being of both the work of art and the hermeneutic gesture of "appropriation", a gesture, that is, which allows the interpreter to enter the "dialogue" with the text: play thus defines the interpretive act as interpretive. But appropriation exists in a perpetual supported balance with
its opposite pole—distanciation—the pole, I want to suggest, thrown out of balance by Malone's inability to "be" in the game. Distanciation is a crucial component in conceiving of the integrity of text, and the reader's apprehension or appropriation of it as interpretable object. Appropriation for Ricoeur means "to make one's own" what was originally "alien". Thus Ricoeur in "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation":

Distanciation is not abolished by appropriation, but is rather the counterpart of it. Thanks to distanciation by writing, appropriation no longer has any trace of affective affinity with the intention of an author. Appropriation is quite the contrary of contemporaneousness and congeniality: it is understanding at and through distance. (143)

Distanciation thus allows the hermeneuticist to recognize the particular mode of being of text and the self's own mode of being in its relation to the aesthetic object: the self withdraws as the hermeneut makes the text his or her "own". "Being in play" thus involves to some extent a forgetting of one's own being-ness which is precisely the position Malone as story teller desires to assume. Yet I think Malone's difficulties stem from an overdetermination of the hermeneutic function of distanciation: instead of allowing the appropriate "play" to occur through and within a hermeneutical distance,
Malone consistently sets up distanciation as a form of pure alienation (Verfremdung) from text (play?): there is thus no fruitful intersubjective "dialogue" between Malone and his text; each component of the relationship maintains a separate and discrete autonomy. The failure of absorption into text moreover presupposes the impossibility of interpretation: no hermeneutic moment or dialogue can occur if the subject maintains his discrete autonomy.

Second, the metanarrative irruption functions to encode the reader's self-awareness into the text as it consolidates a kind of interpretive focus "in front" of the reader. If, as Ricoeur notes, the reader too is a playful figure in the hermeneutic encounter, a metanarrative, precisely as it works to awaken the reader's awareness of text and textuality, works against the playful incorporation of the reader. Before looking at the consequence for the reader of the metanarrative I want to excerpt briefly from Ricoeur, who in "Appropriation" theorizes the reader as "playful" figure:

It is now possible...to treat the reader in turn as a fictive or playful figure. For the author's subjectivity, submitted to imaginative variations, becomes a model offered by the narrator to the subjectivity of the reader. The reader as well is invited to undergo an imaginative variation of his ego...For the work itself
has constructed the reader in his role. (189)

I have previously suggested that the specular reader--i.e. the reader who finds an analogue to herself "in" the text--undergoes a process of conferred appropriation and thus finds herself undergoing a kind of hermeneutical-subjective transformation. Malone becomes for me the prime figure of the specular reader, as, to a lesser extent, does Watt. The position of the reader towards *Malone Dies* hinges precisely on the blurring of subjective/ontological boundaries between reader and text; it thus seems obvious enough that Malone, as self-conscious narrator and hermeneut, stands as the specular reader in the text. The reader's interpretive economy is invested precisely in "how" Malone makes sense or works to understand his present situation. But whereas the reader is incorporated gradually and has his/her hermeneutic subject position dismantled over the course of Moran's narrative in *Molloy*, in *Malone Dies* the experience is bound to a strict and abrupt dialectic of absorption into narrative and radical awareness of text and textuality. Our readerly position with regards to this text thus is continually consolidated and fractured precisely as Malone's efforts to absorb himself into texts are shattered. Thus even if, as Ricoeur suggests, a transformation of the ego occurs in the true hermeneutical encounter--and it is true that we are in a sense "transformed" as we invest a certain degree of importance in Malone's
readings of his narrative and thus take up a position similar to his--the fact remains that the subjectivity of the reader is always in place as it traces through Malone Dies: the logic of the metanarrative denies the full "playful" erasure of the self-consciousness of reader, precisely as the self-consciousness of Malone can never or will never be eradicated.

Thus we have to make some sense of the final words of the text, that moment when Malone does indeed die, as a moment of supreme irony:

Lemuel is in charge, he raises his hatchet on which the blood will never dry, but not to hit anyone, he will not hit anyone, he will not hit anyone any more, he will not touch anyone any more, either with it or with it or with it or with it or with it or with it or with his hammer or with his stick or with his fist or in thought in dream I mean never he will never

or with his pencil or with his stick or

or light light I mean

never there he will never
Malone Dies articulates itself as a parody of the topos of writing deferring death that is found, for instance, in a text like *A Thousand and One Nights*. Where in that text the narrative act is causally related to the deferral of death, the narratives in *Malone Dies* act not to delay death but simply to fill the void until death. Yet the narratives are linked to the thematic of death inasmuch as the "playful" desire for self-abnegation rehearses the self-forgetfulness that death itself may bring: the narratives thus may be seen as a series of little deaths: "They will be almost lifeless, like the teller" (180). The narratives themselves, however, precisely because they do not bring about this self-forgetfulness--perhaps because for Beckett, as for Gadamer, language inscribes and "supports" Being; because Malone "is" his language--fail as the articulation of play, fail as the rehearsal for death. The irony here in these final lines is that Malone cannot inscribe the self-abnegation he desires: only a silence in the end of writing will inscribe the end of Being. The moment of play that Malone desires occurs not in
the space of his texts or metatext but only as the text concludes with his death: the moment of "absolute play"—as the moment of absolute self-abnegation—is the moment of death, the uninscribable moment.

Thus I think it appropriate to echo Malone's early statement: "There I am back at my old aporetics" (181). It becomes apparent as the reader traces through Beckett's oeuvre that the aporetic split between intention and result cannot be noted simply as an "effect" (or indeed "affect") of the peculiar subject position of the perversely self-aware Beckettian narrator. These splittings, be they narratological, temporal, or subjective, are nothing less than a major thematic of the Beckett novel. I have traced the narrative self-hermeneutic as it plays out over several texts to this point, from Watt, Mercier and Camier, Molloy, and now Malone Dies: in each case I noted the peculiar sense in which the text, either in its (con)figuration of character (Watt), or more precisely, in the articulation of narrator, seems always to divide itself against itself; in all cases this division is the direct result of or is invested in the economy of desire, desire for narrative, or more precisely the desire for "directedness", order, knowledge. Malone himself, as noted, expresses in what are to this point in the oeuvre the most explicit terms most clearly the desire for knowledge as knowledge of self. This desire is bound up in the "playful"—though the term belies the seriousness of the effort—gesture
of the narrative as if Malone understands that the stories are in one way "about" himself. The series of narratives told by Malone thus contain in their structuration—in the very fact of their telling—an implicit desire for "coherence"; if framed as "play" the stories can be read, like the inter-chapter summaries of Mercier and Camier, as an attempt to consolidate and focus the subject of the narrative(s). But the "old aporetics" arise precisely and simultaneously with Malone's own understanding of the logic of play which demands the obfuscation of subjectivity. Subjectivity or Being is bound by language that both consolidates and defers Being, or, more precisely, understanding of Being: understanding of self is mediated by that which constitutes the subject a priori. To write the end of Being thus is to engage in what Merleau-Ponty would call a "paradox of expression". ³ Subjectivity for the Beckett character thus is always painful and protracted: with the desire for the nullification of self-hood comes the realization of the impossibility of inscribing that nullification, an experience described by Blanchot in "Literature and the Right to Death" as the "experience through which the consciousness discovers its being in its inability to lose consciousness" (331).
Endnotes

1. We might compare this formulation of the "purpose" of writing as game to that of the narrator of *Texts for Nothing* 7:

Another thing, I call that another thing, the old thing I keep on not saying till I'm sick and tired, revelling in the flying instants, I call that revelling, now's my chance and I talk of revelling, it won't come back in a hurry if I remember right, but come back it must with its riot of instants. It's not me in any case, I'm not talking of me, I've said it a million times, no point in apologizing again, for talking of me...(108)

2. In "What is an Author?" Foucault notes the relation between writing, the game, and subjectivity:

First of all, we can say that today's writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression. Referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority. This means that it is an interplay
of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier. Writing unfolds like a game (jeu) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears. (103)

Chapter Five: The Unnamable

The end, the beginning, the beginning again, how can I say it, that's all words, they’re all I have.

--The Unnamable

I am my world.
--Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus

I

The unnamable’s speech is an obligatory speech. It is a speech, as he describes it, conferred on him from somewhere beyond him, devoid of the speaker’s own volition. It is a speech that at once articulates him as speaker and prevents the end of speech, the end of Being. It is in short—and again Beckett’s speakers articulate the means of their own reading—an aporetic speech, a speech acknowledged as “speaking the speaker”.' But because it is acknowledged as speaking the speaker, it is a speech that sets itself up as distanciated from the unnamable, distanciated and thus able to be perceived as controlling speech: the unnamable is articulated into a state of pure self-alienation, a state that permits the recognition of discourse as being discourse. This distanciation allows the unnamable to liberate itself from the economy of mere puppetry and to enter into a protracted self-conscious reading of its hermeneutic speech: acts. The profound hermeneutic irony of The Unnamable is precisely that it is this self-alienation that finally allows for a rigorous self-
scrutiny, finally brings to the fore the realization that has been haunting the writers in the trilogy: Being is self-alienation, self-alienation allows for the understanding of Being-as-hermeneutics.

But the unnamable’s narrative is more than a continuation of the thematics of the aporetic subject inscribing the aporetic narrative: because the discourse is characterized as obligatory discourse, this narrative enters into an ethical realm. This chapter is an attempt to give a specifically ethical reading of The Unnamable, to suggest how the unnamable’s "obligation" is more than logorrhoaiac compulsion, but is in fact an index of a profound sense of the responsibilities and power of (Being in) discourse. The responsibility of the reader of this text, I wish to argue, is to gauge the philosophical, hermeneutic, and semiotic resonance of the notion of "obligation" as it maps out into the unnamable’s narrative, to gauge, more problematically, how the thematics of ethical obligation is manifested in a semiology--more specifically an aesthetic semiology--without firm discursive or subjective boundaries. Wittgenstein proposes in the Tractatus that "Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same" (6.41): my analysis is an attempt to make some sense of the relation between the aesthetic act and the ethical gesture, to explore the similarity between the aesthetics of response and the ethics of response.

The question of prime importance in The Unnamable is that
of the logic of ethics (as obligation) under the constraints of a radically fragmented subjectivity: Whence obligation for a radically decentered subject? The question of the ethic of speaking—and ethics here is synonymous with but not totally encompassed by the notion of obligation—is a thematic given relatively little attention in the scholarship on the unnamable’s story, even though the notion of obligation is thoroughly foregrounded and thematized in the preamble, as it is in Beckett’s crucial "Three Dialogues," which I discuss below. Most critics focus on the thematics of writing and speaking in their formulations of the text. Thus Leslie Hill in Beckett’s Fiction defines the unnamable’s speech as exhibiting an excess, "a supplement, a waste which cannot be pronounced or incorporated within words" (82). Anna Smith in "Proceeding by Aporia" maintains that the unnamable’s speech exceeds its own grasp: "both the narrator and the narrator’s language must serve as the subject and object of investigation. Perception is prior to language; language gives rise to perception. Verbal description, therefore, is never able to reveal the elusive nature of the ‘I’" (21). This notion is echoed by Thomas Trezise, who notes in Into the Breach that the formation of the non-coincidental subject gives rise to a language unable to conceive of its own formations: "subjectivity is the experience of a solitude...Wherein, by reason of its own non-self-coincidence...the self as subject is not alone" (117). It is
this non-coincidence of subject, of self and language, that leads Edouard Morot-Sir in "Grammatical Insincerity in The Unnamable" to note the discursive importance of the hypothesis in the unnamable's narrative: the discourse of the hypothesis (a discourse I want to maintain is ineluctably related to the spirit of ethics) creates what Morot-Sir calls the "suspension" of judgement. It is in the gap between the attempt to construct a world and the reality of disfiguring discourse that the hypothesis is formed: "I propose to interpret Beckett's 'fables' as hypotheses of Imagination, when Imagination realizes that it cannot achieve the idealist dream of reconstructing the world and the self in the same verbal effort" (142). This curious totalizing "suspension" is an effect noted by Lawrence Miller in The Expressive Dilemma. Miller writes that the narrator of The Unnamable "avoids any neat conclusion by adopting a method opposed to the 'spirit of system'; further, an 'aporetic approach, and the use of 'affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered' are meant to prevent any accumulation and co-ordination of assertion" (133).

It is, I think, vital to keep the "hypothetical" or "suspended" nature of the unnamable's text counterpoised to/with his own sense of expressive obligation, because it is in the space between (mere) hypothesis and the logic of obligation that the rhetorico-ethical effect of the novel is articulated. As we trace through the unnamable's narrative the
link between non-totalizing experience and the need for acts of practical judgement in the face of this incomplete experience will become increasingly clear: although I do not wish to anticipate my argument at this point, it needs to be suggested that the acts of judgement the unnamable will make—acts ultimately discursive or performative—are hermeneutic acts of a specifically ethical kind. The ethical act of interpretation—what I call the ethico-hermeneutic act—is ethical because made in response to and from within the lacunae of Dasein.

II

The thematic of obligation plays a large role in Beckett’s own "Three Dialogues", a text often referred to as sounding some of the major themes of Beckett’s oeuvre. Indeed, it is easy enough to read "Three Dialogues" into the unnamable’s own speech, to see a conjunction between "B"[eckett’s] "nothing to express" and the unnamable’s "nothing to say" (314) or "What I say, what I may say, on this subject...has already been said" (302). It is also important to link up "B"[eckett’s] "the obligation to express" with the unnamable’s repeated sense of the obligation to speak. Both senses of obligation stem, I want to maintain, from the same space, as both articulate a corollary or concomitant obligation or ethical impulse to interpret, an ethic that resides both within the speaker-writer and his inscribed
reader.

In "Three Dialogues" the thematic of obligation is sounded a number of times:

B-...Yet I speak of an art turning from it in disgust, weary of its puny exploits, weary of pretending to be able, of being able, of doing a little better the same old thing, of going a little further along a dreary road. D-And preferring what?
B-The expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (139)

...

B-The situation is that of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint. The act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event, paints, since he is obliged to paint. D-Why is he obliged to paint?
B-I don't know. (142).

...

B-I know that all that is required now, in order to bring even this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and of the act which, unable to act, obliged to act, he
makes, an expressive act, even if only of itself, of its impossibility, of its obligation. (145)

The obligation—the ethical force spurring the painter-artist-writer—is the obligation to act knowing full well the futility of action, the futility of an act (in)adequate to its own vehicle of expression. The obligation, a deeply stoic obligation in far., is the obligation to fail. The ethic articulated by "B"(eckett) in "Three Dialogues", an ethic put into practice by the unnamable, is therefore an ethic of suffering, to borrow Beckett's own term.

As Beckett suggests in Proust, suffering is more than a mere existential condition. It is a condition that tempers and perhaps articulates interpretation, the hermeneutical experience itself: suffering initially is a heuristic "device". It exists at the opposite pole of "Habit". As Habit disguises, perhaps disfigures the "essence" (11) and idea (of things), suffering acts to remove the veil of familiarity from experience to reveal the quiddity of that experience (Beckett's affinity with the Romantics—Shelley, Coleridge—and with Brecht is obvious):

The fundamental duty of Habit, about which it describes the futile and stupefying arabesques of its supererogations, consists in a perpetual adjustment and readjustment of our organic sensibility to the conditions
of its worlds. Suffering represents the omission of that duty, whether through negligence or inefficiency, and boredom its adequate performance. The pendulum oscillates between these two terms: Suffering—that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience, and Boredom—with its host of top-hatted and hygienic ministers, Boredom that must be considered as the most tolerable because the most durable of human evils. (16)

Suffering—suffering of the Proustian character, the Beckettian character, the writer—thus articulates its own aesthetic, its own framing of specific experiences. The aesthetic formed within and through suffering is one of the partial, the fragmentary, the "schematic", to borrow from Ingarden. Beckett sees in Proust, and his ideas hold at least partially true for his own writing, a quasi-Romantic scepticism "before causality": "Thus his [Proust's] purely logical—as opposed to intuitive—explanations of a certain effect invariably bristle with alternatives" (61). He notes Proust's extreme subjectivism: "Consequently for the artist, the only possible hierarchy in the world of objective phenomena is presented by a table of their respective coefficients of penetration, that is to say, in terms of the subject" (61... And of course the subject for Proust and Beckett is non-self-coincidental: "The individual is a
succession of individuals" (8); the subject is perhaps even
defunct: "The subject has died—and perhaps many times—on the
way" (3). The aesthetic production—i.e. the textual artifact—
of the decentered suffering subject is constructed in this
very space of incomplete knowledge, as the subject, non-
coincidental to himself, is, moreover, at a remove from the
object of perception: the textual product thus will be
precisely fissured, reflecting in its semiology the lacunae of
the experience of Being. Beckett refers to the instability of
the subject—his "mobility"—in its relation to the object and
defines the (aesthetic) experience of suffering:

Moreover, when it is a case of human intercourse, we are
faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not
merely a function of the subject's, but independent and
personal: two separate and immanent dynamisms related by
no system of synchronisation. So that whatever the
object, our thirst for possession is, by definition,
insatiable. At the best, all that is realised in Time
(all Time produce), whether in Art or Life, can only be
possessed successively, by a series of partial
annexations—and never integrally and at once. (6-7)

Beckett here outlines a problematic that should immediately
remind us of the hermeneutical difficulties of, for instance,
Malone, whose radical distanciation from his textual
productions clearly thematizes Beckett's notion of the subject/object problematic, the difficulties produced by these "separate and immanent dynamisms".

I offer this extended introduction to the topos of obligation-as-suffering precisely because the aesthetic that Beckett articulates in "Three Dialogues" and Proust--especially in its quasi-romanticism--is precisely the aesthetic and semiology of The Unnamable, an aesthetic of "suspension" that articulates and delimits the semiotic (for interpretation) of both the reader and the narrator: the narrator is writing an interpretable object here while offering the means of its own reading, if not precisely its own interpretation. Beckett's articulation and theory of the partial and serial possession--of what? meaning?--can, I think, be read fruitfully into an ethico-hermeneutical context that at once liberates the art-object from the tyranny of the monological hermeneutic (what in my Introduction I called hermetic hermeneutics) and places the reader--or writer/character as reader--in a responsive, dynamic space of reading. Beckett outlines an aesthetic theory that demands action on the part of the perceiver, the perceiver who must consistently negotiate between aspects of the text, must negotiate a space within which to "read" the gaps and lacunae of the aesthetic object. The ethic of suffering--as an ethic of action, an ethic of interpretation--thus is conferred onto the reader. This theoretical ethic of negotiati
put into productive praxis in the unnamable's narrative in a way which at once draws upon "traditional" ethics (that we find, for instance, in Aristotle) and dismantles the very economy of the arche of ethical obligation. The paradoxical Beckettian strategy in The Unnamable is thus to use the "ghost" of a dead metaphysics to breathe life into a dead ethic.

III

It is not often acknowledged that the concomitant to the unnamable's obligation to speech is his, and our, obligation to interpret. It is in fact just the unnamable's will to interpret a speech at once compelled and self-originating that places the unnamable in, paradoxically, the clearest intellectual space of any of the narrators in the trilogy. Precisely as external signifying systems--landscape, character--fall away, the compulsion to interpret moves to the fore: as the character is reduced to mere Being (or being-ness) the purest understanding of Being-as-hermeneutics arises. Thus:

Where now? Who now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. Can it be that one day, off it goes on, that one day I simply stayed in, in
where, instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend
day and night as far away as possible, it wasn't far.
Perhaps that is how it began...I seem to speak, it is not
I, about me, it is not about me. These few general
remarks to begin with. What am I to do, what shall I do,
what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia
pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations
invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later? (291)

The unnamable's first paragraphs are the most lucid expression
of the hermeneutic dilemma in Beckett, the clearest expression
of the necessity to know given the limitations of the subject
in epistemological crisis. The unnamable's "And things, what
is the correct attitude to adopt to things?" (292) lays clear
the interpretive problem as it re-writes the fundamental
hermeneutic question: How does it stand towards me?

The unnamable's speech thus interiorizes the opposition
that defined Malone's position as aporetic: he interiorizes
the opposition of speaking/being spoken only, of course, to
produce more aporia, aporia that delimits itself precisely as
aporia (is it feasible then to describe self-conscious aporia
as aporia?). The unnamable's speech thus continues, but does
not complete--for how can it?--the thematic of speaking one's
own dying, speaking one's own death: "One starts speaking as
if it were possible to stop at will. It is better so. The
search for the means to put an end to things, an end to
speech, is what enables the discourse to continue" (299). Indeed the unnamable's speech assigns itself the dual—and perhaps exclusionary—role of articulating itself as both beginning and ending, or beginning always anticipating the end knowing always that it inhabits the space of both polarities ("poison and antidote" [298]). But it is he, even as he is inscribed by the language of others, who assigns himself the originary role as writer, as recorder of this "Gospel" of decline: "It is I who write, who cannot raise my hand from my knee. It is I who think, just enough to write, whose head is far. I am Matthew and I am the angel, I who came before the cross, before the sinning, came into the world, came here" (301).

The unnamable's obligation, "the compulsion I am under" (302), is to assign meaning to the logic of "Being" at the beginning, anticipating the (uninscribable?) end and thus writing the middle, the great gap of time. "But I am here" (301; italics mine), says the unnamable, and thus his preamble, his "exordia" (302) fixes the subject, defines him as subject and clears a space for the writing of the immovable subject's story, a story that inscribes the death of the author aware of his death as he speaks his death: "And indeed I greatly fear, since my speech can only be of me and here, that I am once more again engaged in putting an end to both...Whence a certain confusion in the exordia, long enough to situate the condemned and prepare him for execution" (302).
And therefore whence a certain confusion of the writing subject, of literally, author-ity, who at once defines himself as a kind of (un)willing amanuensis who must write, like Murphy's sun must rise, because he has "no alternative" (294), but who also inscribes himself as writer (Matthew) writing about himself: "So it is I who speak, all alone, since I can't do otherwise" (307). Who then, or what then, speaks here? Does the langue of "others" (314) become the parole of the unnamable simultaneously maintaining itself as langue? Can parole exist without a speaking subject?: "It's no longer I in any case" (318). Barthes' question in S/Z, "Who speaks?" is the unnamable's "Who now?" defining itself as the I without a subject, as the subject without object: "There, now there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me, no one comes towards me, no one has ever met anyone before my eyes, these creatures have never been, only I and this black void have ever been" (304).

The unnamable thus is fully aware of the problematics of inserting the self into the "space" of beginning a task, is aware of the beginning as ultimately ethical because ultimately exclusive act: to begin, as Edward Said has demonstrated in Beginnings, is to circumscribe a space, an act of profoundly ethical resonance precisely because it chooses to delimit "world" in the creation of "world":

A text is a statement made with signs, and those signs
constitute a judgment already made that as signs they shall be. This judgment-statement excludes other signs, just as it includes the ones it intends. Such a way of describing a text is ethical. (230)

The unnamable articulates this sense of beginning as choice in his preamble:

The thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of system. People with things, people without things, things without people, what does it matter, I flatter myself it will not take me long to scatter them, whenever I choose, to the winds. I don't see how. The best would be not to begin. But I have to begin. That is to say, I have to go on. (292)³

For I am obliged to assign a beginning to my residence here, if only for the sake of clarity...(295)

It would help me, since to me I must attribute a beginning...(296)

The unnamable's first paragraphs thus articulate themselves as an extended prolegomenon on the ethic of beginnings, the ethic--because obliged--of beginning to interpret, the ethic of attempting to inscribe the self (if the notion of the
subject still obtains: "I. Who might that be?" [336]) within a space where the logic of "understanding" may not simply be erroneous, but more problematically, irrelevant. Yet the effort to begin is in place here at the outset; the unnamable thus articulates a desire for, if not precise construction of, what Said has called the "transitive" beginning intention. Such an intention "foresees a continuity flowing from it" (76); it is what Benveniste in his essay "Language and Human Experience" calls the "axial moment which provides the zero point of the computation" (5): it is, in precise philosophical terms, the articulation of a desire for the arche, or what Derrida in *Writing and Difference* somewhat mean spiritedly calls "an ethic of nostalgia for origins" (292).

Articulating or inscribing a beginning is thus an act of profound epistemlogico-hermeneutic consequences: it is the logic of beginning as "ground" (arche) that presupposes the movement towards end (telos). But the unnamable's narrative calls on a kind of thinking about the logic of beginning that he will acknowledge to be defunct. And yet what prevents the narrative from simply articulating itself as protracted aporia is this profound sense of obligation, a sense that seems at once to call upon what Derrida would term "metaphysical" categories and casts into doubt the very ground (arche) of that thinking. As in *Mercier and Camier*, Molloy, and Malone Dies, we again see here a double movement in the narrative: there is at once the desire to dismantle the very (ethical)
system that seems to prop up the facticity of the narrative. Moreover, the unnamable's obligation—to express, to interpret—is precisely a constitutive "metaphysical" category that prevents the radical and absolute dismantling of the "logic" of ethics as it prevents the absolute dismantling of the subject: the concomitant obligation to interpret, I wish to suggest, carries with it an implicit ethical component that will recompose the economy of ethics even as the unnamable tries to dismantle it. The unnamable's narrative does not simply dismantle the "logic" of ethics but acknowledges the force of the ethical obligation precisely by questioning its efficacy in a purely discursive context.

Thus, it is the resonance of the unnamable's "must" that configures his speech—as action, as interpretation—as ethical in the sense described, for instance, by J. Hillis Miller in *The Ethics of Reading*. Miller speaks about the ethic of reading, which for me encompasses also the ethics of speech in the unnamable's discourse: speech, writing, reading, and interpretation are conflated and interpenetrating categories in Beckett's oeuvre. Miller writes:

The ethical moment in the act of reading, thus, if there is one, faces in two directions. On the one hand it is a response to something, responsible to it, responsive to it, respectful of it. In any ethical moment there is an imperative, some "I must" or Ich Kann nicht anders. I
must do this. I cannot do otherwise...On the other hand, the ethical moment in reading leads to an act. (4)

For the unnamable the moment of speech/writing/reading/interpretation does not have the necessary (according to Miller) concomitant of action: it is action. It is always already an action. The concomitant act here is, of course, the actual reader's reading of the unnamable's multi-semiotic. But the problem here for the reader is to locate within the fractured sensibility or subjectivity of the narrator the precise locus of the ethic: an ethic to be an ethic must be identifiable as such, must presuppose an origin (arche) of the obligatory force. The unnamable's ethic of "must" comes from himself, comes from "elsewhere": it is both exterior and interior to himself:

This voice that speaks, knowing that it lies...it is not mine. I can't stop it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know, its round that I must revolve, of that I must speak, with this voice that is not mine, but can only be mine, since there is no one but me...(307)

Indeed it is from within this problematic configuration of speaking/spoken "voices" (to call the novel "dialogical" is to
beg the question of originary sources of voice) that the
unnamable recognizes the difficulty of even articulating his
obligation as obligation:

Strange notion in any case, and eminently open to
suspicion, that of a task to be performed, before one can
be at rest. Strange task, which consists in speaking of
oneself. Strange hope, turned towards silence and peace.
Possessed by nothing but my voice, the voice, it may seem
natural, once the idea of obligation has been swallowed,
that I should interpret it as an obligation to say
something. But is it possible? (311)

The unnamable’s difficulty here is, in short, as much a
problem of ethics as it is one of speaking/being spoken/being
unable to speak/ceasing speaking/ceasing being spoken.
Precisely, it is a problem of locating the impelling force of
the obligation: does it reside within the narrator or without?
The unnamable will suppose "that it is in fact required
of me that I say something, something that is not found in all
I have said up to now. That seems a reasonable assumption. But
thence to infer that the something required is something about
me strikes me as unwarranted" (311). And thus the difficulty
of locating the source, the arche of the obligatory force is
subsumed by the narrator under the larger question of
language: the question becomes one of locating or defining the
nature of ethical action in the unnamable’s universe of pure language. I posited in my introduction to this thesis that the ethical component to interpretation is formed by the constant hermeneutical application of action in the space between text and reader. The Beckett text compels its reader continually to negotiate and adjust her ethico-interpretive bearing in her negotiation of the Beckettian aporia: to read Beckett is to engage actively in purposeful interpretive action. This action is impelled by the facticity of the reader/text relationship—the very reality of the hermeneutic encounter compels the hermeneutic dialogue or negotiation. The fundamental premise of ethics is that one inserts oneself into a situation where obligation or action arises actually; i.e. there is some course of action to be decided on.

The Beckett character is often inscribed within the configuration of the ethical or what I have been calling the phronetic moment (phronesis: practical or prudent judgment/action). The common expression of this ethic is the desire to know how to act in and interpret a specific situation: this moment is one I wish to figure as the ethico-hermeneutical moment. I want to pause here and outline the importance of phronesis here as it pertains to The Unnamable and specifically its pertinence to a Gadamerian hermeneutics. Gadamer borrows the concept from Aristotle’s Ethics and draws parallels between ethical action and hermeneutic action using the concept of phronesis as a yoke. In Part II of Truth and
Method Gadamer draws explicitly on the ethical resonance of hermeneutics specifically by reference to the *Ethics*. Aristotle is important to Gadamer's project in that Aristotle figures ethics as a practical response to the task at hand: "But what interests us here is precisely that he [Aristotle] is concerned with reason and with knowledge, not detached from a being that is becoming, but determined by it and determinative of it" (Gadamer 312). Moreover, the ethical action is a practical judgment based explicitly on the exigencies of the immediate context, a context in which full knowledge may not obtain; Aristotle makes the point that ethical action, since it must conform to the task at hand that never fully reveals itself cannot account for the totality of human experience: ethical action situates itself as a practical partial response to a totality which is perhaps beyond immediate comprehension: "For the scientific truth is demonstrable, whereas art and prudence (phronesis) are only concerned with the variable" (Ethics 211). Gadamer writes:

In contrast to the theory of the good based on Plato's doctrine of ideas, Aristotle emphasizes that it is impossible for ethics to achieve the extreme exactitude of mathematics. Indeed to demand this kind of exactitude would be inappropriate. What needs to be done is simply to make an outline and by means of this sketch give some help to moral consciousness. (313)
As ethical knowledge is not "pure" knowledge, so too for Gadamer hermeneutical knowledge is constructed in a balance of practical judgment and incomplete experience:

This is the point at which we can relate Aristotle's analysis of moral knowledge to the hermeneutical problem of the modern human sciences. Admittedly, hermeneutical consciousness is involved neither with technical nor moral knowledge, but these two types of knowledge still include the same task of application that we have recognized as the central problem of hermeneutics. (315)

Gary Madison picks up this line of argument in The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity:

Moreover, unlike theoretical reason, whose purpose is to lead one to an insight into what simply is and which, in principle, exists as what is independently of the knowing subject, practical reason is concerned with all those situations where one must make a choice, produce something, or decide on a course of action, the outcome of which is contingent in that it depends, precisely, on the subject oneself. This is another reason why practical reason should be taken as the model for interpretation, for interpretation too is always a creative business. (34)
The interpretive moment in Beckett is ethical inasmuch as it is often an obligatory moment of compelled action in the face of incomplete or undisclosed knowledge. It is also a moment which may, or may not, have consequences beyond the immediate sphere of the sole actor. The trilogy, however, pares down the act-consequence element of ethics by inscribing its characters within increasingly solipsistic "spaces". The large ethical questions I think the trilogy in toto raises are: Does the ethical moment exist if the actant is isolated purely? What kind of practical judgment is involved in a purely discursive moment? Can the ethical moment be a moment of pure discourse? The question here shares something with Wittgenstein's observation in the Tractatus of "world" existing as the very limits of language: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (5.6); yet for Wittgenstein, as for, I suggest, the unnamable, there is some "truth" in solipsism precisely as the "intending" proposition (or consciousness) is in place (5.62). For Wittgenstein, as for the unnamable, world is a function of the subject, not vice versa: "The subject does not belong to the world; rather it is a limit of the world" (5.632). The responsibility of the reader of The Unnamable is to make sense of the unnamable's semiology in terms of the ethic he creates when he says, to borrow again from the Tractatus, "I am my world" (5.63).

The unnamable articulates himself in a space that perhaps even moves beyond pure solipsism in that there seems even no
"I" to speak of: "I. Who might that be?" (336). The narrator, rather, configures himself as neither one thing nor another; he is a liminal, or more precisely, a hymenal figure:

I’m neither one side not the other, I’m in the middle, I’m the partition, I’ve two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that’s what I feel, myself vibrating, I’m the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don’t belong to either...(383)

Indeed it might be more accurate to posit the unnamable, as he himself will do, as existing in a "world" of pure discourse:

I’m in words, made of words, other’s words, what others, the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words, the whole world is here with me, I’m the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I’m all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder, wherever I go I find me, a particle of me, retrieved, lost, gone astray, I’m all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their setting. (386)'

Thus the question: Whence obligation in this "wurdy-gurdy" (399), this world of pure discourse without ground, without
arche? Despite the obvious totalizing discursivity of the unnamable’s universe—a discursivity that as it is defined here seems to preclude full apprehension of Dasein—the obligation to seek, to find an arche and telos is there: "I’m always seeking something, it’s tiring in the end, and it’s only my beginning" (387). But despite momentary hallucinations of a unitary subject—"there is I, yes, I feel it, I confess, I give in, there is I, it’s essential, it’s preferable" (388)—hypotheses of the obliged "I" give way to hypotheses of the decentered subject: "It has not yet been our good fortune to establish with any degree of accuracy what I am, where I am, whether I am words among words, or silence in the midst of silence, to recall only two of the hypotheses launched in this connexion" (388). And thus the suffering of pure discourse—as the suffering of pure Being—leads the narrator to propose, as solution to the gaps of experience/knowledge, as a phronetic act of judgement and creation, the efficacy of "resolutions" (389):

Make resolutions, while we’re at it, that’s right, resolutely, more resolutions. Make abundant use of the principle of parsimony, as if it were familiar to me, it is not too late. Assume notably henceforward that the thing said and the thing heard have a common source, resisting for this purpose the temptation to call in question the possibility of assuming anything whatever.
Situate this source in me, without specifying where exactly, no finicking, anything is preferable to the consciousness of third parties and, more generally speaking, of an outer world. Carry if necessary this process of compression to the point of abandoning all other possibilities than that of a deaf-wit, hearing nothing of what he says and understanding even less. Evoke at painful junctions, when discouragement threatens to raise its head, the image of a vast cretinous mouth, red, blubber and slobbering, in solitary confinement, extruding indefatigably, with a noise of wet kisses and washing in a tub, the words that obstruct it. Set aside once and for all, at the same time as the analogy with orthodox damnation, all idea of beginning and end. Overcome, that goes without saying, the fatal leaning towards expressiveness. Equate me, without pity or scruple, with him who exists, somehow, no matter how, no finicking, with him whose story this story had the brief ambition to be. Better, ascribe to me a body. Better still, arrogate me a mind. Speak of a world of my own, sometimes referred to as the inner, without choking. Doubt no more. Seek no more. Take advantage of the brand-new soul and substantiality to abandon, with the only possible abandon, deep down within. And finally, these and other decisions having been taken, carry on cheerfully as before. (389-90)
This series of imperatives—compelling whom? the narrator? the reader?—act as performatives, discursively calling into Being that state required through and within which to act in accordance with the narrator's own self-described ethic of obligation. They construct a stability of discourse, an arche of discourse ("the thing said and the thing heard have a common source"); they construct discursively a stability of body and mind; they in fact command discursively the cessation of the aporia that would seem to preclude the ability to act ethically. The unnamable's brutally ironic "Doubt no more" contains the maximum compression of the phronetic act: he has made in this statement an imaginative performative resolution towards a stability of Being, or as Wittgenstein would have it, the propositions the unnamable offers create an imagined "model of reality".

Yet these performatives exist only discursively, and thus the question: Whence obligation in a world of pure discourse? can it seems be answered for the unnamable only negatively: there is no obligation. This answer, however, again begs the question of the narrator's own finely attuned sense of the impetus and obligation to speak, to go on speaking about an obligation without arche, without author-ity, without beginning or end: "Set aside once and for all...all idea of beginning and end". But ethics, as Aristotle astutely noticed, is all about delimiting arche and telos: "For the originative cause [arche] of an action is the purpose [telos] for which it
is done" (*Ethics* 210). The narrator's setting aside of the logic of beginning and end is more than the deconstruction of the origin, more than an inscription of an absence at the centre of structure: it is a paradoxical acknowledgement of an end to the delimiting prescriptions of *arche* and *telos* while maintaining the need for obligatory force, regardless of how the reading or interpreting subject—or indeed how the interpretable situation itself—is figured or (re)inscribed by that obligating force. *The Unnamable*, which thus at once decomposes the subject into various simulacra (Worm, Mahood) and various "pronouns" (404)—and thereby threatens the basis of ethical action by splitting the ethical "actant"—curiously recomposes "it" via the logic and economy of aporetic obligation, aporetic because having no source, being neither internal nor external to the narrator, it being neither one thing nor the other, but still an obligation. It needs to be emphasized that regardless of the effort to rid itself of the logic of beginning and ending, of the logic of the subject, the philosophical basis (*arche*) of the narrator's ethic of suffering (as obligation) will always re-inscribe that which it attempts to "outlive". The very facticity of a sense of obligation—to continue, to express, to suffer—is the inscription of an ethic, and the inscription of an ethic will always threaten to re-inscribe the subject even as the subject places himself under erasure. Edward Said, to return to his *Beginnings*, calls this aporetic moment the "intransitive
It is very much a creature of the mind, very much a paradox, yet also very much a figure that draws special attention to itself. Its existence cannot be doubted, yet its pertinence is wholly to itself. Because it cannot truly be known, because it belongs more to silence than it does to language, because it is what has always been left behind, and because it challenges continuities that go cheerfully forward with their beginnings obediently affixed--it is therefore something of a necessary fiction. (77)

The narrator's will-to-narrate (as a will-to-create)--a will shared in part by Malone--thus has the characteristics both of willed phronetic act, i.e. a discourse creating a possible ethical "world," and of the fragmentive, the partial: it creates a discourse that Gadamer in "Hegel's Dialectics" calls "speculative", discourse which "points to an entirety of truth without being that entirety or stating it" (96), a discourse that must have something of the "silent" about it. We may in fact characterise the entire narrative of the unnamable as constructed on the dialectic of the phronetic and the "speculative": it is in the space between these two poles that the (moribund) ethical energy of the text obtains precisely because the "speculative," i.e., incomplete, nature
of this discourse, continually demands a response, continually demands an active hermeneutic. Thus the unnamable: "I go on as best I can, if it begins to mean something I can't help it" (400); and thus the responsibilities of the story-telling act which composes a unity of discourse and subjectivity even as it must dismantle that unity:

his story the story to be told, but he has no story, he hasn't been in story, it's not certain, he's in his own story, unimaginable, unspeakable, that doesn't matter, the attempt must be made, in the old stories incomprehensibly mine, to find his, it must be there somewhere, it must have been mine, before being his, I'll recognize it, in the end I'll recognize it, the story of the silence that he never left, that I should never have left, that I may never find again, that I may find again, then it will be he, it will be I, it will be the place, the silence, the end, the beginning, the beginning, how can I say it, that's all words, they're all I have. (413; emphasis mine)

And thus we have circled back to the question of ethics in a purely discursive context: ethics, as an orienting response to the vagaries and variabilities of Being, is precisely a fact or, perhaps more radically, a result of being-in-the-world, is precisely the fact of being-in-language. The dynamic response
to the lacunae of Dasein—and I have read the above excerpted passages as provisional phronetic responses—is the formulation of hermeneutic phronesis: the ethic of hermeneutics is an ethic as it orients itself from and towards an interpretable discursive situation, i.e. a situation itself always already polysemous. The logic of this formulation is that any situation is potentially interpretable and hence demanding of an ethical response: the very fact of being-in-the-world (the hermeneutics of Dasein) is necessarily ethical.

My reading of The Unnamable is intended to suggest that the split between the subject and his discourse, instead of negating the possibility or even the premise of ethico-hermeneutic action, itself is productive of it. In fact, the split is what allows me to read the semiology of the text as ethical: the split creates the polysemous nature of the discourse, i.e., creates the very need for interpretation. It inscribes a polyvalent subject confronted with a "world" of pure and hence interpretable discourse. If the ethical situation is in the widest sense "dialogical" in that there must be two components to the ethical and hermeneutical exchange (a thing to oblige, a thing to be obliged; a thing to be interpreted, a thing to interpret), the unnamable has (unwittingly?) created an ethical situation it perhaps cannot even comprehend as ethical in its own self-described solipsism. And thus the narrator's "I can't go on, I'll go on" (414) is the inscription—and perhaps it can only be an
inscription--of a self-imposed ethical obligation that acknowledges itself as a purely discursive act: the only (ethical) response to the "silence" is discourse--"I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any" (414)--because the silence is that which negates the possibility of reaching the (always already dismantled) end: "in the silence you don't know" (414).

The "end" of this discourse of silence is a semiotic that itself demands or "obliges" the reader: it is a semiotic (of "suffering") that is itself ethical as it demands an ethical, i.e., factual, phronetic response from the reader, that is, a response geared towards the present instance of discourse (this entire chapter thus stands as one such response). Such a response, moreover, is not one, I suggest, guided by the theological hermeneutic and promise of the "revelatory" text; rather, the ethical response is more radically one that demands a construction of a paradigm of reading, a "way" or "method" that articulates itself in the balance between the reader's "prejudice" (Vorgriff) and affect of the text. It is a method of reading that is itself speculative precisely as it is "fully unfinished"; it is what Gadamer calls Bildung: a continual process that confirms the exigencies of text as it conforms to that text's own first premises. This is entirely not to say that the reader is "bound" to the text or its reading: the reading takes place "in between" text and reader (as in play), in the interstices of hermeneutical dialogue. It
should be apparent that this situation is as much a
description of the unnamable’s hermeneutic as it is one of the
reader’s: the unnamable in a peculiar way thus confirms, as it
articulates, the hermeneutic circle, which is simply another
way of saying that Beckett’s texts always already inscribe
their readers even as they re-inscribe the basic hermeneutical
question: How does it stand towards me? And thus the response
to the overarching question posed by The Unnamable—whence
ethics in a purely discursive context?—can be answered: in
the reader.
Endnotes

1. This is a thematic present again in *Texts for Nothing* 5:

Now I’m haunted, let them come, one by one, let the last
desert me and leave me empty, empty and silent. It’s they
murmur my name, speak to me of me, speak of a me, let them go
and speak of it to others, who will not believe them either,
or who will believe them too. Theirs all these voices, like a
rattling of chains in my head, rattling to me that I have a
head. (98)

2. Compare Beckett’s discussion of Habit to Coleridge’s
conception of the function of poetry in the *Biographia
Literaria*: poetry “awaken[s] the mind’s attention from the
lethargy of custom” (Chapter 14). In *A Defense of Poetry*
Shelley writes: “Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty
of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were
not familiar” (Adams 503). Brecht’s notion of the function of
the *Verfremdungseffekt* and indeed his dramaturgy in general
are similar to Beckett’s conception of the function of
suffering and Shelley’s theory of the effect of poetry. In *A
Short Organum for the Theatre* Brecht writes:
A representation that alienates is one that allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar...The new alienations [in epic theatre] are only designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today. (192)

Of course all of Coleridge, Shelley, Brecht and Beckett are drawing on a long line of thinkers theorizing the relation of poetry and any "estranged" discourse to revelatory experience. In chapter 22 of the Poetics Aristotle had discussed how metaphor makes the familiar unfamilii; in the Novum Organum (a text surely influential to Brecht) Francis Bacon had discussed the need for "estrangement" in discourse and the "depraved habit" of the understanding which is "necessarily corrupted, perverted, and distorted by daily and habitual impressions" (Quoted in Carlson Theories of the Theatre 385).

3. The unnamable’s talk of the "spirit of system" and "method" recalls Coleridge’s distinction between these two modes of understanding. In "Essays on the Principle of Method" (in Volume One of The Friend) Coleridge posits methodical understanding as related to an active, dynamic, principle of "progressive transition" (457), a principle in some ways linked to the ethos of the fragment, which in its partial presentation of things initiates the active hermeneutic in the
reader, encouraging participation in the progression of understanding. In The Advancement of Learning Bacon writes on the aphorism, a mode of discourse related to the ethos of the fragment; aphorisms "representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to inquire farther" (3:405). Opposed to the principle of method is what Coleridge sometimes calls "system", by which he means a mode of understanding simply articulated as a "dead arrangement" of ideas.

The unnamable, however, seems to view both the spirit of system and the spirit of method as equally productive of stasis: "The thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of system" (292):

And yet I despair, this time, while saying who I am, where I am, of not losing me, of not going from here, of ending here. What prevents the miracle is the spirit of method to which I have perhaps been a little too addicted. (303)

An argument could be made that the unnamable's semiology, in its deliberate removal of any firm narrative signposts, its flouting of any immediately graspable teleology, fits Coleridge's notion of the way in which the discourse of method works. In fact any reading that participates in some way in the constructing of narrative meaning in this text (as in this chapter) is participating in what Coleridge would call a
methodical reading; more precisely, one might posit the unnamable, himself constructed out of a tissue of discourses and himself articulated as a fragment, as a living embodiment of method.

4. Compare to *Texts for Nothing* 6:

Words, mine was never more than that, than this pell-mell babel of silence and words, my viewless form described as ended, or to come, or still in progress, depending on the words, the moments, long may it last in that singular way. (104)
Chapter Six: How It Is

my life last state last version ill-said ill-heard
ill-recaptured ill-murmured in the mud
brief movements of the lower face losses everywhere

-- How It Is

How It Is ties together all the hermeneutic threads that make up the previous novels. It thematizes the questions of the semiotics of repetition, the problematics of temporality, and the integrity of the narrator as written/writing subject, questions that inform to a greater or lesser degree all of Watt, Mercier and Camier, Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable. Where it diverges from the previous texts in the corpus is in its structural arrangement, in its conflating of the teleological impulse—"how it was I quote before Pim with Pim after Pim how it is three parts I say it as I hear it" (7)—with the fracturing effect of parataxis: "instead of ending abandoned I end as tormentor/ the essential would seem to be lacking/ this solitude when the voice recounts it sole means of living it" (129). How It Is is a text that re-writes the notion of narrative even as it presents a self-consciously "linear" narrative in a productively, and paradoxically, paratactical form. Thus, a hermeneutic reading of a text such as How It Is will be as much a hermeneutic of form—
configuration—as it is a hermeneutic of the function of narrative in what may be called a non-discursive or non-narrative semiological context.¹

In this pivotal text Beckett moves from thematizing a particular hermeneutic problem to a more generalized thematization of a hermeneutic of being: the fundamental question this text explores is that of the (hermeneutic) subject articulated in a general economy of suffering. But because How It Is (re)presents itself as an extended paratactical quotation: "how it was I quote" (7), it immediately configures and articulates itself "in" the discursive space of repetition, and thus the entire problematic of the representation of repetition instantiates the difficulty of "locating" the present moment of Being and, more precisely, the present moment of suffering in the narrator’s story. What is at stake in this text of "midget grammar" (76) is the efficacy of representation, the representation of the facticity of suffering in the discursive space of repetition, the space, to borrow from Heidegger’s Being and Time, of "having-been" (388). The crucial question How It Is presents to us is a narratological, thus ultimately a hermeneutical one: when is suffering? I will read How It Is through a matrix of converging hermeneutic lenses all of which touch upon or use as a point of departure this precise thematic of the (a)temporality of suffering. In part one I discuss the semiotics of memory and subjectivity; in part two,
using some aspects of Deleuze's writings on the subject, the
semiotics of desire, the Other; and in part three, using
Blanchot (using Heidegger), the semiotics of death and
writing. All three parts in turn detail the complex relation
between memory, desire, death, and the constitution of the
narrating subject from whom the logic of suffering gathers its
authority: "only one voice here yes mine yes" (145).

I

The question---when is suffering?---is problematized at the
outset of *How It Is* by the configuration of the
speaking/narrating/narrated voice:

past moments old dreams back again as fresh like those
that pass or things things always and memories I say them
as I hear them murmur them in the mud

in me that were without when the panting stops scraps of
an ancient voice in me not mine (7)

The text resurrects again the thematics of voice explored in
*The Unnamable*, the problematic of speaking yet being
simultaneously spoken. Indeed, fixing the precise "ontology"
of the speaker is a concern of a number of critics. Eric P.
Levy in *Beckett and the Voice of Species*, for instance,
figures the narrator unproblematically as the "Bom" named in
the text (84), a gesture that does little to acknowledge the
text's thematization of the very problem of the speaking "I".
In Wandering and F"ome: Beckett's Metaphysical Narrative, Eyal
Amiran chooses rather to see the question of the subject as
one of deciphering a problematic of the Neoplatonic One and
the many: by figuring the question in specifically
metaphysical terms, Amiran, though acknowledging the
polyvocality of the subject, finally inscribes the text within
a philosophical paradigm the "metaphysics" of which the text--
and indeed oeuvre--may in fact resist or nullify. In Beckett's
Fiction: In Different Words, Leslie Hill chooses to let the
narrator remain anonymous or to be effaced entirely in a
manner that simply ignores the difficulty of locating the
subject in the text (140).

Part of my argument in what follows is predicated on the
observation that the subject in this text articulates himself
in a space "ontically" separate from the semiotic space of
memory. The critical readings of How It Is are problematic
because they tend to reify the subject in a textual context
that explicitly resists that reification: to perceive a
subject in this text is more precisely to perceive a
problematic of the subject without memory and thus without
that which constitutes the subject qua subject, as I shall
argue below. The question here in How It Is thus is not one of
the identity of the speaker but of the temporality of the
speaker, because temporality always determines the "being" and
thus the subjectivity of the suffering subject, as Gadamer notes in *Truth and Method*. Commenting on Heidegger's configuration of being in time Gadamer writes: "What being is was to be determined from within the horizon of time. Thus the structure of temporality appeared as ontologically definitive of subjectivity...Heidegger's thesis was that being itself is time" (*Truth and Method* 257). Gadamer goes on to offer a comment on the ontology of the subject that seems to me a superb "definition" of the (non?) ontology of the speaker in *How It Is*, and more precisely, the epistemological position of the speaker who is, in Gadamer's terms, both "knower" and "known": "neither the knower nor the known is 'present-at-hand' in an 'ontic' way, but in a 'historical' one--i.e., they both have the mode of being of historicity" (*Truth and Method* 261).²

The speaker of *How It Is* is acutely aware of himself as an historically located subject, crawling through a phenomenal world--"in the mud" (7)--seemingly untouched by the movements of temporality but at the same time aware of "vast tracts of time" (7). Part of the peculiarity of the speaker--and part of his anxiety as historically located consciousness--is his sense of history continually offset by his overwhelming sense of the intractable present, the unchanging order of the now; this unchanging now, however, is articulated within the logic of repetition and thus confers a specific aporetic onto the present:
here then part one how it was before Pim we follow I quote the natural order more or less my life last state last version what remains bits and scraps I hear it my life natural order more or less I learn it I quote a given moment long past vast stretch of time on from there that moment and following not all a selection natural order vast tracts of time (7)

The present moment that is articulated by its place at the "end" of the vast tract of time, this "last version" that we know is only a last version of an endlessly repeating version, is a moment articulated "vertically" by its awareness of the past "above". In part one of How It Is the speaker articulates a fairly clear dialectic between the linear present now (I say "linear" as a metaphor for the speaker's sense of telos or continuity "in" the vast tracts of time) and the vertically oriented memory of the life "above" in the light. These memories are arranged in or intrude upon the present now as moments of absolute revelation, or to borrow again from Heidegger, aletheia. In fact these memories are more than memories: they are constructed images that "reveal" the space between the now and the then, or the point of the intersection of the two temporalities. I list a series of images:

life in the light first image some creature or other I watched him after my fashion from afar through my spy-
glass sidelong in mirrors through windows at night first image (9)

another image so soon again a woman looks up at me the images come at the beginning part one they will cease I say it as I hear it murmur it in the mud the images part one how it was before Pim I see them in the mud a light goes on they will cease a woman I see her in the mud she sits aloof ten yards fifteen yards she looks up looks at me says at last to herself all is well he is working (10)

the huge head hatted with birds and flowers is bowed down over my curls the eyes burn with severe love I offer her mine pale upcast to the sky whence cometh our help and which I know perhaps even then with time shall pass away (15)

...another image yet another a boy sitting on a bed in the dark or a small old man I can’t see with his head be it young or be it old his head in his hands I appropriate that heart (18)

...another image above in the light you come to a hospital in the dark (22)
I look to me about sixteen and to crown all glorious weather egg-blue sky and scamper of little clouds I have my back turned to me and the girl too whom I hold who holds me by the hand the arse I have (29)

By figuring the subject in the interstices of this vertical-horizontal parataxis (I do not think of the relation as a dialectical one) the text thus metaphorizes, or doubles the metaphorization of, temporality and being spatially in a manner that estranges—and perhaps parodies—the epistemology and metaphorization of time, space, and being. The speaker of How It Is finds himself (or creates himself, or is created) in the curious semiological position of "being" at the "point" intersecting temporal-"horizontal" ("vast tracts of time") and temporal-"vertical" lines:

life life the other above in the light said to have been mine on and off no going back up there no question no one asking that of me never there a few images on and off in the mud earth sky a few creatures in the light some still standing (8)

The peculiar position of this speaker is thus to have lived a life and to be living a life: the life above in the "light" is
one so distant, so remote as to be a completely different level or order of Being. And the life below now in the mud is one of an eternal present continually aware of its position on a repeated and repeating continuum. The contradiction or aporia in this temporal position defines the speaker "precisely" as living in a repeated present moment continually (un)aware of the repeatable past, as Ursula K. Hiese notes in "Erzählzeit and Postmodern Narrative": the "logic" of repetition here configures a contradiction in and at the level of the textual representation of temporality (262). The textual now simultaneously configures itself as quoted then. Hiese notes that the reader must keep both temporalities in view as s/he proceeds through the text and that s/he "must understand it [the text] as a flickering, an alternation of both...[B]oth readings logically exclude each other and yet are simultaneously present" (262). Defining the present moment of suffering thus becomes a problem of divining the presentness of the past, or the pastness of the present.

As they intersect with the present moment—and narrative—of the now, the images seem to offer an alternative narrative; they seem to articulate an alternative plane of being that contrasts the "history" of a past life to the present one in the mud. However, this doubling produces an effect that needs to be understood as more than merely a conflation of past and present temporalities into one discursive semiotic zone. To see an alternate narrative in
these images is to go some ways towards "naturalizing" the present moment of the narrating "I": to place these images hermeneutically in "dialogue" with the present moment is to place the present moment--itself perhaps unlocatable--within an arbitrary frame of understanding, as if, as has been suggested, this "now" is the dim "afterlife" to the life constructed or suggested in the images. ³ To embrace such a reading is productive of a number of difficulties. First, it tends to elide the problematic of temporality into a clear binary of past and present, a binary which the logic of repetition consistently threatens to deconstruct. Second, these images instantiate a fairly clear and readable conventional "life" (in fact those critics given to biographical readings will find a mine of detail from Beckett's own life in these images), a conventional life that stands in absolute--one might say generic--antithesis to the absurd present moment, a moment so improbable as to articulate itself on the boundary line of allegory. The arrangement of these images--images of boyhood, motherhood, love, death--alongside the present now produces a bizarre and uncanny generic struggle between memory and allegory which itself problematizes the notion of clear relations between the image and the speaker, between the past and the present. The point to foreground here is again how the text--formally--problematizes the notions of relation and representation, how even the discursive articulation of memory itself is
productive of a distance in the knowing re-membering subject: memory qua memory "exists" in another semiotic plane, indeed perhaps in a different semiosis altogether. If the subject--reading, writing, knowing--is the product of memory, is, in a sense, a function of memory, we have here at least a split subject, or perhaps even more radically, an unknowable because unknowing subject.

I have posited this text as articulating the suffering subject in the zone or space of "repetition". The narrator's discourse is generative--"a word from me and I am again" (26; emphasis mine)--but productive of an unknowing/unknowable subject because beyond, or is it below?, memory: he inhabits, in his own perfect words, "an under-earth where I am inconceivable" (37). The text's entire problematic can I think be filtered through this subjective matrix: to exist beyond or below memory is to exist in a semiosis without a subject, as subjectivity--the sense of one's own being or selfhood--is itself the product of memory, itself in turn functioning semiotically within time. And thus we have circled back to the primary question: when is suffering? If it is time that articulates the subject, or articulates the grounds for understanding the subject, we have to recognize how How It Is, as it frames itself in repetition, problematizes this understanding of subjectivity and Being. The narrator presents his text as extended quotation and thus immediately figures it as simulacrum: "my life the last state last version ill-said
ill-heard ill-repeated ill-murmured in the mud" (7). But, as simulacrum—as repeated "version"—it resists temporality. The original version of events is placed in infinite regress even as the "present" moment is enveloped by the logic of the quotation: "I quote the natural order more or less my life...I quote a given moment long past vast stretch of time" (7). Thus to locate a "given moment" (of suffering) is only always already to locate its simulacrum, its quotation within a structure itself functioning from the "unthinkable first to the no less unthinkable last" (140) as extended "inconceivable" repetition.

II

The subject's status as simulacrum thus inaugurates a seemingly unresolvable ontological problem in How It Is: to apprehend the subject as simulacrum is, as Jean Baudrillard would put it, to displace the real, the real from and to which suffering qua suffering must orient itself. In Simulations, Baudrillard writes of the simulacrum: "It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double" (4). The simulacrum as "image" is always a "murderer of the real" (10) as it reduces the real by simulation into signs of the real, a "radical negation of the sign as value" (11). At this point in my analysis of How It Is
the subject has been articulated as simulacrum, as repeated version of itself and thus as an instantiation of an unlocatable moment of suffering. But this is perhaps only one half of the story in How It Is because part two explicitly dramatizes the subject as a desiring subject, a subject in relation to an Other that acts as inscribable/torturable body. I wish to argue that the narrator here cannot be left simply as aporetic subject-as-simulacrum: it is precisely the facticity of desire that threatens to recompose the narrating subject, to make him "conceivable" again. Indeed, the text's instantiation of desire can be read as a reconfiguration of what Baudrillard would call the (hallucinatory) power of representation. If simulation, or the order of simulacra, inaugurates a negation of the sign as value, representation initiates a metaphysics of presence, an equivalence of the sign and the real. I want to argue in what follows that the body of the (torturable) Other functions as the sign of the real in How It Is, functions as the mean by which to recognize the subject in a metaphysics of presence. Ultimately my suggestion is that the narrator of How It Is articulates himself in the aporetic interstices between representation and simulation, always seeing himself shimmering between the real and its murderous image.

As he places the subject in this paratactical "abyss" of self-consciously produced texuality, Beckett thematizes the process of desire, desire for the Other as articulable text
and as inscribable body through which to (self)create the writing subject; the narrator attempts to "conceive" the writing subject through the written body of the Other. I borrow from Gilles Deleuze here, who articulates a theory of desire in his *Dialogues*. Desire for Deleuze in not articulated in a "lack":

Do you realize how simple a desire is? Sleeping is a desire. Walking is a desire. Listening to music, or making music, or writing, are desires...Old age also is a desire. Even death. Desire never needs interpreting, it is that which experiments...it is objected that by releasing desire from lack and law, the only thing we have left to refer to is a state of nature, a desire that would be natural and spontaneous reality. We say quite the opposite: *desire truly exists when assembled or machined*. You cannot grasp or conceive of a desire outside a determinate assemblage. (136)

It is Deleuze's notion of the assembled or machined nature of desire that I find fruitful for a reading of *How It Is*, a text transparently "machined"—as self-conscious articulation of process: "similarly number 814326 may know by repute number 814345 number 814344 hving spoken to him to number 814343..." (120). Moreover, the text, in its obsessive concern with process over ground (through the mud) seems the perfect emblem
of Deleuze and Guattari's notion, articulated in A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, of the "territorial assemblage" (503). Thus, I think we can account for the narrative qua process and configuration in territory, as an articulating expression of desire purely. It is the narrator who is "signifying again I'm subject to these whims" (88); it is his "composition" (52) that orders things; it is he who has the power to "efface myself behind my creature" (52). Most purely—and it is "sadism pure and simple" (63)—it is the narrator who uses Pim's body as a space for his "literature", a space to write the moment towards death (we will return to Blanchot below): "with the nail then of the right index I carve and when it breaks or falls until it grows again with another on Pim's back intact at the outset from left to right and top to bottom as in our civilisation I carve my Roman capitals" (70). This moment of inscription on the body, as in Kafka's "The Penal Colony", establishes writing as profoundly an articulation of power; it is the writing that deictically "fixes" this particular victim in the muddy now of this atemporality, this memory-less space:
the gloom HERE HERE to the bone the nail breaks quick
another in the furrows HERE HERE howls thump the whole
face in the mud mouth nose no more breath and
howls...(96)

In Kafka, however, there is a discernable difference in
"ontology" between the punisher and the punished. In How It Is
the punisher in his turn will move into the position of
punished, but, more importantly, his position as memory-less
subject is precisely that of his victim. He speaks as much
about himself as his victim here:

they are not memories no he has no memories no nothing to
prove he was ever above no in the places he sees no but
he may have been yes skulking somewhere yes hugging the
walls yes by night yes he can’t affirm anything no deny
anything no so one can’t speak of memories no but at the
same time one can speak of them yes (97)

There is in this passage a curious and paradoxical conflation
of desires: the desire to fix the victim in memory-less space,
and the desire, it seems, to access through the aporia of the
now the impossible possibility of memory, of being. We can, I
think, understand this moment as what Deleuze in the Logic of
Sense describes as a "paradox of becoming":

Becoming unlimited comes to the ideational and incorporeal event, with all of its characteristic reversals between future and past, active and passive, cause and effect, more or less, too much and not enough, already and not yet. The infinitely divisible event is always both at once. It is eternally that which has just happened and that which is about to happen, but never that which is happening (to cut too deeply and not enough). The event, being itself impassive, allows the active and the passive to be interchanged more easily, since it is neither the one nor the other, but rather their common result (to cut—to be cut). (8)

Deleuze's talk of the cut, being cut, is uncannily thematized in *How It Is* in this interchangeability of the active and the passive, the victim and the victimizer, an interchangeability that occurs in the peculiar temporality of both past and future, the temporality, that is, of repetition. What charges the moment of the "event" of torture, the event of the "Othering" of the Other, which reifies the subject as equally Other—and thus as the "same" to borrow from Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*—is that the event of torture is the event of desire:

soon unbearable thump on skull long silence vast stretch
of time soon unbearable opener arse or capitals if he has
lost the thread YOUR LIFE CUNT ABOVE CUNT HERE CUNT as it comes bits and scraps all sorts not so many and to conclude happy end cut thrust DO YOU LOVE ME...(75)

The speaker's unbearable question here "DO YOU LOVE ME" seems unanswerable. Its importance is in its asking, the positing of a question this muddy, tortured context renders perversely hideous, hideous not because of the brutal conflation of love and torture, but because the question threatens to reconstitute the subject in a space where the subject is always already "inconceivable". The uncanny effect of the question is thus produced in this perfect distillation of desire. But desire, as Deleuze suggests, "cannot be attained except at the point where someone is deprived of the power of saying 'I'. Far from directing itself toward an object, desire can only be reached at the point where someone no longer searches for or grasps an object any more than he grasps himself as subject" (113). Beckett's narrator thus articulates himself in what may be called, if the logic of Deleuze's formulation is followed, the "half-space" of desire. His is an aporetic desire because, as I have outlined, he inhabits a memory-less and thus a subject-less space, a perfect space, perhaps, for this Deleuzian desire. But his overdetermined question, DO YOU LOVE ME, a question containing and reconstituting the subject-object predication (YOU/ME), indeed, a question only able to be asked within an a priori
posed subject-object epistemology, threatens to reconstitute the Other and thus the subject even as it acknowledges the impossibility of such a containment.

III

And indeed part three of *How It Is* seems to thematize precisely this reification of the subject-less subject, this "voice no objection back at last a voice back at last in my mouth my mouth" (106), recording "how it was" (103) in these "indelible traces" (104) of becoming in the mud. Here the speaker still feels the "want of memory" (107) and still articulates his story—and the narrator is a teller of stories—in the space of repetition: "another story leave it dark no the same story not two stories leave it dark" (109). But it is a moment of repetition that still fails to mark a progress from or to anything, fails to articulate itself, precisely, as difference. Repetition here articulates itself always in the now, despite the narrator’s insistence on the before Pim, with Pim, after Pim structure: "at the instant I leave Bem another leaves Pim and let us be at that instant one hundred thousand strong then fifty thousand departures fifty thousand abandoned no sun no earth nothing turning the same instant always everywhere" (112). This is a "machined" space of desire where desire is perhaps even without knowledge of itself precisely because it never moves from something to something. In this half-space of desire even acknowledgement
of the facticity of desire seems erroneous: "no one here knows himself it's the place without knowledge" (123), "the essential would seem to be lacking" (129); but this lack does not itself become the impetus for desire but simply demarcates the space to mark that lack.

But the narrator of How It Is is, as he himself acknowledges, a teller of stories in this curious half-space of desire that is also, to borrow from Blanchot and Benjamin, death's space. The story the narrator tells is one articulated by its precise awareness of its own inability to be told, a tale, in a sense, dead before living because non-signifying: "of this old tale quaqua on all sides then in me bits and scraps try and hear a few scraps two or three each time per day and night string them together make phrases more phrases the last how it was after Pim how it is something wrong there..." (107). The refrain "something wrong there", one in fact running throughout the text, acts to signal the narrator's own distance from the facticity of the story he tells. There may be, as he says, "reason in me yet" (111), but the "old tale" he tells, paratactically fractured beyond reckoning--a fracturing perfectly reflective of the narrator's own subjectivity--seems beyond the pale of reason because beyond the possibility of telling. The narrator here in How It Is is thus an inhabitant of precisely the same semiotic space of the unnamable: his discourse, self or "Other" created, is what functions to encode his sense of self, is
what articulates him as subject. As that discourse disintegrates or, as is the case here in *How It Is*, as the discourse moves paradoxically towards death (paradoxically because how can a generative discourse record its own end?), the anxiety of non-being is articulated. But it is precisely the figure of death itself that (re)composes the subject in his being-towards-death even as it threatens the end of discourse.

I have noted previously the relation between Malone as "playful" subject and death, suggesting that the stories he tells "rehearse", or attempt to rehearse, the death—i.e., the moment of non-being—he so desires: death for Malone becomes the ultimate object, and thus it tempers, and authorizes, his narrative project. The relation between storyteller and death in *How It Is* has altered with the curious alteration of the subject. As I posited above, the question DO YOU LOVE ME recomposes the storyteller as it reifies the subject "via" the "creation" of the new subject-object relation; moreover, the question, so strikingly "real" (because so strikingly conventional), is an uncanny interloper in this half-lit world where the logic of love seems so absurdly out of place. I want to suggest that the "figure" of death here operates in a similar way. There is a sense in which the narrator's utter fear of death—"screams I SHALL DIE" (147)—seems redundant because the story he himself articulates, in which this utter anxiety is enunciated, is told in the space of repetition and
thus suggests that to die is merely to die again; more crucially, this anxiety is always already an anticipation of the subject as subject-ready-to-die, and thus as, at least partially, constituted being. But to suffer, to die, in How It Is is to suffer and die in an unlocatable temporality and thus is to die in paradox, for death, as Heidegger reminds us, only makes sense in a temporal condition. It is, as Heidegger notes, death that functions to encode the understanding of the present moment of Dasein: death as event in futurity composes our sense of now, even our sense as subject: "...we must characterize Being towards death as a Being towards a possibility—indeed, towards a distinctive possibility of Dasein itself" (305).

Blanchot continues from Heidegger and writes in The Space of Literature: "Having death within reach, docile and reliable, makes life possible, for it is exactly what provides air, space, free and joyful movement: it is possibility" (97). Death for Blanchot, and indeed Heidegger, is the Other for Deleuze: the possible. But Blanchot theorizes the relation between writing and death that also preoccupied Beckett and thus concerns the narrator here in How It Is. Blanchot: "Death is...from the start linked to the movement, so difficult to bring to light, of the artistic experience" (124):

The search for a death that would be mine sheds light, thanks to the obscurity of its paths, upon precisely what
is difficult in artistic "realization"...Death must exist for me not only at the last moment, but as soon as I begin to live and in life's intimacy and profundity. Death would thus be part of existence, it would draw life from mine, deep within. It would be made of me and, perhaps, for me, as a child is the child of its mother.

(125)

And indeed the narrator of How It Is feels the enormity of the pressure of death on and in his narrative: his awareness of death, however, has none of the calm of a Rilke or a Mallarmé, or indeed of a B. ...hot theorising death through Rilke or Mallarmé. It is the sheer terror of non-being that recomposes the subject, just as the impossibility of losing the self in narrative recomposes Malone:

so things may change no answer end no answer I may choke no answer sink no answer sully the mud no more no answer the dark no answer trouble the peace no more no answer the silence no answer die no answer DIE screams I MAY DIE screams I SHALL DIE screams good (147; emphasis mine).

Indeed, we might posit that it is the utter fear of death, precisely as it recomposes the subject, that composes the subject's sense of himself as narrator/writer: it seems that it is precisely the anxiety produced by the thought of the end
of life—"when the panting stops and this voice to have done with this voice namely this life" (144)—that leads the narrator to deny his status merely as recording "scribe" and assert his anxious primacy as fully articulating voice: "yes my voice yes mine yes not another's no mine alone yes sure yes" (146). Like Benjamin who in "The Story-teller" writes, "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death" (94), the narrator of How It Is finds his final authority as he writes the moment towards death. The sign "Death" is encoded by the narrator as a sign of the real and thus instantiates an epistemological particularity in this general economy of repetition and simulation: death particularizes and reifies a subject who can perhaps only understand death as simulation, as repeated figure of consolidation.

But, as is true for a great number of Beckett's texts, the final words of the novel threaten this re-constituted subject within the aporia of repetition, or more precisely, the aporia of the repetition of authorial denial. Indeed, it is precisely from within the space of the fear of death, with its seeming concomitant reconstitution of the subject as one-who-shall-die, that the narrator articulates what may be seen as the typical Beckettian narrative/hermeneutic aporia, an aporia articulated most clearly in Molloy and Mercier and Camier. He denies his narrative and thus denies the facticity of suffering:
all these calculations yes explanations yes the whole story from beginning to end yes completely false yes that wasn’t how it was no not at all no how then no answer how was it then no answer HOW WAS IT screams good there was something yes but nothing of all that no all balls from start to finish yes this voice quaqua yes all balls yes only one voice here yes mine yes when the panting stops yes (144-45)

This final denial—which may in fact itself be denied in the final lines of the text: "good good end at last of part three and last that’s how it was end of quotation after Pim how it is"(147)—throws into suspicion the constitution of the subject even as it curiously constitutes him alone, but singular, in his solitude. I have attempted to suggest, following Deleuze and Blanchot, following Heidegger, that it is the categories of love and death that (re)constitute the subject without memory: as they place the subject in the machined assemblage of desire these categories always offer the narrator his subjectivity. Yet the detailed, complicated, machine of process of victim/victimizer is denied in the final lines of the text and thus the facticity of suffering as desire too is denied:
never crawled no in an amble no right leg right arm push pull ten yards fifteen yards no never stirred no never made to suffer no never suffered no answer NEVER SUFFERED no never abandoned no never was abandoned no so that’s life here no answer THAT’S MY LIFE HERE screams good (146)

And thus the question that heads this discussion is doubled and doubly difficult to answer (perhaps there is indeed "no answer"). As a simulation, and in repetition, the suffering moment is (at least) doubled and endlessly unlocatable. And thus as suffering is denied here in the final lines the question is begged but functions to mask in anxiety the facticity of suffering even in its denial. Death--"I SHALL DIE"--would seem to reconstitute the suffering moment and thus the suffering subject, but it too is (at least) doubled as the narrative repeats again its own state as repeated simulacrum: "that’s how it was end of quotation after Pim how it is" (147). And the final three words place the narrator at the present unlocatable moment, again: how it is: comment c’est/commencez/commencer. We can perhaps read this final reversal as what Heidegger calls a "falling":

As falling, everyday Being-towards-death is a constant fleeing in the face of death. Being-towards-the-end has the mode of evasion in the face of it--giving new
explanation for it, understanding it inauthentically, and concealing it. Factically one's own Dasein is always dying already; that is to say, it is in a Being-towards-its-end. And it hides this fact from itself by recointing "death" as just a "case of death" in Others—an everyday occurrence which, if need be, gives us assurance still more plainly that "oneself" is still "living" (298)

To begin (commencer) again in the "how it is" (comment c'est) is not to face and inscribe the present moment of death or non-being, but is to place the subject in a simulacrum-space that simply repeats the assembled machine of desire, perhaps a desire towards death. The constant movement of this text thus is the constant movement towards nullification, a movement that simultaneously nullifies and reconstitutes the narrating subject as desiring subject in a space where he both is and is not, again.

IV

I conclude this study with my reading of How It Is because it seems to function as both end and turning point in Beckett's oeuvre. It signals the end of the "novel", the "assassination" of the form as A. Alvarez puts it in his Samuel Beckett, and a turn into a prose that articulates itself in a more "minimalist", compressed semiosis. But in its extended thematization of repetition, How It Is offers itself
as a retrospective (meta)hermeneutic of the previous novels, novels in one way or another participating in its construction. *How It Is* is an extended and microscopic meditation on the semiotics of the subject and thematizes the subject’s intimate relation to memory, desire, and writing. But what I think it most powerfully suggests, even as it places the subject in what I call its "simulacrum-space" or its "half-space" of desire, is the power of the writing self, the power of the subject’s generative discourse. Beckett’s narrators are often seen as being in some way passive victims of an extra-subjective ordering force (the unnamable) or the victims of spiritual or mental defect that renders their discourse and ontology suspect (Watt). It is I think crucial to a reading of *How It Is*, and indeed to the entire oeuvre, to keep in mind the facticity of the narrator, his/its indomitable will-to-narrate, to interpret, to know. It is perhaps too simple to remind the reader that it is the narrating subject in *How It Is* who writes his being-towards-death, who, despite what seems the eternal return of his text-as-quotation, recomposes himself by writing his assemblage of desire, his memory, his death. Indeed, we might read the recorso structure of the narrator’s being (as writing) as a perverse desire to write the moment towards death, endlessly.

It is, at any rate, crucial to notice how each of the novels immediately prior to *How It Is* in turn problematizes the notions of endings: *Molloy* seems to suggest an endlessly
circular structure of hermeneutical pursuit, Malone Dies suggests the impossibility of ending, as does The Unnamable. Most commentators see these tautologies or aporias as symptomatic or at least productive of a kind of absolute ontological despair, primarily, I suggest, because most critics seem endlessly caught up in what Derrida would call the "metaphysics" of the telos structure, telos leading toward the end, the end in turn signifying enlightenment, finality, perhaps the end of becoming. I have a different view of the Beckettian end, the end in perfect emblem in How It Is. I see Beckett's ends, as they place the subject "back" at the beginning, as curious spaces of empowerment: where to end in the ideologico-religious universe of Beckett would be to end without enlightenment, to end without, as it were, ending. Beckett's narrators reconfigure their endings always as beginnings, placing the subject, even as aporetic or decomposing, back at the moment of his own initial articulation. The narrator's final "how it is" in How It Is, like Moran's "It was not midnight. It was not raining", or the unnamable's "I'll go on", more than instantiations of the treadmill of Dasein, recomposes the beginnings of narrative as the beginning of Being, and thus as the beginning of signification.
Endnotes

1. Ricoeur notes in "The Narrative Function" that the act of narration, as well as reading, is articulated precisely by the narrator's and reader's ability to balance the logic of sequence against the logic of configuration:

But the activity of narrating does not consist simply in adding episodes to one another; it also constructs meaningful totalities out of scattered events. This aspect of the act of narrating is reflected, on the side of following a story, in the attempt to 'grasp together' successive events. The act of narrating, as well as the corresponding act of following a story, therefore require that we are able to extract a configuration from a succession" (279).

But what happens when that configuration is always already a configuration? It is precisely the tension produced as the narrator articulates himself in the interstices of telos and the logic of the fragment that defines the narrating subject here as aporetic.

Of course not all commentators see the problem of parataxis in How It Is in these terms. In Understanding Samuel Beckett, Alan Astro sees the paratactical structure of the text not as productive of a specifically hermeneutic problematic. Parataxis is for Astro a purely mimetic
reflection of the mind's processes: "Beckett in *How It Is* might have gotten far closer to the reality of our thought processes, which are characterized not only by flow but also by gaps. Thus it might be the careful imitation of thought that makes this text so difficult" (105).

2. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer writes:

   Moreover, the nature of memory is not rightly understood if it is regarded as merely a general talent or capacity. Keeping in mind, forgetting, and recalling belong to the historical constitution of men and are themselves part of his history and his Bildung... It is time to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded merely as a psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man. (15-16)

For Gadamer, memory is a crucial element in the constitution of the subject *qua* thinking subject: "The process of thought begins with something coming into our mind from our memory" (425).

3. Francis Doherty in *Samuel Beckett* calls these images "retrospective flashes of life" (120) and thus confuses the text's confusion of the relation between past and present. In *Samuel Beckett: A New Approach*, G.C. Barnard suggests that the
images construct a memory of past characters such as Sapo and Malone: *How It Is* thus becomes a refrain to the trilogy.

4. I follow Gilles Deleuze here who in *The Logic of Sense* defines the simulacrum as built "upon a disparity or upon a difference. It internalizes a dissimilarity" (258); the simulacrum is not a copy (of a copy) but an "image without resemblance" (257).

5. In *Frescoes of the Skull: The Late Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*, John Pilling writes: "Part two of *How It Is* is Beckett's most sustained attempt to demolish the distinction subject and object that has intrigued him all his life" (70). The deconstruction of the subject/object opposition of Molloy notwithstanding, I think Pilling somewhat overstates the matter here: it is precisely the relation between desiring subject and inscribable object that is at the heart of the matter.

6. It is tempting to read *How It Is* in part as a kind of political or artistic allegory on the ethics of torture as an ethics of creation, indeed, as Susan Brienza does in *Samuel Beckett's New Worlds*: "Here the situation of all men, and in particular the artist, is presented through an allegory of tormentors and victims either languishing in solitude or locked together in pain." (88). I have attempted to suggest in
my previous chapters (see especially chapter one) that such ready allegory can only serve to halt the semiotic process of the text, but I am in full sympathy with the temptation of allegory here in *How It Is*, a text that, at least in one semiotic zone, seems to articulate itself at the boundary of allegory. Why I am in some sympathy with Brienza's allegory is that her frame--like the frame of allegory of reading, for instance--at least acknowledges what I have been calling throughout this project the facticity of the text: her allegory acknowledges the facticity of writing and thus orients itself partially towards the actualities and exigencies of text and textuality. However, Brienza's argument tends again to reify the subject: the fractured semiosis of the narrating subject in *How It Is* is recomposed retrospectively via the economy of allegory. The narrating subject now is the artist and thus the entire epistemono-ontological problematics of the subject is elided.

7. Deleuze and Guattari write: "Every assemblage is basically territorial. The first concrete rule for assemblages is to discover what territoriality they envelop, for there always is one: in their trash can or their bench, Beckett's characters stake out a territory" (503).

8. In "The Novel as Polylogue" Julia Kristeva notes the relation between language and the subject and suggests that a
"shattering of language is really a shattering of the body" (162). I have noted that Beckett's narrators function as discourse, and thus Kristeva's notion here seems perfectly applicable.

9. In The Logic of Sense Deleuze writes that the Other is the "expression of a possible world" (61).
Conclusion

The Dialogical Subject in *Endgame* and the Second Trilogy


---Worstward Ho

I want to recall Roman Ingarden's anxiety over the post-Realist texts' articulation of what he calls the "regional essence of reality" in this final section of my study. In *The Literary Work of Art* he writes:

In principle, there can be literary works which do not trouble themselves at all with staying within the bounds of a particular type of object; but precisely because of this, they can make a particular aesthetic impression by representing a world that is actually impossible or one that is full of contradictions, going beyond the limits established by the regional essence of reality. We are then dealing with a grotesque dance of impossibilities (einem grotesken Tanz von Unmöglichkeiten). To what extent such an "impossible" world can be exhibited, and what aesthetic value qualities and values it affords, are questions that introduce entirely new points of view,
which without doubt require strictly regulated bounds for
the allowable completion of the spots of indeterminacy.
(253)

Part of the purpose of this study has been to theorize the
nature of reading (and its concomitant theorizing) in its
relation to the novels of Samuel Beckett, novels that
articulate themselves precisely in this space of impossibility
that Ingarden posits. Such a reading thus instantiates a
curious relation between itself and the text that, as I have
been at some pains to suggest, often articulates itself in an
already implicit self-hermeneutic. The preamble of The
Unnamable is perhaps the most striking example of an extended
(self)hermeneutic prologue, a prologue providing the key
thematics of, for instance, subjective locus ("Where now?"),
temporality ("When now?") and the logic of beginning ("How
proceed?"). What is produced by the hermeneutic reader of
Beckett—that reader attuned to the specific ways in which
Beckett’s texts engage specific hermeneutical questions—is
interpretation always aware of its peculiar simultaneity with
the "originary" text, always aware of itself as, essentially,
a simulacrum of the text because interpretation, in the
exegetical sense of the term, is something perhaps always
already anticipated and neutered by the metahermeneutic text.
Indeed, simulacra of the originary text are perhaps all that
any fundamental reader of Beckett can produce, aware as she is
that the text renders allegorical interpretation ontologically if not epistemologically suspect, perhaps—and this is the crucial point—as suspect as the originary text itself.

And thus I end this study of Samuel Beckett’s early to middle novels with as many caveats as firm conclusions. Indeed, the very notion of coming to a conclusion in Beckett seems patently absurd, out of harmony with the reason or logic of the Beckettian aporia or paradox. The almost conventional aporia of the Beckettian conclusion, from the logical contradiction of Moran’s "It was not raining" to the unnamable’s "You must go on. I can’t go on. I’ll go on" (by now a touchstone of the Beckettian problematic), to the aporia of the speaker’s denial of his narrative in How It Is, articulates the ending, indeed like the beginning, as a problematic rather than definitional threshold. Endings aside, we notice perhaps more fundamentally that the hermeneutic semiosis of each text precludes the coming to a conclusion so vital for the allegorical—what I have called the "hermetic"—hermeneutic. Each text has instantiated a particular hermeneutic problem: Watt, the function of "appropriation" and phronesis; Mercier and Camier, the relation between narrative, epistemology and the "dialogical" relation between seemingly disparate semiotic "zones"; Molloy, the function and elision of the dialogical principle in the process of coming to an understanding; The Unnamable, the problematic of the definitional threshold of beginning as hermeneutic obligation;
How It Is, the function (or effect) of the repeated scene of hermeneutic suffering. If there is an overarching hermeneutic economy at work in these texts it would be that of the dialogical function, that function vital to the scene of (self)interpretation. Each text, whether in its particular textual economy, or as it obliges the hermeneutic reader, instantiates the dialogical principle if only to deconstruct it. Fixing the "subjectivity" of the hermeneutic speaker of the Beckett text, that subjectivity fundamentally dependant precisely on establishing itself in (aporetic) dialogue, thus proves ultimately impossible as the voice of the subject is itself, to glance at my title, "impossible". Another way perhaps of understanding this impossibility--indeed an impossibility that I argue is the basis of the purest possibility of Being--is as a kind of re-articulation of what Gadamer would call hermeneutic "openness." Each hermeneutic of each text articulates the interpretation in what Gadamer would call a fundamental "openness" rather than in a system of closure: indeed, a Gadamerian reading of the interpretive experience absolutely emphasizes the openness of the experience as it is here that the true hermeneutic self is revealed or experiences phusis (self-emergence). Thus, the "impossible" problematic of speaking, of being spoken, of speaking to, still articulates these texts, still places them firmly within a hermeneutic tradition which emphasizes the facticity and openness of dialogue--however defined and
articulated—as the grounds (arche) of meaning. This problematic of the aporetic dialogue is continually thematized in dramatic texts concurrent with the trilogy and How It Is, especially Endgame, and in the later prose narratives as ill seen ill said, Worstword Ho, and especially Company.

I want to spend some time here examining the process of the instantiation of dialogue in these texts to explore how this thematic articulates, or is articulated in, the later texts. As a drama, Endgame articulates itself in a different semiotic context from the novels, but Beckett's profound concern with the dialogical principle still remains, remains even more important given the aesthetic context that traditionally privileges dialogue above all else. I would suggest that Endgame is an elaborate exploration of the absence of the dialogical function, that function that works, as Gadamer would have it, in the "in-between" stage of hermeneutical understanding. There is of course dialogue in the play in the mundane sense of the word—and it is dialogue, as Clov suggests, that keeps Hamm "here" (58)—but as Clov also quite rightly suggests, the words making up that discourse may no longer have any meaning: "I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent" (44). 1 Without a constitutive language, "world" cannot be disclosed, dialogue cannot be grounded or even posited. In the face of this hermeneutic degree-zero semiology, the characters, and especially Hamm,
take refuge in narrative as a way, perhaps, to facilitate the
dissipation of the exhausted self that can never achieve its
end(game) in this endlessly repeated and endlessly "corpsed"
(30) world; yet precisely as narrative functions
hermeneutically and epistemologically, it also allows for—
perhaps by definition inaugurates—the appearance of the
possibility of teleological structuration and of "order". The
reader of *Endgame* thus has to make sense of the fact that
hermeneutics—the possibility of discovering or stumbling on
"meaning" ("We’re not beginning to...to...mean something?"
[32])—is something, as is often demonstrated in the play, to
be derided or even feared, as it serves as a kind of spectre,
reminding the characters of their infinite remove from the
real of significance. The opposition of Being-in-narrative
and Being-present (onstage, in "life" now) reveals a secondary
opposition between the hermeneutic of narrative and the
hermeneutics of Being. *Endgame* ultimately threatens to
decompose the Heideggerean notion of hermeneutics as the
hermeneutics of Being precisely by delineating two distinct
semiological zones through which the hermeneutic function
operates.

And it is precisely this split between modes of being,
between an existence now—in the degree-zero semiology of the
present—and the existence then—that moment retrievable
through narrative—that instantiates the primary dialogical
function in *Endgame*, that function that operates not, as we
might expect, in the exigencies of exchanged communication, but in the "resurrection" of the past through narrative, acts of narrative which compel the teller into an active, concretizing role. Hamm's central narrative of the beggar is the clearest and most important example of how the dialogical function in the play proper is subtended into one speaker. This narrative, more than a mere self-consciously undermining metanarrative, attempts to instantiate the "past" within the present instance of discourse via Hamm's own resurrection of the dialogue. He begins, as the narrative unfolds, to take on the voice of the beggar, to "appropriate"--in the hermeneutical sense of the word--the text of the past, to in a sense lose his own subjective fixity in the dialogical exchange. Consider the multiple roles played by Hamm in the following:

It was then he took the plunge. It's my little one, he said. Tssts, a little one, that's bad. My little boy, he said, as if the sex mattered. Where did he come from? He named the hole. A good half-day on horse. What are you insinuating? The place is still inhabited? No, not a soul, except himself and the child--assuming he existed. Good. I enquired about the situation at Kov, beyond the gulf. Not a sinner. Good. And you expect me to believe you have left your little one back there, all alone, and alive into the bargain? Come now! (52)
This sequence instantiates and highlights precisely the dialogical function that is missing from the quotidian linguistic exchanges of Hamm, of Clov, of the parents. It is a complex discursive play-within-a-play that highlights the absent hermeneutical function of dialogue in the play proper. Hamm here "plays" both parts of himself years previously and of the beggar; he appropriates the voice of the beggar in order to concretize him on stage: "It's my little one, he said" (52). The profound irony of the narrative is that it preserves a more "real" sense of "being" than does the stage business of the "real" play world. This effect is achieved primarily by the emotional resonance of the narrative—a resonance that carries through to the end of the play— but also by the fact of its having been framed as a repeated discursive act: repetition serves pragmatically to highlight the importance of narrative qua narrative for Hamm and, moreover, the story of the beggar instantiates an instance in Hamm's life where real ethical (phronetic) action could be taken: "All those I could have helped!" (53).

The instantiation of meaningful dialogue in narrative serves however to consolidate the semiotic void of the present, the present that is constantly thrown into "corpsed" relief by the resurrection of the past. Beckett here articulates a frame to be repeated again and again in his career, the speaker as (sel., dividing or divided subject, the speaker divided between temporalities, between states of
being. Precisely as a result of this division the subject is a priori thrust into a dialogical position, of listening to the self, speaking to the self, devising the self as at once present and non-self-coincidential. The profound irony of the Beckettian text as it is read through the hermeneutical lens of this dialogic function is that the subject is articulated into a zone that compels dialogue even as it denies its precise hermeneutic viability. The result of this aporetic dialogical matrix is the ever retreating narrator, the narrative voice endlessly impossible to locate. Perhaps no other text defines this problematic more precisely than *Company*, the first text of the so-called second trilogy:

For why or? Why in another dark or in the same? And whose voice asking this? Who asks, Whose voice asking this? And answers, His soever devises it all. In the same dark as his creature or in another. For company. Who asks in the end, Who asks? And in the end answers as above? And adds long after himself, Unless another still. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last person. I. Quick leave him. (24)

*Company* is a text in many ways similar to *How It Is*. It articulates a speaker/hearer/listener/deviser in the split between a (perhaps unlocatable) present and a past
illuminated, as in How It Is, by a series of brilliantly etched memories. The narrative voice—the voice of the listener attempting to maintain a discrete discourse and grammatical distance from himself—articulates the narrative precisely as a means of achieving "company": "Deviser of a voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself, He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company" (26). The inscription of company here operates both at once as a method for alleviating the barrenness of the present (much as in Endgame) and as the instantiation of the grounds (arche) for dialogue, for the possibility of meaning. The economy of the narrative is organized around the protracted attempt to "have the hearer have a past and acknowledge it" (34) as a means of facilitating a kind of historical consciousness in what appears to be a split—thus in my terms dialogical—subject.

Company is organized precisely by the speaker’s attempt to maintain his distance from the listener, as if he were the "deviser" of an ontologically distinct "listener", as an author is the deviser of a character: "Might not the hearer be improved? Made more companionable if not downright human. Mentally perhaps there is room for enlivenment...Might he not cross his feet? On and off. Now left on right and now a little later the reverse. No. Quite out of keeping" (28). Company thus articulates itself as a meditation on the process of
being as the process of creation; or, at least, the speaker would like to facilitate the illusion of his "authorial" distance from the hearer. The text thus constructs a "double-vision" of the speaker, an illusion--crucially--systematically to be stripped away: the speaker speaking of himself as "he" and "you" and simultaneously meditating on himself as aesthetic process and product. This "illusion" of the double self is one that Company, perhaps unlike the earlier novels, now seems comfortable in exposing precisely as illusion: while the narrator perhaps articulates the desire to maintain the discrete difference between biography and autobiography, between writing of the other and writing of the self (as other?), the text will not allow this and collapses these discursive categories as it collapses the speaker's attempt to maintain himself independent of himself. The speaker is the hearer, both writer and written: "Devised deviser devising it all for company" (46), but the authority commanding the text, unlike the "they" of Malone Dies and The Unnamable, is not an extrasubjective force but only the speaker:

Huddled thus you find yourself imagining you are not alone while knowing full well that nothing has occurred to make this possible. The process continues none the less lapped as it were in its meaninglessness. You do not murmur in so many words, I know this doomed to fail and yet persist. No. For the first personal singular and a
fortiori plural pronoun had never any place in your vocabulary. But without a word you view yourself to this effect...(61)

There is a sense in which this late text operates as a kind of hermeneutic of the past novels and perhaps especially on *The Unnamable* and *How It Is*, texts founded on the same hermeneutic semiotic, texts articulating their speakers in remarkably similar postures. What separates this text from the previous ones, and thus what sets it up as a kind of retrospective reading of those texts, is its unflinching presentation of the solitude of the speaker: "And you as you always were. Alone" (63). This text refuses to conclude in aporia, but crystallizes the unbearable fact of absolute isolation. *The Unnamable* and *How It Is* articulate their speakers and their relations to the narrator (and narrative) in a continually (un)ravelling aporia which renders it impossible to "locate" the speaker's precise relation to either his temporality or ontological position as speaker. *Company* refuses the comfort of aporia, refuses the complication of textuality and contradiction that masks the brutality of isolation in endlessly repeating scenes of regeneration and decay. Aporia functions, as I suggested in my final chapter, as a curious space of empowerment, recomposes the subject back at the beginning of Being, not the end in isolation: these aporetic moments, ultimately, sustain the
subject even as they threaten to negate him, perhaps because they threaten to negate him. Company finally articulates the subject in telos, at the end, in solitude, alone.

Beckett's final texts are remarkably "still" texts, texts whose speakers/characters are marked by their physical and mental inactivity. In earlier texts characters were confined to beds, to urns, to mud fields, but their mental lives were almost manic in their productivity. In the later texts, solitude has calcified the subject (I prefer the term "character-object" to describe these narrated beings of the final texts), entombed him or her in texts that leave little room for the articulation of narrative acts that essentially defined the worlds of the earlier narrators. The later texts pull back from the subject, isolating him or her in landscape or in memory, refusing either to allow the character-object voice or to maintain any possible illusion of textual/discursive mastery over "world". These later texts—ill seen ill said (1982); Worstward Ho (1983)—maintain the separation of narrator and object; indeed the object of the text, the old woman of ill seen ill said, the "it" of Worstward Ho, is placed under microscopic narrative focus, each detail of physical movement tracked painstakingly through landscape in a painstakingly arid grammar:

Seated on the stones she is seen from behind. From the waist up. Trunk black rectangle. Nape under frill of
black lace. White half halo of hair. Face to the north. The tomb. Eyes on the horizon perhaps. Or closed to see the headstone...Voidlike calm as always. (ill seen ill said; 29)

The narrative function in these late texts has been wrenched from the speaking subject who now is merely grammatical object; the subject is rendered mute, incapable of speech and of dialogue. Where in the earlier texts, especially after Mercier and Camier, the narrative function articulated the speaker as it articulated his world, the late texts ruthlessly objectify their characters, articulating them in texts of an enormously restrictive economy. The dialogical function in ill seen ill said thus reverts to the unnamed narrator who objectifies the character-object in an inscribed interrogative discourse; that is, the dialogical function finds its voice in the narrator’s attempts to make sense of the character-object. Often in the second trilogy, this exploration takes the form of parodical philosophical interrogations:

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. Implying furthermore that it the culprit. And from it as from an evil core that the what is the wrong word the
evil spread. And none to urge--none to have urged its
demolition. As if doomed to endure. Question answered.
(8-9)³

In many ways ill seen ill said recalls the pre-trilogy
narrative economy of Mercier and Camier, specifically in its
careful arrangement of narratological doubt as to the precise
ontology of the "world" the text discloses; and this doubt is,
as in Mercier and Camier, located not in the narrated subject,
but the narrator/narrative itself (we have no access to the
character-object in ill seen ill said). It is the narrator who
indicates that his discourse may in fact contain the "wrong
words" (8; 17) to describe the character-object's world; it is
the narrator who continually cautions itself "Careful." It is
the narrator, perhaps punning on "Eye/I", who suggests the
character-object's distance from the perceivable "truth" of
things: "The eye will return to the scene of its betrayals"
(27). It is, finally, the narrator who acknowledges the
impossibility of maintaining the epistemological verity of his
character-object, who exposes the fictitiousness of her
ontology:

Not possible any longer except as figment. Not endurable.
Nothing for it but to close the eye for good and see her.
Her and the rest. Close it for good and all and see her
to death. Unremittent. In the shack. Over the stones. In

This seems an acknowledgment of the purely imaginary or imaginative status of the character-object, of the narrative itself. The eye as epistemological tool is closed in favour of the eye of imagination, the "I" of the naming/narrating subject who fabricates the character-object as it perceives her.

The final text of the second trilogy, Worstward Ho, sees the character-object shimmering between the "real" and the grammatical, as the old question, "Who speaks?" is again sounded: "Whose words? Ask in vain. Or not in vain if say no knowing. No saying. No words for him whose words. Him? One. No words for one whose words. One? It. No words for it whose words. Better worse so" (Worstward Ho; 20). The text seems to facilitate a distanciation between character-object and narrator, but as the above quotation exemplifies, the precise status of "voice" in this text is never fixed. In fact we might posit that the dialogical subject of Worstward Ho is language itself, a realization confirming Gadamer's formulation: "being that can be understood is language"; the text grounds itself as a continual meditation on its own linguistic possibility, continually calling into question in
dialogue its own arche and telos as language. The speaker and spoken are categories never fully differentiated; the possibility of being itself is questioned as is the possibility of temporality. This ontological-existential problematic is illustrated precisely in the opening statement of the text: "On. Say on. Be said on. Somehow on. Till nohow on. Said nohow on" (7). It is as if a new language has to be formulated to begin to articulate this state of (narrative) being, which is a state, as equally, of non-being: "Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none. That at least. A Place. Where none" (7). This is a dynamic strikingly reminiscent of the problematic of temporality of How It Is; and, it seems, the narrator, acknowledges that Worstward Ho is a recapitulation of the old ontological themes: "All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (7).

Worstward Ho produces the subject/character-object in the most restrictive narrative economy of this second trilogy. Where in Company the hint of a past life retrospectively animates the corpsed subject, and where in ill seen ill said the ontological uncertainty of the woman ("If only she could be pure figment"[20]; "Not possible any longer except as figment" [30]) sustains the character-object if only in aporia, the subject in Worstward Ho is composed of fragments--bones, head, skull, eyes, hands--gradually coalescing into the vaguest of images of a man. But even at the point of achieving
an image, that image is denied: "Say bones. No bones but say bones" (8). The text composes itself in a precise semiosis of absolute contradiction where language composes itself to simultaneously erase its representational force: "Not now. Know better now. Unknow better now. Know only no out of. No knowing how know only no out of" (11). (How far away are we from the "No knowing. No knowing such things any more" (103) of Mercier and Camier?) To perceive here is to misperceive; to know is to "unknow"; to see is to be "misseen." The text's language often turns upon itself to meditate on its own status, acknowledging its own impossibility even as it acknowledges its facticity:

Worsening words whose unknown. Whence unknown. At all costs unknown. Now for to say as worst they may only they only they. Dim void shades all they. Nothing save what they say. Somehow say. Nothing save they. What they say. Whosesoever whencessoever say. As worst they may fail ever worse to say. (28)

Worstward Ho offers itself as an extended meditation on the impossibility of meaning formation in a discourse that restricts meaning a priori; yet, like the unnamable who has only his words to define his paradoxical ontology of speaking in a language beyond the ken of meaning, but still speaking, the narrator in Worstward Ho is "confined" to his language, a
language of "worser words for worser still," but still a language. And it is perhaps this realization that marks these later texts as ultimately concerned with (re)tracing the primary dialogical or linguistic territory of the earlier novels and thus instantiates a fundamental thematic of the Beckett oeuvre: the fact of being; the fact of being in language that at once composes and decomposes the subject; the fact of being in a language whose end is never to be but exists at the paradoxical "bounds of a boundless void"; the fact of being in an impossibility but still in a language that articulates its impossibility in the "nohow on":


Said nohow on. (47)
1. Compare Clav's statement to the final proposition in Wittgenstein's Tractatus: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (151). Wittgenstein, of course, suggests that his propositions--perhaps even the final one--are to be transcended in the process of coming to an understanding: "anyone who understands me eventually recognizes [the propositions] as nonsensical, when he has used them--as steps--to climb beyond them" (151). In Beckett silence may in fact be the final step (it also may be the first step); in any case, for Clav, the possibility of seeing the "world aright" (Tractatus 151) is perhaps a "logical" absurdity.

2. I recall Ricoeur's translation of "appropriation" (Eheignen) as meaning to "make one's own" what was originally alien. It is crucial to note that appropriation, like the hermeneutical conception of "play" always inaugurates an alteration of the subject: "Appropriation will be the complement not only of the distanciation of the text, but also of the relinquishment of the self" (Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences 183).

3. Compare this "debate" to the following passage in Company which sees the narrator theorizing the nature of the "crawling creator". The passage moves with excruciating logic from: "Can
the crawling creator crawling in the same create dark as his creature create while crawling" (52), through a series of agonizing steps until the final:

So while in the same breath deploring a fancy so reason-ridden and observing how revocable its flights he could not but answer finally no he could not. Could not conceivably create while crawling in the same create dark as his creature. (52)

There is something satirical about these and other moments of "logic" in Beckett, as if the protracted effort to reach a conclusion in a philosophical context that denies the metaphysics of the conclusion is itself the logical approach to the question of meaning.
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