

ABSTRACT

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THE USE OF TWO LANGUAGES IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S ART

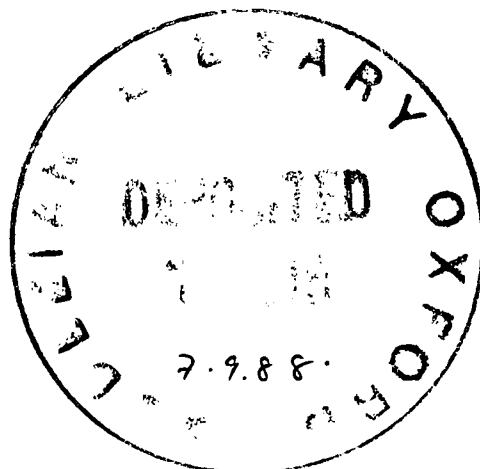
This study argues that Samuel Beckett's works in English and French reveal the organising energy of a "bilingual consciousness". Bilingualism is no personal eccentricity but the foundation for Beckett's mature art, without which it could not have developed. He has never been a unilingual writer; at every stage of his career his two languages have enriched, challenged and opposed each other. Bilingual art has allowed Beckett to move between linguistic circles, claiming as his own a transitional space that has protected his need for imaginative solitude. Gradually abandoning the cultural specificity of his early works in favour of archetypal settings that "translate" successfully to other contexts, he has focussed directly on what unites rather than divides human communities. Yet his writing retains an evident alertness to, and love of, the linguistic and cultural resources of English and French. His alternations between languages and his frequent activities as translator and self-translator contribute to a detachment from generic conventions that encourages innovation. Thus the often-criticised marginality of the bilingual has become for Beckett a source of strength.

This analysis draws on a close reading of certain key texts, crossing languages freely to follow Beckett's own development. The prose has central place, because it spans his entire career, and because his most radical innovations have occurred in prose to be, subsequently, transferred in new forms to the drama. Chapter I presents Beckett's dual language-use in a wider context, exploring the early exposure and later suppression of bilingual awareness, the implications of bilingualism for his artistic outlook, and the bilingual aesthetic he has developed. The remaining chapters draw on a new chronology of his writing and translating activities to show the development of his dual language-use and how it has interacted distinctively at each period with his artistic goals and practice.

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NOTE

USE OF MANUSCRIPTS

The symbols I have used in manuscript transcriptions are as follows:

- [] - erasure in Ms.
- () - substitution in Ms.
- xxx - illegible
- (?) - suggested reading; barely legible

NAMING OF TEXTS

The focus of this study demands a precise naming of Beckett's texts in their original language and in translation, a practice which is not always followed in Beckett criticism. I use En attendant Godot, for example, or From An Abandoned Work, to refer to the original French and English versions, and Waiting for Godot or D'un ouvrage abandonné to refer to the translations. When the French and English titles appear identical (e.g. Murphy, Molloy) I add the bracketed letter (F) or (E) in contexts where confusion could otherwise arise.

TERMINOLOGY

In discussions of bilingualism, especially literary bilingualism, the use of the synonymous terms "monoglot/unilingual/monolingual" and "polyglot/multilingual" remains a matter of personal preference. I have chosen to use "unilingual" and "multilingual", thus retaining the clear link with the unambiguous term "bilingual" and stressing the idea of human tongues. Beckett is a multilingual person; as a writer, however, he is primarily a user of two languages, and it is in this sense that I use "bilingual" throughout this study.

INTRODUCTION

Why does Samuel Beckett write in two languages? How important has bilingualism been to him at different stages of his career? What does it mean to be a fully bilingual artist? These questions surface again and again in Beckett scholarship, to be answered with a brief hypothesis, then to be put aside. My aim in this study of Beckett's use of two languages has been to bring together all the hypotheses and to give my own interpretation of the meaning of his bilingualism.

My answers, in the simplest terms, are the following: Beckett writes in two languages because he must, bilingualism being not a personal eccentricity but the foundation for his mature art, the motivating and shaping force without which it could not have developed as it did. He has never been a unilingual writer; at every period of his artistic life his languages and cultures have enriched, challenged and opposed each other, whether or not they are both visibly present. What bilingual art has meant to Beckett is the chance to move between linguistic circles, claiming as his own a transitional space, an imaginative realm of complete solitude, that has allowed him to remain true to a vision of exceptional integrity, unaffected by the pressures of social interaction and,

since the 1950s, of fame. His "bilingual consciousness", as I have called it, shapes every part of his work. For this very reason Beckett cannot be expected to analyse or justify it; it lies too deep, is too intimately connected with the unconscious sources of his creativity, for him to expose it or even to acknowledge it explicitly.

Beckett's answers to enquiries about his reasons for writing in French have been evasive, humorous, or at best over-simplifying. French was more exciting, or had the right weakening effect, or allowed him to write "without style"; he had to leave English because he "couldn't help writing poetry in it." (1) When the question was posed for the 1948 issue of Transition in which three of his poems (written in French and translated into English) appeared, he drew his interrogator aside "into the little frequented semi-circular Rue de Tilsitt, and (...)

1. These comments, quoted over and over again in studies of Beckett, come from the following records of interviews or correspondance: Israel Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters", New York Times (6 May, 1956), Section 2, p. 3; Herbert Blau, "Meanwhile, Follow the Bright Angels", Tulane Drama Review, V (Sept. 1960), pp. 90-91; Niklaus Gessner, Die Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache: Eine Untersuchung über Formzerfall und Beziehungslosigkeit bei Samuel Beckett (Zurich: Juris, 1957), quoted in Ruby Cohn, Samuel Beckett: the comic gamut (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 95; and Richard Coe, Samuel Beckett (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), p. 14.

confessed at last in a strong or rather weak Dublin accent:

'Pour faire remarquer moi.'" (1) This "undoubtedly original syntactical usage of his adopted tongue" provides an effective defense against such intrusive questions, and in its own form shows Beckett's freedom to sin against the rules of French syntax, a freedom that, at a far more serious level, he has used to the full. Like all his responses, "Pour faire remarquer moi" discourages the questioner from probing further, and conceals the profound psychological and emotional implications of his bilingualism.

Among the scholars who have included consideration of Beckett's bilingual focus in their work — and a great many never mention it — John Fletcher, Ruby Cohn, Richard Coe, James Knowlson, Raymond Federman, Ludovic Janvier and Jean-Jacques Mayoux are the most familiar. They have provided a solid foundation for the study of Beckett's self-translations and his stylistic methods at various periods of his bilingual career. Yet their interest has generally been centered on the details of textual analysis and the effects of translation-changes in the interpretation of a particular work. The same is true even in studies whose titles suggest that bilingualism, rather than (or as well as) self-translation,

1. "Notes About Contributors", Transition 48, II (June 1948), p. 147.

is central, such as Harry Cockerham's article "Bilingual Playwright" (1) and the doctoral theses by Helen Wehringer, "Beckett and his Bilingualism: The Word as Mask and Mirror", (2) and Ekundayo Simpson, Samuel Beckett: Traducteur de lui-même. Aspects de bilinguisme littéraire. (3) While all these discussions and analyses are valuable and have greatly stimulated my own research, they seem to remain at a distance from the full imaginative implications of Beckett's bilingualism, and the ways in which, uniquely, it unifies the whole of his work across the linguistic barrier and from the earliest years of writing in English to the most recent, and totally bilingual, art.

Some brief articles and sections of books do indeed approach the subject of bilingualism as a concept in its own right, including Evelyne Pieller's "Les Mots des Autres", (4) Erika Ostrovsky's "Le Silence de Babel," (5) and Ludovic

1. Harry Cockerham, "Bilingual Playwright", in Beckett the shape changer, a symposium edited by Katharine Worth (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 139-159.

2. Helen Wehringer, "Beckett and his Bilingualism: The Word as Mask and Mirror", unpublished doctoral dissertation, City University of New York, 1979.

3. Ekundayo Simpson, Samuel Beckett: Traducteur de lui-même. Aspects de bilinguisme littéraire (Québec: Centre international de recherche sur le bilinguisme, 1978).

4. Evelyne Pieller, "Les Mots des Autres", Magazine Littéraire, No. 231 (June, 1986), pp. 27-28.

5. Erika Ostrovsky, "Le Silence de Babel", L'Herne: Samuel Beckett (Paris: Editions de L'Herne, 1976), pp. 206-211.

Janvier's "Combinaison et Liberté: Le bilinguisme" in his brilliant study Pour Samuel Beckett. (1) Pieller firmly states: "Ce n'est pas^{là} une bizarrerie, ni une quelconque élégance, c'est tout au contraire la matière même de son travail." I know of no full-length work, however, in either English or French, which is devoted to the exploration of bilingualism throughout Beckett's career, and it is this gap in our understanding of the aesthetic and imaginative basis for his art that I have tried to fill.

My approach has been shaped by a desire to follow the development of Beckett's bilingualism closely and with a sense of the successive waves of innovative energy that characterise his work. It is important to remember that his bilingualism is totally voluntary; he chose to study French at university, chose to live in France from 1937, and made a deliberate decision to write in French after the war. His later return to English and sequence of alternations between the two languages have been equally self-directed. To follow this set of artistic decisions I have used a broadly chronological outline (after the opening discussion of bilingualism and the evidence for it in Beckett's work). Within this chronology, however, my aim has been to look in detail at the particular works, and the interactions between them, that seem to reveal most about the kind of bilingual

1. Ludovic Janvier, Pour Samuel Beckett (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1966 / 1973), pp. 348-359.

thinking, bilingual "making", Beckett was then engaged in. Bilingualism is never static; it changes throughout a lifetime and, in the case of a writer who has harnessed it, made it a source of energy and insight, it emerges in many different forms.

The prose takes central place here, not only because Beckett has produced it at every stage of his career, from 1929 to the 1980s, but, crucially, because it is the genre in which his experimentalism has repeatedly brought new insights, new forms, and new relationships with language. He has spoken of theatre as a "relaxation", (1) and has said of prose that in writing it he feels alone, "dans le noir".(2) The structural and economic demands of theatre give a certain degree of security, a certain frame within which to work, whereas in prose there are no forms, no rules, no constraints other than that of the printed page, which cannot be broken. This is not intended in any way to denigrate the drama, in which Beckett has been an innovator of extraordinary influence, and to which he owes his fame and the vast majority of his admirers. It is, however, in his prose that the greatest continuity of bilingual practice can be seen,

1. Samuel Beckett to Michael Haerdter, quoted in Ruby Cohn, Just Play: Beckett's Theater (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 230 n.

2. Paul-Louis Mignon, "Le Théâtre de A jusqu'à Z: Samuel Beckett", L'Avant-Scène, 313 (15 June, 1964), p. 8.

as well as the startling advances that have then gone on to find different but equally effective form in his works for the stage and the broadcasting media.

The danger of this approach, and perhaps a major reason for its absence in previous criticism, is that it seems to move back towards Beckett as a man, away from the art, and thus to run the risk of lapsing into biographical or psychological speculations that have no foundation in the works themselves. "Even if French-speakers could read him only in French and English-speakers only in English, there would still be one person inescapably aware of his double venture: Samuel Beckett", as one reviewer expressed it. (1) Perhaps that "one person" is a necessarily unknown area, a hidden centre for the evidence we have in his plays and novels, his poems and his criticism. Yet the desire to understand Beckett the artist better surely justifies looking at his bilingual artistry through new eyes. Bilingualism is becoming a more and more common subject for research, and I have drawn on this body of knowledge in order to provide a context for Beckett's particular achievement. I have, moreover, based my entire study on a close and sequential reading of the works themselves, crossing languages as Beckett did in writing them, and using manuscripts (or manuscript evidence provided by Beckett scholars) wherever

1. George Craig, "The voice of childhood and great age", Times Literary Supplement (27 August, 1982), p. 921.

they reveal bilingual and bicultural awareness in the genesis of a work. It is Beckett the artist, not the unknowable human individual, who is central here, one who has indeed drawn deeply on the experiences of a long and eventful life, but one for whom art itself has been the formative influence and concern.

Beckett writes in the context of a rich European literary tradition, having freed himself from a single language, a single culture, through his lifelong use of bilingualism. "L'artiste qui joue son être est de nulle part", he said, praising the Irish artist Jack B. Yeats. (1) Like Jack Yeats Beckett has become an artist of international outlook, and he has achieved this in a way that is remarkable for a creator who uses, not the non-verbal medium of paint, but the inherently localising medium of words. "Les mots vous font voir du pays avec eux d'étranges voyages", the speaker of Comment c'est informs us. (2) The imaginative territory Beckett has made his own involves members of both language-communities (and all those who encounter his work in other

1. Samuel Beckett, Hommage à Jack B. Yeats, Les Lettres Nouvelles, II (April, 1954), p. 619.

2. Samuel Beckett, Comment c'est (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1961/1975), p. 145.

translations) in strange mental journeys. Yet at the same time his concerns are those at the deepest levels of the self.

Beckett resists inclusion in any familiar contexts; he is difficult to place because he has centred his art in a bilingual realm of the imagination. His relativism and bilingual consciousness offer a challenge to innocent assumptions about a single natural language and the version of reality it claims to represent. Still more, he challenges us to know who we are when all secure anchors of home and culture are torn away.

CHAPTER I: THE BILINGUAL ARTIST

A bilingual literary artist enjoys an unusual but a double-edged privilege. To have "two tongues", as the word in its simplest definition implies, means for the writer something very different from a simple convenience, a source of pleasure or wider knowledge, as bilingualism may be for the non-writer. In literature, the relation between personal idiom and the speech of the group, between words and culture, words and history, words and psychological realities, is a delicate and powerful one; the bilingual writer is placed in the unusual position of asking: can this relation exist with my two languages? Or do I accept that my use of one, or both, will lack that loyalty, that intimacy of a primal bond, which the unilingual writer so often delights in? For artists of Irish birth, however, the bond with English, even if it is their mother tongue, has always been an uneasy one; Beckett is one of many Irish writers who has found in bilingualism a kind of personal response to the divided linguistic heritage of his native land.

W.B. Yeats, a poor linguist, yet so great a master of the resources of English, spoke of his own paradoxical relationship with the language thus: "My hatred tortures me with love; my

love with hate". (1) Like a passionate affair, his relation with the English language that had conquered Ireland was intense in both its angers and its joys. James Joyce felt these contradictions equally strongly, and reacted to them in a way that changed the course of literature. More recently, Brian Friel has given a new perspective on the problem in his play Translations. Beckett's contradictory relationship with English has resulted in a bilingualism, and indeed multilingualism, which, like Joyce's, has profoundly challenged previous literary assumptions. In the pages that follow I will explore Beckett's relationship with his inwardly divided mother tongue, the English of Ireland, and with his adopted tongue, French, that has been, at times, a successful rival for his "love".

Beckett's passion for French was part of a voracious linguistic hunger which also led him to Italian, German, Latin, Greek and Spanish to greater or lesser degrees. His uneasiness with Irish English, like that of Joyce, led Beckett to multilingualism and to voluntary exile, but unlike Joyce Beckett was not content to explode English from within, packing it with words from other tongues and shaping it to his own rhythms; Beckett went further still, abandoning it for French, the language in which many of his greatest works are written. He

1. W.B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1961), p. 519.

could then return to it to refashion its syntax, phrasing and idioms, employing the perspective given by his French.

Chapter I will explore the relation between the bilingualism Beckett has developed over his long career as dramatist, novelist and poet, and some characteristic features of the works themselves. A sense of transitional movement, and intermediate, indeterminate states, runs throughout his work and allows a linking of his two languages in a way that unilingual approaches to his art rarely consider; at many levels of incident and image "transition" represents the Beckettian sense of a purgatorial reality. The explicit treatment of bilingualism, and of languages as elements of Babel, is then traced from Beckett's early work to his maturity; his relationship with the two languages, and his understanding of the implications of multilingualism, can be seen to undergo revealing changes as his art develops. The third section examines the charge that has been made against bilingualism, that multiple language use is an unhealthy, a mentally dangerous practice; unilingualism, in this view, represents the health of "normal" sanity. This "pseudo-scientific rumour", (1) as George Steiner calls it, persists although there is

1. George Steiner, After Babel (London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 119.

no solid proof, and although at least half, if not more, of the world's population is bilingual. To stray from unilingualism, at least in a European perspective, is sometimes seen as a threat to identity and psychological balance. Similarly, Beckett's works have been called "schizophrenic", and dangerous for impressionable readers or audiences, though an explicit link between the psychological challenges raised by his work and bilingualism is not commonly made. The narrowness of the view that condemns or distrusts bilingualism raises intriguing questions about the ways in which relations between language and identity have been defined, for the last two hundred years at least, in the European context.

Finally, the investigation of bilingual artist and bilingual art looks at a major principle of the Beckettian aesthetic, the notion of "petrified" and "animated" matter in language. Beckett's lifelong belief in the need for a living, freshly created idiom for art relates directly to his bilingualism; this viewpoint is one which all the subsequent chapters subscribe to, as they move from the artist to the art. The use of two languages informs and leads that art at every point, for a language is not only a set of structures and a lexicon, but a storehouse of a specific history and literature; for the artist, if not necessarily for the mass of its users, it is a consciously explored medium in which to express a vision, a way of approaching truth.

Transitions

Beckett's bilingual art circles around the process of transition. The word transition provided a name for the influential journal in which he first came to public notice, a journal committed to reawakening the energy of language through the interpenetration of languages. The concept also provides a key to his mature imagination and craftsmanship. Movement between two points of time, or space, between the two sides of an alternation or of a binary equation, and between two cultures can be seen developing throughout his work, in the major plays and novels as in the less familiar poems and articles. In both "seeing" and "saying", his writing is made up of transitional shifts of focus.

Two themes become interwoven in this process: first, the longing for the other place, wherever the speaker is not, so that a restlessness develops, a need to alternate; second, an awareness, at first suppressed, later focussed on with increasing intensity, of the place between the two points, the indeterminate area through which the traveller passes. Images of the sea, the shore, railway lines, roads, journeys from "A" to "B" are central to his imaginative patterning. Frenetic travelling in the works of the 1930s to 1950s gives way, after 1960, to an increasing focus on stillness in a solitary realm, a place between or beyond human interactions. Such images reveal the bilingual consciousness at work, suggesting a restless,

shifting imagination that will not stay contentedly in one firm environment. Yet even in the early writing, "spaces between", and the tension they create, exert a curious fascination.

One early use of the concept is especially striking in the light of his later concerns, although as yet its full significance is lost in too rapid, and widely focussed, allusiveness. The dead body of Belacqua in More Pricks Than Kicks becomes an intermediate space which his two mourners, the Smeraldina and Capper Quin, are acutely conscious of:

She had herself supported up the stairs, she led the way into the death-chamber as though it belonged to her. They diverged, the body was between them on the bed like the keys between nations in Velasquez's Lances, like the water between Buda and Pest, and so on, hyphen of reality. (3)

Here the two figures move to position themselves on either side of the body, and in a curious reversal of what one might expect, it is the body that seems in process, flowing, "like the water between Buda and Pest", while they are still. The Velasquez painting The Surrender of Breda, usually known as "Las Lanzas", shows the keys of Breda being handed across a shadowed central area by the defeated commander to the victorious Spanish general. It is "famous in its elegant courtliness as a model of fair

3. Samuel Beckett, More Pricks Than Kicks (first published 1934; this edition London: Calder and Boyars, 1970), p. 194. Note: because of the limited availability of many original Beckett editions I have used standard modern texts. Full details of original publication can be found in Bibliography.

dealing and good manners". (1) Belacqua, dead, had become a "hyphen of reality", an intermediate force both dividing and bringing together the two survivors, who will shortly take comfort with each other. Water, meetings of nations, form in language come together here, to force the solid shores of habitual understanding apart. Budapest is redivided by water into the two cities it names; the minds of the living must come to terms with the "reality" of that indefinable figure lying between them. The hyphen, a symbol of the writer's conventions, becomes a direct equivalent of the body's shape; it is a curious concept in language signs, for it denotes a separated but connected pair of words, ideas -- or in this case future lovers.

In the same story, Belacqua's parson has made a hasty visit to the deceased, and then, anxious to depart, pedals away "like a weaver's shuttle". The Book of Job is being recalled: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope". (2) The verse shortly before this is also highly appropriate to the Beckettian world: "When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day" (v.4). The sense of mortality, to-and-fro movements, the speed and hopelessness of alternations between light and dark; all are characteristic of future Beckett concerns,

1. Enrique Lafuente, The Paintings and Drawings of Velasquez (London: Phaidon Press, 1943), notes on plates 73-75.

2. Job, Chapter VII, verse 6.

hinted at in this one allusion. The shuttle is a superb image of a shifting object, passing again and again over the same intermediate space. It reappears to powerful effect in Molloy. Whereas in More Pricks Than Kicks the image does not resonate widely beyond its immediate context, so densely packed is the prose with allusions and ideas, the image in Molloy, typically for Beckett's mature work, brings form, narrative persona and the medium itself together in a deeply satisfying conjunction. Moran, considering his account of his journey towards his target, "toutes les vicissitudes du chemin menant de mon pays à celui de Molloy", contemplates his lines of writing, doubtful as to the wisdom of having attempted them:

Mais je les écris quand même, et d'une main ferme,
inexorable navette qui mange ma page avec l'indifférence
d'un fléau (1)

In English the text is slightly different:

But I write them all the same, and with a firm hand
weaving inexorably back and forth and devouring my
page with the indifference of a shuttle (2)

The page itself becomes an intervening space. A text is, etymologically, a piece of weaving; what happens between the fixed points of the beginning and end or between the two sides

1. Samuel Beckett, Molloy (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1951), p. 205.

2. Samuel Beckett, Molloy in Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable (London: Calder and Boyars, 1959), p. 133.

of the page is a mysterious process since it involves both conscious and unconscious levels of the weaver's mind. The "indifference" of that mind is the detachment of the experienced traveller, the disciplined writer. Yet as Molloy goes on, Moran's firmness and detachment are revealed to be more vulnerable to attack by the unknown than he at first believes: he himself begins to be woven into the strange, irrational tissue of events surrounding his prey, Molloy. He too becomes subject to tossing "to and fro", and to a kind of hopelessness, the shuttle caught up in, as well as directing, the mysterious realm of the space between departure and arrival points, the area of transitions.

At the same period as Molloy, Beckett reworks in a poem the idea of travelling through a disturbing intermediate territory:

vous voulez que j'aille d'A à B je ne peux pas
je ne peux pas sortir je suis dans un pays sans traces (1)

The speaker cannot travel confidently from A to B because he finds himself trapped in a special country. He is unable to take for granted, to accept as normal, the passage from one fixed point to another. The place is "sans traces" -- tracks, marks or signs are absent. It is a realm of wordless being, deprived of namable co-ordinates, or, as the earlier lines of the poem say:

1. Samuel Beckett, bon bon il est un pays in Collected Poems (London: John Calder, 1977), p. 53.

un pays 
 où l'oubli où pèse l'oubli
 doucement sur les mondes innommés

There is, once again, a sense of a transitional space that cannot be clearly defined; it is a territory where the speaker is alone and sinking into wordlessness.

Associated images recur in another form in the 1970s, at a time when Beckett directed La dernière bande in Paris (1975), Footfalls in London and its German translation Tritte in Berlin (1976), and shortly afterwards, Krapp's Last Tape (in English, though for a 1977 production in Germany). (1) As he himself was travelling between languages and countries, he seems to have been struck by the representation on stage of the familiar to-and-fro movement, to judge by two short texts he wrote at the same period, neither and the seventh mirlitonnade, lueurs lisières (2). In Footfalls May paces from right to left, left to right, in a compulsive shuttle-like rhythm. In Beckett's directing of Krapp's Last Tape, he makes a change from the printed text; the alcove, as well as the table at which Krapp now sits, is now lit, so that his lurching movement is from light to light, through the intervening darkness which he fears.

1. For details, see Ruby Cohn, Just Play (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 248-249.

2. Note: Titles of all Beckett's published works are underlined, and of all unpublished works given in quotation marks. I have taken this somewhat unusual decision for the sake of clarity, because some very short works have been published separately, and because my use of unpublished material is extensive in some chapters.

Krapp, another writer, finds relief not in the toing and froing itself, but in the bitter comforts of drink and recollection at either end. The dark between disturbs him; it is a space without form, where death or Old Nick awaits him.

Beckett's fascination with binary forms, images and characters comes together with these representations of the two halves of a doubled world, and the no man's land that lies between. "The living mystery of life is always hidden between Two, and it is the true mystery which cannot be betrayed by words and depleted by arguments," as C.G. Jung wrote, (1). Beckett's work seems peculiarly fitting to embody such a statement. In all of these images, the emphasis on the space between two fixed and defined points evokes his transitionally-centred, relativist view of reality. If the bilingual consciousness that underlies such patterns has not received much emphasis, it is presumably because, as Hjelmslev said, "it is the nature of language to be overlooked". (2) It is even more the nature of bilingualism to be overlooked when the usual context is that of unilingual conventions of discourse. The switching between languages in which the artist himself is engaged may not even become an issue,

1. C.G. Jung, Letters, ed. Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffé, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953/1975), Vol. 2, p. 581.

2. Louis Hjelmslev, trans. Francis Whitfield, Prolegomena to a Theory of Language (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961/1963), p. 5.

an element of the reader's experience. It is hidden, and yet its influence is everywhere.

The two short texts mentioned above, neither and lueurs lisières, both move the motif of transitional space towards a realm of music; if they really were music, the limitations of verbal attempts to convey such a perception could be surpassed. neither is a text to be set to music, and lueurs lisières is one of a group of miniature poems that play with rhythm, rhyme, sound and sense as "mirlitonnades" or verbal "jingles". Both these small and delicate works attest to Beckett's concern, at the age of seventy, to explore more directly the haunting image of the ^{no} man's land of intermediate existence, a realm between the refuges of clearly defined and secure human cultures. Reading them closely and together (they were written five months apart) demonstrates the fresh patterns of meaning that can be reached through a perspective that sets Beckett's two languages side by side:

neither

to and fro in shadow from inner to outer shadow

from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself
by way of neither

as between two lit refuges whose doors once neared
gently close, once turned away from
gently part again

beckoned back and forth and turned away

heedless of the way, intent on the one gleam
or the other

unheard footfalls only sound

till at last halt for good, absent for good
from self and other

then no sound

then gently light unfading on that unheeded
neither

unspeakable home (1)

lueurs lisières

lueurs lisières
de la navette
plus qu'un pas s'éteignent
demi-tour remiroitent

halte plutôt
loin des deux
chez soi sans soi
ni eux (2)

Like the Footfalls and Krapp's Last Tape productions, these two short texts reemphasise a highly visual impression of transitional movement. In neither the speaker's first words may seem at first an echo of a familiar Cartesian dualism; self-other, inner-outer, in a way Murphy would have understood only too well. But "self" as well as "other" is impenetrable, and the speaker seems to be outside both. Forty years of bilingual art since Murphy lie behind the text. The "to and fro", like Moran's "back and forth", suggests a spatial movement

1. Journal of Beckett Studies, 4, Spring 1979, p. vii. N.B. the word "neared" was accidentally omitted from the end of the fourth line. I have restored it here.

2. Samuel Beckett, Poèmes suivi de mirlitonnades (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1978), p. 37.

which the observer analyses from a detached third position.

Beckett may have written neither in Germany, where he was directing in September, 1976; he was perhaps standing outside his two principal languages and looking at them. Self and other are both unattainable, two lit refuges whose doors close to the approaching traveller and, tantalisingly, open again as soon as he no longer tries to enter them. For a time he ignores the "way" itself, intent on the one gleam or the other; in a characteristically Beckettian oxymoron "unheard footfalls" are the "only sound". The observer's focus then changes with the words "till at last". He learns to abandon the anxious pursuit of impossible safety on either side, rather like the protagonist of Acte sans paroles I abandoning all action. Instead he settles for the place between, which can only be designated by the word "neither" since it has no linguistic or rational identity. This is, necessarily, a place of no sound, but once accepted, it can be a region of illumination, suggesting an almost mystical solitude: "then gently light unfading on that unheeded/neither".

This "unheeded" realm surely hints at that between languages and cultures; a disturbing because indefinable dark space between the circles of rational understanding which have traditionally been associated with metaphors of light. It is, necessarily, an "unspeakable" home (both unspeakably strange and beyond speech). Language is absent, but the space offers, once the speaker has faced it directly, the security of a home (a key word in many Beckett

works) otherwise denied. It is the "extraterritorial" writer's only possible home, "unhoused" in language, solitary, but also unconstrained.(1)

The images of light, refuges and binary contracts are familiar Beckettian motifs. But as a whole the text of neither remains somewhat obscure, or may seem a mere reworking of a familiar game of dualistic negation, unless it is read in the bilingual context. The images and sense of lueurs lisières add force to the idea that Beckett's imagination was working in both languages on the sense of private space between. The weaving shuttle of Moran's words has returned in the mirlitonnade's linguistically playful form. The French word "navette" has a variety of meanings, including not only "shuttle" but the kind of boat, car or train that does repeated short journeys between two points. Here, though, "navette" is used also in its agricultural sense; the field of growing "rape-seed" lies between two borders: the "lueurs lisières" are also gleams of light on either side. Meanings dance elusively together; Tantalus-like the scene frustrates the traveller; "plus qu'un pas s'éteignent / demi-tour remiroitent". He decides, as in neither, to give up trying to attain either alternative, and to "halte plutôt/ loin des deux" in lines that resemble neither

1. These terms are taken from George Steiner's After Babel and Extraterritorial (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971/1972).

especially closely: "chez soi sans soi /ni eux" ("absent for good/ from self and other"). Again the poem reflects a state of linguistic and imaginative detachment, the discovery that the speaker can somehow hover in a realm between languages, a "chez soi", a home, in a place where verbal definition of self is impossible.

The notion of self and other as distinct and confrontational collapses in the direct consideration of language itself; language necessarily bridges the gap between the two, is always interactional. Bilingualism complicates the issue of one speaker's use of language being different from another's, an issue Beckett had explored in his only long piece of criticism, Proust, written in 1930:

Even on the rare occasions when word and gesture happen to be valid expressions of personality, they lose their significance on their passage through the cataract of the personality that is opposed to them. Either we speak and act for ourselves -- in which case speech and action are distorted and emptied of their meaning by an intelligence that is not ours, or else we speak and act for others -- in which case we speak and act a lie. (1)

Indeterminacy within a single tongue is clearly on a different level from indeterminacy between different languages, as Quine has argued in Word and Object (2). While it is true that, over the years, Beckett has read deeply in Western philosophy, what surely matters most in his sense of language and languages

1. Samuel Beckett, Proust and Three Dialogues (with Georges Duthuit), (London: Calder and Boyars, ^{1965/}1970), p. 64.

2. Willard von Ormond Quine, Word and Object (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1960).

stems from his own linguistic experience -- as artist and translator -- not simply from his reading. If anything, thinkers such as Mauthner and, very much later, Wittgenstein confirmed in a different discipline what he already knew: "individuals communicate with each other", as Mauthner said, "because every one of them sees the speech-habits (Sprachgewohnheiten) of the other similar (to his own)". (1)

When the speech-habits of a single language community are not shared, the sense of a self distinct from the other immediately becomes focussed and intensified. One's sense of belonging in a group with shared assumptions depends on the conventions the group has developed together. As a professional translator, Beckett knows only too well the real blind spots, as well as the strengths, of different languages as public, mediating instruments of culture which also interact constantly with individual reception and perception. This was exactly the kind of question the contributors to the magazine transition were interested in discussing. The "inner shadow" of neither is the place of solitude in which any speaker can create an internal monologue, using a public language for a private purpose. The "outer shadow" is that area where the speaker employs the public language, while knowing it distorts inner

1. Translated from the German by Gershon Weiler in his book Mauthner's Critique of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 113. The parentheses in the quotation are Weiler's.

experience. The bilingual who turns both languages inwards can do something quite different: experience a dialogue between two different human tongues within his own head, thus becoming, in microcosm, the place where self and society meet. Yet, as language must, the tongues come from and ultimately return to the public realm, or madness follows.

In the English translation of Théâtre II Beckett had a happy afterthought in a passage where the madness, or at least suicidal depression, of the central character, C, comes together with questions of language, languages, failed communication and mortality. For the French: "partie d'échecs inachevée avec correspondant à Melbourne" (1), pronounced by one of the chillingly bureaucratic investigators of C's case, as he reads from a report, the English has a variation: "unfinished game of chess with a correspondent in Tasmania" (2). The alteration adds greatly to the poignant emphasis on a failed communicative relationship, as well as making a concealed point about human cruelty. The original Tasmanian language and culture died in 1876, with its last unfortunate native speaker, a woman called Truganini who had outlived the rest of her community. European settlers had persecuted them

1. Samuel Beckett, Fragment de Théâtre II, in Pas suivi de quatre esquisses (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1978), p. 46.

2. Samuel Beckett, Rough For Theatre II, in Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 82.

to extinction in the space of seventy-five years. (1) B's report continues: "hope not dead of living to see the extermination of the species." The grim humour of this line has a painful edge; English, French or any other apparently successful language, even with the added security of a written form, is just as mortal as Tasmanian. Like the game of chess, languages are patterned systems which can only survive as long as their "players" do. Tasmanian is a game for which the rules are now lost.

Beckett's sense of contrasting verbal systems, his use of transition, opposition and meanings that shift into each other in a vortex of disintegrating solidities, (2) emerges in the words and imagery of many of his works, but is encapsulated in neither and lueurs lisières. These exist as a kind of bilingual pair, linked without direct translation, in which Beckett expresses a transitional consciousness directly. Eugene Jolas, the editor of transition, had wanted to discover this realm too, as an escape from the conflicting language-worlds which shaped his experience:

1. Racism: The Australian Experience, ed. F.S. Stevens, 3 vols. (New York: Taplinger, 1972), vol. 2, pp. 228-234.

2. In a 1934 review of Sean O'Casey's Windfalls, Beckett spoke of O'Casey discerning "the principle of disintegration in even the most complacent solidities". Reprinted in Samuel Beckett, Disjecta (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 82.

In the little border-town of Lorraine, where French and German civilizations sought and fled each other in a ceaseless tension, I spent my childhood before the World-War dreaming escape from the millenary struggle of languages and races. (1)

Although part of a literary age long gone when Beckett wrote neither and lueurs lisières, Jolas would have been well placed to appreciate them. The revolutionary language which transition celebrated, the automatic writing of the Surrealists, the dream-language of Finnegans Wake, all seemed to provide bridges to unconscious levels of experience. They bear a direct relation to Beckett's own verbal exploration of the implications of bilingualism or multilingualism, of a relativism extending to language as well as to culture, for the human mind. Living in the stimulating circle of Joyce's "Work in Progress" as a young man, Beckett found, in the decades that followed, his own highly individual path to a new artistic vision, in which languages, in Jolas' words, seek and flee each other "in a ceaseless tension."

Bilingualism exposed/concealed

Explicit references to bilingualism occur frequently in Beckett's pre-war work; they continue to appear occasionally in his great post-war flood of writing, but in more recent years

1. transition, April-May 1938, No. 27, p. 243.

they have sunk to concealment beneath layers of rare allusion and powerful metaphor. Bilingualism is a subject for facetious jokes in 1934; it helps to undermine narrative authority in 1948; only gradually does it descend into the subtext of Beckett's work, consistently vital to the creative act itself but generally "unheeded" because the explicit signs of its presence have been steadily suppressed. Why such a development should occur is a question at the heart of the artistic direction Beckett has taken. His intuitions, if not the explicit goals he has revealed in his criticism and in conversation, led him to a bold and unusual decision: to make of bilingualism a context and provider of energy for his art. Its intimate connections with the unconscious sources of his imagination are reason enough for the artist himself to avoid analysing it rationally, yet on some level, as I now want to illustrate, the awareness is undoubtedly there.

The younger writer of Whoroscope, of "Dream of Fair to middling Women" and of More Pricks Than Kicks takes pleasure in both using and at times abusing the French language. He wants his readers to know of his linguistic versatility. Whoroscope has its bilingual phrases, and is devoted not simply to a French-language context but specifically to the emblematic French thinker, René Descartes. "Dream of Fair to middling Women" is full of French expressions and passages, used with knowledge and evident delight. In More Pricks Than Kicks, which Beckett

partly salvaged from his cumbersome and unpublishable novel, the narrator shows a mocking, yet indulgent, attitude towards the bumptious Belacqua who is so proud of his "short stay abroad" (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 26). Seeing the Alba home, in "A Wet Night", Belacqua's powers of amorous persuasion seem limited in either language:

He insisted on their taking a taxi to her home.
They found nothing to say on the way. Je t'adore à l'égal...

(...)

'Well' he said, wondering might he hazard a quick baisemain before he went. He released the gesture but she shrank away and unlatched the gate.

Tire la chevillette, la bobinette cherra.

Pardon these French expressions, but the creature dreams in French. (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 86)

The scraps of French, "je t'adore à l'égal", "baisemain" and the quotation from Perrault's Le petit chaperon rouge (1) are only some of many such expressions with which Belacqua's mind is well-stocked. The narrator seems both pleased and comically apologetic at Belacqua's distinct sense of superiority to the society in which he lives; Belacqua is a typical Beckettian protagonist already in the sense that he exists with a divided consciousness, dreaming in French in a -- to him -- impossibly provincial Dublin. As yet, however, the use of French does not reveal, in the text itself, deep or

1. Where it is the grandmother's, and then the wolf's, explanation as to how to gain entrance to the cottage (Contes de Perrault, fac-similé de l'édition originale de 1695-1697 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1980), pp. 52-53).

disturbing psychological implications. Belacqua's search for identity and his bilingualism have not come together into a powerfully united focus.

His need to communicate has a slightly darker tone in "Yellow" when he longs to make conversation with his night-nurse, as he languishes in a hospital bed:

Belacqua cast about wildly for a reply that would please her and do him justice at the same time. Au plaisir was of course the very thing, but the wrong language. (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 178)

Once again French seems more attractive for the affairs of the heart. The most explicit hint of all (and the only occasion where any Beckettian narrator or speaker uses the word "bilingual") is the effect a Scottish dialect has on the extremely tense patient, as his operation time approaches. The reference to Scottish English is most unusual: Miranda, who hails from Aberdeen, is preparing his toe for surgery:

'Such a lang tootsy' she giggled.
Heavenly father, the creature was bilingual. A lang tootsy!
Belacqua swallowed his choler.
'Soon to be syne' he said in a loud voice. What his reparte lacked in wit it made up for in style. (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 182)

It is not, then, only in French that the first major Beckettian hero makes an effort to communicate precisely; Belacqua is nervously alert to any situation where two tongues (or two dialects) interact with or oppose each other. Yet in the dense and sometimes arrogantly intellectual tone of this early prose,

much of the force of such preoccupations is lost. Later works, for both the theatre and the page, will face questions of linguistic doubleness and isolation with a depth of understanding, a metaphoric power and humanity, that are as yet unsuspected.

After 1934, Beckett became more discriminating in his inclusion of explicit bilingual and bicultural references. For nearly three years, corresponding to the period in which he was trying to make a place for himself in English letters, the habit of using, and alluding to, his European languages, especially French, is reduced. Murphy is intriguing in this respect, as the novel that deals most analytically with questions of insanity and self-willed isolation in a social setting of considerable realistic, if comically presented, detail. It employs an English from which most of the obsessive echoing of French words and phrases has been excised. Yet even the character Murphy, who is shown in the contexts of Cork, Dublin and London, recalls France with nostalgic resignation. Poignant indeed is the record of his assessment of London and Paris streets, comparing the merits of the two environments:

By far the best part of the way was the toil from King's Cross up Caledonian Road, reminding him of the toil from St. Lazare up Rue d'Amsterdam. And while Brewery Road was by no means a Boulevard de Clichy nor even des Batignolles, still it was better at the end of the hill than either of those, as asylum (after a point) is better than exile. (1)

"Asylum" and "exile" both permit separation from an unsympathetic or incomprehending circle of fellow-beings: Murphy finds his asylum with the insane, until released into chaos, and the eternity he liked to gaze at with his star-charts, by the explosion of gas in his garret. Perhaps exile would have been better after all, the implied conclusion seems to be; it is, at any rate, the decision made by the author of Murphy not long afterwards.

The English of Watt is profoundly subverted and at the same time motivated by a consciousness of two languages. A surface-use of French in the style of More Pricks Than Kicks would be undesirable, and French expressions are slipped in almost surreptitiously through apparent linguistic interference, while the novel's subversion of the English it employs bears a direct relation to the tension of an underlying bilingual consciousness. (See Chapter III.) Beckett wrote Watt in English but in France, and after it began the years of using his "second" language (which, in a sense, has since become his "first") for the massive outpouring of fiction and drama for which he is best known. Yet what is noticeable in almost all the works of the period 1945-1954 is a nervous comic habit, almost like an irrepressible need, by many of the characters, spokesmen or narrators, to tell of a foreign origin, or demonstrate knowledge of a foreign language, or hint at another existence in a different tongue and a different realm.

Mercier et Camier, like most of the fiction that comes after it, contains scenes and sequences of dialogue that emphasise problems of non-communication in conventional public language. "Usage" is at the heart of linguistic and social agreement. The couple, a kind of comic double-act, are rebels against all kinds of unspoken rules of behaviour and speech, and constantly bring attention to the words they are using. "Quelque humble, dit Camier, que cela sonne drôlement." (1) On their travels they find themselves being taken for tourists by a hotel employee who associates the use of English with all that is chic, just as French would be in linguistically reversed circumstances:

Ce n'est pas le Savoy, mais c'est -- comment dirais-je? Il les toisa d'un regard rapide et sournois. Comment dirais-je? dit-il.
Dites-le, dit Camier. Ne nous faites pas languir.
C'est... cosy, dit l'homme. Voilà. C'est cosy. (Mercier et Camier, p. 66)

Although the man claims to be an expert in "physionomies" he does not seem absolutely certain that Mercier and Camier are English-speakers, so he adds "C'est...gemütlich" for good measure. What he seems sure of is that they are not French.

As with Estragon's "accent anglais" as he praises Pozzo's oration on sunset, (2) the aim is still comic in context, but

1. Samuel Beckett, Mercier et Camier (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1970), p. 21.

2. Samuel Beckett, En attendant Godot (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1952), p. 53.

the comedy is becoming related to a deeper level of feeling about language itself. In the Nouvelles the unsettling sense of a linguistic gap between protagonist and group coexists with the humour more obviously, and darkens it. All the heroes are on the edge of convention, social outcasts or objects of charity, their language at a distance from their fellows. The protagonists of L'expulsé and La fin are quite literally looking for a home, while the speaker in Le calmant is trying to get back to his. In a rare chronicle of communication that, for a time, is relatively successful, Premier amour has the narrator and his female acquaintance agreeing over the pronunciation of her name, Lulu, because they are both using a foreign language to which their phonetic habits are not fully adapted:

N'étant pas française, elle disait Loulou. Moi aussi, n'étant pas français non plus, je disais Loulou comme elle. Tous les deux, nous disions Loulou. (1)

Sadly, such unity of expression does not last long, and by the end of the novella the narrator is being pursued by the screams of Lulu/Anne (he arbitrarily changes the name during his narration) in labour, bringing forth his child while he flees; the language of pain and separation has outlasted the language of "love".

1. Samuel Beckett, Premier amour (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1970), p. 17.

In the trilogy the French language allows Beckett to confirm what Watt began: to undermine an unspoken narrative contract, a sense of clear authority, which is also the contract of a shared language. Molloy, Moran and Malone are all language-conscious, and there are submerged hints of another language's presence. Molloy tells us of the word for "papa" in his part of the world; it is "da";(1) the reader who, in common with Beckett, knows Synge's The Playboy of the Western World may hear the echoes of the tones of Christy Mahon. The parrot at Lousse's house swears in fluent French ("Putain de conasse de merde de chialison", Molloy, p. 55) in the French text, which leads Molloy-as-narrator to comment: "Il avait dû appartenir à une personne française avant d'appartenir à Lousse." So Lousse is not French, though the text we are reading is. The parrot also swears in English: "il disait aussi, Fuck! Ce n'était pourtant pas une personne française qui lui avait appris à dire, Fuck!"; it is, in other words, a bilingual parrot. Molloy thinks it may have found "Fuck" all on its own, a kind of innate language-ability. Yet the parrot resists learning "Pretty Polly!", which Lousse is trying to teach it; though bilingual, it is also a parrot which dislikes the clichés of parrot-language. When the text moves to English, a neat reversal occurs, with a little cultural

1. "Et da, dans ma région, veut dire papa" (Molloy, p. 23).

adjustment:

He exclaimed from time to time, Fuck the son of a bitch, fuck the son of a bitch. He must have belonged to an American sailor, before he belonged to Lousse. Pets often change masters. He didn't say much else. No, I'm wrong, he also said, Putain de merde! He must have belonged to a French sailor before he belonged to the American sailor. Putain de merde! Unless he had hit on it alone, it wouldn't surprise me. (Molloy, pp. 37-38)

The two versions, compared, reveal the predisposition of the original French to translation into English; bilingual awareness is already incorporated into its thinking. (1)

Malone meurt contains a startlingly direct admission by the decrepit writer Malone, as he describes Big Louis' wife and the way she uses her arms to show despair, that his own origins are foreign: "je dirais brandissais (sic) si j'ignorais encore mieux le génie de votre langue".(2) It is "votre" langue, not our language. He separates himself from his projected readers in this one pronoun, as well as drawing attention to the "faux ami"; "brandish" would be the verb used in English. The statement compels the reader, already necessarily suspicious of the authenticity of any level of the narrative,

1. Eugene Kaelin, in The Unhappy Consciousness: The Poetic Plight of Samuel Beckett (Dordrecht, Boston and London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1981), has a sensitive discussion of this passage in his chapter on Beckett's self-translation, "Sound, Sense and Sound", pp. 269-281.

2. Samuel Beckett, Malone meurt (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1951), p. 50.

to take a further step backwards: this Irish-sounding Malone is indeed Irish, not French, although using that language. In both Molloy and Malone meurt, the reader of the French original can be forgiven for thinking that this is some kind of mental translation of what should be an Anglo-Irish story, which, of course, it will become in Beckett's subsequent translation.

L'innommable provides the most open exposition of bilingual consciousness of this period. Some of the innumerable confessions of the speaker, anonymous and incoherent as he is, insist cumulatively on a separation between the words and him who speaks them. The mind plunges into the mystery of a space between two languages, the darkness separating areas of rational discourse:

Peut-être que cette fois^{-ci} encore je ne ferais^q que chercher ma leçon, sans pouvoir la dire, tout en m'accompagnant dans une langue qui n'est pas la mienne. (1)

Cette voix qui parle (...) Elle sort de moi, elle me remplit, elle clame contre mes murs, elle n'est pas la mienne, je ne peux pas l'arrêter... (L'innommable, p. 40)

J'ai à parler, n'ayant rien à dire, rien que les paroles des autres. (L'innommable, p. 55)

1. Samuel Beckett, L'innommable (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1953), p. 39.

M'avoir collé un langage dont ils s'imaginent
que je ne pourrai jamais me servir sans m'avouer
de leur tribu, la belle astuce. (L'innommable,
p. 76)

This last protest is especially provocative. It may call up Mallarmé's famous lines about Poe: "Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu".(1) Mallarmé was not only deeply versed in English-language literature, like many of his contemporaries, but was also, of course, a teacher of English, and writer of Les Mots Anglais. He was, in other words, an artist who has an exceptional relevance for Beckett as a French/English bilingual. The poem on Poe also contains the lines:

Son siècle épouvanté de n'avoir pas connu
Que la mort triomphait dans cette voix étrange!

"Une voix étrange" is exactly what L'innommable contains, in more senses than one. It is a voice both strange and foreign, "étrange" and "étrangère". In a text triggered off by an artistic need to confront language directly, the author's bilingual consciousness allows him to move into a zone where reason appears to have no control. L'innommable is art

1. Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1945), p. 71.

externalising as fiction what in life would be psychological breakdown. It is not that breakdown itself, because the circle of irrationality is firmly and clearly drawn, and set in a particular form, a weaving of complex metaphors; the artist has found a way to contain and express verbal chaos.

L'innommable has frequently been cited by critics as an example of texts about the alienation of the artist, the sense of language as lies; like Sartre's La Nausée, Sarraute's novels, and her essay L'ère du soupçon, Beckett's culmination to the trilogy seems an ideal illustration of the way the individual artistic consciousness (in a specific context) has felt itself betrayed by, separated from, the words it had no choice but to use. Hannah Case Copeland quotes from L'innommable to say:

Having no language of his own, the artist is compelled to use the poor tool society has made. In his efforts to see into the truth of himself, he has only the blinding, distorting, utterly inadequate formulae of others to aid him. Yet, all men are limited by such a language; one can ask with Mayoux, "who does not express himself in a foreign language?" (1)

Her comments are indeed apt within the specific context she refers to. Yet in answer to her, or rather Jean-Jacques Mayoux's, question: "who does not express himself in a foreign language?", a perspective that considers bilingualism as a reality requires the answer: "many people". For vast numbers, -----

1. Hannah Case Copeland, Art and the Artist in the Works of Samuel Beckett (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1975), p. 200.

including many fine writers, language is not a "poor tool" at all but an effective and rich one; it is not for them "foreign". A broader view of both English and French literature shows, in fact, that a strong non-alienated tradition of writing has continued in each culture. There is a profound difference between the native French writer writing for a well-defined French audience, or the equivalent in England or the United States, and an exile who, like Beckett, lives in a language which he is consciously aware of as the language of others. If the writer's own childhood was not lived in that language, if it was learned after, not before, the beginnings of rational thought, or if it is in political and cultural conflict with another tongue, then he is "alienated" not just in a loose, fashionable sense of the term, but in a specific realistic one.

If alienated language has come to seem central to perhaps the most powerful current of European literature, it is, as George Steiner has pointed out, because so many of its writers are exiles, bilinguals through some accident of birth, or individuals affected by the century's great movements of populations, giving them a double or multiple linguistic awareness. A striking aspect of the language revolution, Steiner says:

has been the emergence of linguistic pluralism or 'unhousedness' in certain great writers. These

writers stand in a relation of dialectical
hesitance not only toward one native tongue -- as
Hölderlin or Rimbaud did before them -- but
toward several languages. (1)

In Beckett's case, bilingualism was voluntary, as was exile,
and yet the linguistic conditions of his native Ireland
certainly set it apart from such firmly centred cultures as
those of England and France. Edward Said has a valuable
term to describe the particular pattern of consciousness that
is characteristic of the exile, and is equally true of the
balanced bilingual:

Most people are principally aware of one culture,
one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least
two, and this plurality of visions gives rise to
an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an
awareness that -- to borrow a phrase from music --
is contrapuntal. (2)

In L'innommable, Beckett is continuously using a "contrapuntal"
sense of cultures and languages as a kind of subtext to his
words; such a sense "makes possible", Said says, "originality of
vision". The speaker obsessively reiterates that "they" are
responsible for the words he has to speak; in the case of the
French original of L'innommable this is literally true. Yet
bilingualism is the hidden, not open, motivation for so intense
a struggle with words; self is indeed separate from other when

1. Steiner, Extraterritorial, p. 10.

2. Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile", Granta, 13, Autumn 1984,
p. 172.

that self has deliberately pushed aside the mother tongue, and replaced it with a second tongue of which it is conscious, from which it can maintain a certain detachment. Even in this courageous novel, uncompromising in its harrowing directness, there is a moment of softening into nostalgia near the close of the speaker's outpouring of words (or the point at which the reader ceases to "hear" it):

je ne sais pas, c'est plus simple, je me voulais
moi, je voulais mon pays, je me voulais dans mon
pays, un petit moment, je ne voulais pas mourir
en étranger, parmi des étrangers, en étranger chez
moi, au milieu d'envahisseurs, non, je ne sais pas
ce que je voulais (L'innommable, p. 225)

For a moment the speaker can admit to not being in his own country; his homesickness is as much linguistic as geographical.

L'innommable is, like Watt, a major advance in Beckett's bilingual awareness as an artist. A later advance will come with Comment c'est and its translation as How It Is, and a later still with Company. But what of explicit clues to the bilingual consciousness after L'innommable? They turn into remarks that show an acute awareness of one language or the other but push to an even deeper level the "contrapuntal" relation between them. The speaker of From An Abandoned Work exclaims, of a German word: "Schimmel, nice word, for an English speaker" (1). He savours the sound, in this first text

1. Samuel Beckett, From An Abandoned Work, in Collected Shorter Prose 1945-1980 (London: John Calder, 1984), p. 130.

Beckett had written in English for a decade (as the title suggests, the return seemed premature to its author). The speaker also tells us, disarmingly, that he has a mind "always on the alert against itself" (From An Abandoned Work, p. 131), disclaims ownership of his voice, and sums up: "awful English this" (From an Abandoned Work, p. 137). He could hardly be more frank in sharing with readers the sense of surprise at the qualities of the mother tongue.

In both languages, from the early 1950s, the question of linguistic ownership can be raised, and the mind on the alert against itself becomes more and more familiar. In the theatre, Beckett frequently shows creator-artist figures who, while more rooted in the language they are using than are his prose voices, perform and evaluate their own linguistic prowess with an obvious self-consciousness; Pozzo and Hamm are the most colourful examples. Pozzo even sprays his vocal cords to achieve a better delivery of his oration, while Hamm, equally in need of an audience for his story-telling, uses French with a similar exaggerated awareness: "Allons, allons, présentez votre supplique, mille soins m'appellent. (Ton normal.) Ça c'est du français!". (1) Yet the theatre, because of its different constraints, does not tend to show the pressures of bilingualism as clearly as the prose, where the narrators

1. Samuel Beckett, Fin de partie (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957), p. 72.

seem to push towards the borders of the language they happen to be using.

Since the 1950s Beckett's increasingly long-standing bilingualism has, as all things do in time, become less remarkable to those (perhaps rare) members of his audience and those readers who are aware of it. Yet his imagination, as the 1976 poems quoted earlier suggest, has never lost the wonder and the intensity of a "contrapuntal" mode of existence, a transitional realm of consciousness. As his use of self-translation and a purely bilingual mode of writing became more complex, an intriguing reflection in the works is the use of other language-groups for comparison and contrast.

In Comment c'est, the speaker shows himself capable of considerable humour as he tries to discover whether he and the new arrival in his patch of mud, "Pim", share a language. He has already complained about having lost his Latin, (Comment c'est, pp66) now he wonders if the figure lying beside him is German-speaking:

je ne distingue pas les paroles la boue les étouffe
ou c'est une langue étrangère il chante peut-être
un lied dans le texte original c'est peut-être
un étranger (Comment c'est, p. 87)

Having considered German, he then wonders if Pim is an oriental.

He listens a little more:

une voix humaine là à quelques centimètres mon
rêve voire peut-être une pensée humaine si je dois
apprendre l'italien évidemment ce sera moins
drôle (Comment c'est, p. 88)

As well as the humour (with what learning aids could he
acquire Italian?) there is an underlying serious point: both
"une voix humaine" and "une pensée humaine" are closed to
us if the walls of Babel intervene. Both German and Italian
reappear in the English text. Finally the speaker can
celebrate sharing a language, as he confirms that Pim is
indeed using recognisable words:

quelques mots yeux cieux amour ce dernier peut-être
au pluriel aussi chic nous usons du même idiome
c'est énorme... (Comment c'est, p. 100)

In English this becomes:

a word or two eyes skies the or thee cheers we
use the same idiom what a blessing (1)

What a blessing indeed. It is a blessing not shared by the
speaker in Not I, Beckett's most powerful representation of
alienated language in theatrical terms. In the French version

1. Samuel Beckett, How It Is (London: Calder & Boyars, 1964), p. 70.
It is characteristic of the relatively free translation of How
It Is to put sound and language-patterning before sense; one
might think "amour" a significant word here, yet Beckett drops
it for the "the/thee" homophones since no English singular-plural
pair will work on the page as "amour/amours" does.

of the play, Pas moi, a special touch of the translation brings the speaker's isolation even more forcibly into focus:

brusque envie de... raconter... alors sortir comme
une folle se jeter sur le premier venu... la cuvette
la plus proche... s'y vider... flot continu... sans
queue ni tête... voyelles tout de travers... du
chinois... (1)

Her language-use is a kind of curse; the French phrase "du chinois", rather like the English "double Dutch" or "it's all Greek to me", takes her even further into a terrifying linguistic isolation, a far-away system of words which for some reason she must use.

In other works of the 1970s and 1980s, Beckett's vivid sense of the shock when two human tongues meet, or when communication's conventions are disregarded, becomes calmer and suffused with a resigned acceptance. The writer whose first experiences of this clash were in the Irish context brings a memory of the tongue dominated by his own English together with a far-flung, utterly different language, in the gentle humour of Company:

The voice alone is company but not enough. Its effect on the hearer is a necessary complement. (...) For were he merely to hear the voice and it to have no more effect on him than speech in Bantu or in Erse then might it not as well cease? (2)

1. Samuel Beckett, Oh les beaux jours suivi de Pas moi (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1963/1974), pp. 93-94.

2. Samuel Beckett, Company (London: John Calder, 1980), p. 11.

Erse would be as incomprehensible as Bantu to this language-user, even though the memories of childhood in Company lead back to the "Ballyogan Road" "in lieu of nowhere in particular" (Company, p. 30), and Ballyogan is, of course, an anglicised version of an Erse or Irish name.

Beckett's bilingual consciousness is as crucial to his sense of the way human groups live, in the most practical aspects of existence, as to his perception of how they think and feel. His own ability to slip from English to French and back again raises his sensitivity to questions of "tongue" to an acute level. He rapidly suppressed the explicit, and even self-congratulatory, display of two (or more) languages in his early writing. It is impossible to know, of course, how consciously or unconsciously he did this, but the evidence of the works themselves suggests that his intuitive sense of what was artistically appropriate, as well as his increasingly articulate aesthetic aims, combined to lead him towards such suppression. Instead he has developed serious and far-reaching uses of the perceptions a relativist view of language has given him, his French and English operating on either side of a private transitional space. In this space, as a bilingual artist, he has been able to liberate himself from many of the unconsciously internalised conventions of a single linguistic and cultural milieu. Even more important, he has retained a

sense of solitude, through all the years of fame, a necessary confirmation that neither language-community can assimilate a consciousness determined to stand alone.

The bilingual mind

Attitudes to bilingualism in predominately unilingual literary cultures often seem curiously nervous, as well as uninformed. (1) Even though bilinguals are as common as unilinguals in a global perspective, the whole subject remained little studied until recently, after the rise of widespread linguistic and anthropological research after World War Two. Although there have been bilingual writers throughout recorded history, the relative status of their two languages, politically and culturally, has often determined how much attention is paid to the merits of their performance as users of two complete systems of image and reference. (2)

1. Further details about bilingualism in its social, psychological and linguistic aspects can be found in many studies, including the following, all of which contain extensive bibliographies: Uriel Weinreich, Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems (New York: Linguistic Circle of New York, No. 1, 1953), H. Baetens Beardsmore, Bilingualism: Basic Principles (Clevedon, Avon: Tieto Ltd., 1982), Max K. Adler, Collective and Individual Bilingualism: A Sociolinguistic Study (Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 1977), François Grosjean, Life With Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1982).

2. See Leonard Forster's The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature (New Zealand: University of Otago Press and Cambridge University Press, 1970).

Bilingualism is in fact a perfectly natural part of human achievement, and yet in the European context it conflicts with unspoken assumptions about language and nationalism, an inheritance from the Romantic period, so that it can seem eccentric, even psychologically dangerous. Rayner Heppenstall, in his idiosyncratic study The Fourfold Tradition: Notes on the French and English literatures with some ethnological and historical asides, seems to hover in indecision over this question, asserting that bilingualism (in relation, specifically, to Beckett) "must, one imagines, always result in a degree of harmless, non-clinical near-schizophrenia".(1) He has hedged in the word "schizophrenia" with so many qualifications that it is clear he is uneasy about using it, and yet feels no other will do. Max Adler sees the danger of a "split personality" in the bilingual, and yet makes a comment that would seem, at least, to redeem Beckett: "Only in people of the highest intelligence the conflict between the two egos is absent".(2)

Probable reasons for the general reluctance to focus on Beckett's bilingual artistry seem, then, to go beyond the simple idea that most Beckett scholars prefer to work only in

1. Rayner Heppenstall, The Fourfold Tradition (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961), p. 263.

2. Adler, Collective and Individual Bilingualism, pp. 40-41.

one literary tradition and language, and even beyond the possibility that underlying influences are exerted by the strongly-centred, predominately unilingual cultures where he has found most of his interpreters. Rather, bilingualism in Beckett's writing seems to lead towards a murky area on the borders between literature and psychoanalysis, in which the artist becomes a "case" and the art produced a set of symptoms.

Ever since belief in psychology became a kind of alternative, in some circles, to religious faith, it has been easy to see links between art and insanity, most particularly schizophrenia, and indeed the Freudian tradition has allowed for such an attitude. Instead of receiving inspiration from God, or the poetic Muse, the artist is being inspired by an unbalanced mind. Yet the difference between art and madness is far more important than the similarity. The artist communicates, and has voluntary control of the creativity released from the unconscious. The victim of madness (witness Mr. Endon, the gentle but totally isolated schizophrenic in Murphy) cannot communicate and does not have control over the split or multiple selves that occupy the fragmented brain. Beckett himself, whose interest in the disorders of the mind is evident from Murphy, would know this perfectly well. Before moving into any further discussion of

the bilingual aesthetic I see him as having developed, it therefore seems imperative to look directly at the relationship between Beckett's bilingualism and his exploration of dark -- and, some would say, dangerous -- areas of human consciousness. He approaches these areas, not through the language of religion or science but through the resources literary art has always employed: image, character, form, plot, and above all poetic, metaphorically charged language itself. He only stands apart in having used his two human tongues, rather than one, to achieve this.

In Angels of Darkness, Colin Duckworth argues emphatically against the reductive -- and extremely hostile -- view of Beckett's work that sees it as psychologically dangerous. He illustrates this view with a letter from a doctor whose daughter was studying Waiting For Godot. Such plays, the doctor said, are "a mine of morbid introspection, nihilism, depression, schizophrenic ideas etc." (1)

Duckworth's counter-argument is that "the effect of Beckett's plays can be salutary, forcing one to stop blinding oneself to existential and religious problems and to resolve them " (2).

1. Colin Duckworth, Angels of Darkness (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 56.

2. Duckworth, Angels of Darkness, p. 56.

This view is, either explicitly or implicitly, generally held by Beckett's admirers, and allows a study of his art to remain within the area of imaginative concerns, not that of psychiatric symptoms. Yet bilingualism in an artist, when it is as far-reaching as Beckett's, raises profoundly disturbing questions about the relationship between language, culture and consciousness. Huguette Delye refers to Beckett's bilingualism as a "malaise". (1) Lawrence Harvey acknowledges that Beckett as a young man felt some strong sense of inner division, but sensibly concludes that this "split personality" was seen by the young poet not "as an aberration to be remedied but as a condition to be exploited". (2) Through literature, in other words, Beckett was able to externalise what he had experienced, and has repeatedly spoken of, as a doubled self; through bilingualism he has been able to continue to nurture and extend an acute sensitivity to questions of identity, expression and feeling.

In the 1930s, the awareness of mind as place, and the fascination with solipsism, play a central part in the development of Beckett's

1. Huguette Delye, Samuel Beckett ou la Philosophie de l'Absurde (Aix-en-Provence: "La Pensée Universitaire", Travaux & Mémoires XVI, Faculté des lettres, 1960), p. 13: "La personnalité se dissocie dans le malaise du bilinguisme."

2. Lawrence Harvey, Samuel Beckett; Poet and Critic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 271.

art. Belacqua "bragged of how he furnished his mind and lived there" (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 174); Murphy has a whole chapter on the geography, so to speak, of Murphy's mind. In writing about Descartes and Proust, Beckett was exploring different cases of the isolated mind which is also highly creative. Descartes has his "poêle", Proust his cork-lined room; both find their true originality by looking inwards. In his own invented literary hero, Jean du Chas, the first important character created in French, Beckett also experiments with the idea. (See Chapter II.) A long and revealing passage in "Dream of Fair to middling Women" has the clearest statement in Beckett's entire work of a vision of humanity as shades in a dark mental space, a space that makes all difference of language and culture an irrelevance. It may spring from Dante, but it is a rich source of imagery and perceptions for the mental outlooks of the characters and narrators created in this early period and later. In this passage, Belacqua, trying to be truly alone in his hotel room in Paris, constructs a kind of fortress to protect his inner world:

The labour of resting in a strange place is properly extenuating. The first week and more went to throwing up a ring of earthworks; this to break not so much the flow of people and things to him as the ebb of him to [xxxxx] people and things. (1)

1. Samuel Beckett, "Dream of Fair to middling Women" (copy of unpublished typescript; Reading University Library, Ms. 1227/7/16/8), p. 38.

For two months he lives in a kind of Dante-esque trance or vision:

He moved with [xx] the shades of the dead and the dead-born and the unborn and the never-to-be-born, in a Limbo purged of desire. They moved gravely, men and women and children, neither sad not (sic) joyful. They were dark, and they gave a dawn light to the darker place where they moved.
 n > (...) The mi(b)d, dim and hushed like a sick-room, like a chapelle ardente, thronged with shades; the mind at last its own asylum, disinterested, indifferent. ("Dream of Fair to middling Women", pp. 38-39)

Belacqua's "waking ultra-cerebral obscurity, thronged with grey angels" (so the passage continues), may be mystical, but it is not mad, nor was the writer who created it. He quickly rounds off the sequence and launches Belacqua once more into his hilarious picaresque adventures in the outer world, the typical tangles with sex, alcohol and poetry of a young artistic rebel. Yet there is a profound rapport in such images with the archetypal visions which have appeared and reappeared in art over the centuries, especially in the mystical and, more recently, psychological traditions of writing. The fascination with asylum focusses on a basic human preoccupation. In the works that follow, Beckett returns again and again to a direct consideration of the mind "not as an instrument but as a place", in the words of Murphy (p. 123).

What, though, is the connection between this visionary bridging of medieval and modern thought and bilingualism

itself? Bilingualism led Beckett towards a detachment from specific culture and language into a private, relativist world where the most fundamental and unifying concerns of human life could be seen directly. He developed a strong sense of inner territory, in a clear progression from the nervous moving through the outer world in the early works, to the blunt "nous sommes bien entendu dans une tête" of Le calmant; (1) from the skull-like stage setting of Fin de partie (the two windows eyes on a devastated world) to Le dépeupleur which returns so closely to the "Dream" vision; finally, from A Piece of Monologue, in which the white globe of light is like a bleached skull seen from the outside, to the oozing "soft" (the grey matter of the brain itself) of Worstward Ho. (2) Bilingualism allows an unusually direct focus on areas of awareness that are difficult to articulate; as Beckett's career allows him, from the 1940s on, to move more and more publicly from one language-world to the other, he also gains insight into social experience and expression in specific human idioms. Through the transitional movement between the two languages he can put his acute consciousness of language at the service of his need

1. Samuel Beckett, Le calmant in Nouvelles et textes pour rien, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1958), p. 57.

2. Samuel Beckett, Worstward Ho (London: John Calder, 1983), p. 46.

to bear witness to a reality he sees as purgatorial. It is in itself transitional, the space between Heaven and Hell, between good and evil, total light and total darkness.

The degree to which psychology has become an alternate creed in the Western mind to religious teaching (or an alternative interpretation for areas of darkness and irrationality in human thought and behaviour), and has at the same time fuelled and interacted with much twentieth-century art, finds fascinating illustration in two testimonies that have survived almost by accident from the 1930s. One is an account by Kay Boyle of a memorable conversation with Beckett; the other his own letter of 1937, written in German, to Axel Kaun, whom Beckett had met during his 1936 travels. Both reinforce the idea that Beckett, well-versed in theological questions and psychology, was beginning to define for himself a way in which art could address both areas of thought directly.

In the Kay Boyle memoir, Beckett becomes a Virgil-figure, the artist who knows the way to the world of shades, and out again. This world of shades is, in the context, that of insanity:

He explained to me that night in Paris that madness is a geographical location inside the self. As he talked, it was almost as if we moved through purgatory together, and he was quite modestly showing me the way out for the condemned, saying

that just as there are deep, seemingly impossible crevasses in the static ice of a glacier which mountain-climbers cannot cross, so between sanity and insanity lies a fathomless abyss that it is not possible to traverse either by emotion (love) or by choice (the free will). "Once one has crossed over," Sam said, "there is no way back unless a bridge can be constructed for the return." (1)

These lines, even if romanticised with the passage of time, suggest Beckett's understanding of the implications of alienation, and its different character in art and in states of psychological imbalance. The artist maintains the "bridge"; the insane cannot. His imagery recalls not only Dante but also Milton, although in Paradise Lost the bridge over the abyss is used for opposite effect, not to bring healing but to allow Sin and Death access to the earthly Paradise:

... a broad and beaten way
Over the dark abyss, whose boiling gulf
Tamely endured a bridge of wondrous length
From hell continued reaching the utmost orb
Of this frail world ... (2)

A bridge over a gulf of darkness appears once again in the letter to Kaun, where -- this time -- language is directly

1. Kay Boyle, "All Mankind Is Us", in Samuel Beckett: a collection of criticism, ed. Ruby Cohn (New York: McGraw-Hill Paperbacks, Contemporary Studies in Literature, 1975), pp. 16-17.

2. The Poems of John Milton, ed. John Carey and Alistair Fowler (London and Harlow: Longmans, 1968), p. 556.

implicated. Beckett speaks of a desire to make language capable of expressing silence, as music can, of dissolving "that terrible materiality of the word surface" (1) which keeps literature so close to the utilitarian, preventing it from attaining independence and integrity as a "pure" aesthetic medium. Why, he asks, can language not be dissolved like:

the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence? (Disjecta, p. 172) (2)

In both the memoir by Kay Boyle and the letter, Beckett's imagination is revealed as that of an artist conscious of mystical or visionary levels of experience -- or in more scientific terms, of the darkness of the world of the unconscious, the place of shifting forms and "non-Newtonian" motion as the long description of Murphy's mind expressed it (Murphy, p. 69). Beckett's command of more than one language allowed him, even in the 1930s, to explore what language

1. Samuel Beckett, German Letter of 1937, trans. Martin Esslin, in Disjecta, p. 172. The original German reads: "jene fürchterlich willkürliche Materialität der Wortfläche", Disjecta, p. 53.

2. die von grossen schwarzen Pausen gefressene Tonfläche in der siebten Symphonie von Beethoven, so dass wir sie ganze Seiten durch nicht anders wahrnehmen können als etwa eigen schwindelnden unergründliche Schlünde von Stillschweigen verknüpfenden Pfad von Lauten? (Disjecta, p. 53)

really is; his sense of the need to renew art through a renewal of language, while part of a vast cultural movement in Europe at the time, gained special urgency from his own need to escape an inwardly divided native idiom, Irish English.

With Watt, a work written "with a view to not losing my reason",⁽¹⁾ he moved to an externalised use of English, exposing the language as games and patterns within a conventional system. (See Chapter III.) After the war he was able to find, in French, a bridge to the unconscious over which he could travel and return. Later still, once his full bilingual activity was established, as writer, translator, director in two (sometimes three) languages, he could actually stand on the "bridge", looking at both sides with equal calm detachment. The darkness of the abyss continues to surge below it, but the bridge itself will not collapse; art, not insanity, has won, and "neither" secure realm, but the space between, has become the "unspeakable home". There can be few artists in our age (Kafka is, perhaps, the closest parallel) who have dared to draw on visions of alienation and mental solitude so deeply, without themselves falling into the darkness. Kafka, like Beckett, was a traveller between languages, and highly

1. Letter to Rubin Rabinovitz, quoted in his: The Development of Samuel Beckett's Fiction (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 1 and p. 4n.

conscious of being one; both writers illustrate how the bilingual (or multilingual) mind can look openly at language, and reason, and at what lies beneath them.

Bilingual art

How does a literary artist re-animate forms, images and styles that have begun to petrify as they move into popular acceptance and usage? Since living in a particular language is for most writers an initially intuitive process, only many years of a developing craft, looking at words as well as through them, will lead to the achievement of a new voice, a new way of expressing experience. Bilingual artists, however, especially those who translate, have a privileged way of "seeing" language: they can go outside and return to it, testing it comparatively against the structures, vocabulary and cultural assumptions of another tongue. For Beckett, the "animation" and "petrification" of language, as of matter, are fundamental and lifelong aesthetic concerns. Words, like mortal beings, are always somewhere in a continuum between vigorous life and the stillness of death. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I wish to consider his art in this perspective.

Beckett's development as a bilingual writer makes him part of a particular literary tradition which brings the artists

of many countries together; for all their differences, they have successfully expressed themselves in more than one human tongue. In The Poet's Tongues, Leonard Forster traces the Western branch of this tradition through many centuries. There is a growing body of material which shows how common it actually is for literary artists to step outside a single cultural or linguistic perspective. Nabokov provides a fascinating illustration of the ways in which bilingualism can interact with literary development; he wrote not only in Russian and English but also in French, his languages to some extent reflecting the pattern of his exile. (1) Julien Green, brought up in Paris by American parents, has provided several accounts of how his writing would develop differently depending on which language he chose to use. (2) Oscar Wilde, who wrote Salomé in French, said it was "like a piece of music"; he savoured the use of another language, as well as, perhaps, finding French a relief as a way of escaping English disapproval. (3) In an earlier era still, the aristocrat

1. See Jane Grayson's study Nabokov Translated: A Comparison of Nabokov's Russian and English Prose (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

2. For example, "My First Book in English" and "An experiment in English", in Memories of Evil Days (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), pp. 96-110 and 81-95.

3. The Letters of Oscar Wilde, ed. R. Hart-Davis (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 475.

Willam Beckford wrote Vathek in French, calling forth the comment from Mallarmé that French literature should claim the work. Mallarmé delighted in the fact that a novel known in England in translation should have first been written in French by an Englishman:

Cas spécial, unique entre mainte reminiscence, d'un ouvrage par l'Angleterre cru le sien et que la France ignore: ici original, là traduction; tandis que (pour y tout confondre) l'auteur du fait de sa naissance et d'admirables esquisses n'appartient point aux lettres de chez nous, tout en leur demandant, après coup, une place prépondérante et quasi d'initiateur oublié! (1)

Many other parallels with Beckett can be cited; frequently, unless the bilingual writing is a matter of economic or political compulsion, it is felt by its creators to permit an alternating and freshening of vision and of expression, or a way of allowing two cultures to meet each other in new and surprising ways. In many parts of the world, bilingual writing is hardly even unusual. Nadine Gordimer writes of autotranslation and the divided tongues of many African writers in an article which, curiously, fails to acknowledge Beckett as a prime example of what she discusses. (2)

1. Mallarmé, Oeuvres complètes, pp. 562-563.

2. Nadine Gordimer, "A Note on Autotranslation", Translation, XII, Spring 1984: "I do not know of any European writers since Conrad and Nabokov who are autotranslators", p. 24.

This is hardly her fault; his bilingualism receives little publicity, as Beckett perhaps intended. Innumerable other examples of bilingual or bicultural writers could be cited; their ability to draw on external resources as well as those of the language which they are using at any one time has a profound effect on unilingual, native traditions too. Although he can hardly be called a bilingual writer, T. S. Eliot's contact with French poets, especially Laforgue, is a remarkable example. His use of French, experimentally, before he defined with Pound a whole new path for English poetry, was a way of renewing his own creativity after being "blocked" for a time in English:

I hadn't written anything for some time and was rather desperate. I started writing a few things in French and found I could, at that period. (1)

But Eliot insists that a single language must dominate for the poet:

I don't think that one can be a bilingual poet. I don't know of any case where a man wrote great or even fine poems equally well in two languages. (2)

This view, a common one, is precisely what Beckett's

1. T.S. Eliot, in Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews, Second Series (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p. 98.

2. Eliot, in Writers at Work, p. 99.

poetic use of both English and French, admittedly in his drama and prose more than in his poetry, emphatically disproves. The implications of his bringing together of languages, and the cultures behind them, will no doubt become clearer as time allows a clearer historical perspective on his achievement.

A young Icelandic-Canadian poet, Kristjana Gunnars, speaks for many major bilingual and multilingual writers when she expresses in an interview a desire to bring her two languages together in the creative process. Hers is a contemporary example of the ways a language can be revived by contact from outside:

What fascinated me when I began was the possibility of escaping a unilingual mode, expanding the language I wrote in by pushing out the boundaries. I made cracks in the surface of the English I wrote in by shifting into an Icelandic phrase or changing the structure of an English sentence in accordance with Icelandic sentence structure. This is possible in poetry and it is good to be able to let your language be informed by other modes of thought. It is nothing new. (...) These rhythms should be allowed to enter, to alter the rhythms of English so we can start thinking in other ways. (1)

Although Icelandic may seem a somewhat unusual linguistic resource through which to re-animate English, the process Gunnars describes is not unlike the manner in which Latin syntax

1. "Interview: David Demchuk and Kristjana Gunnars", Prairie Fire: A Manitoba Literary Review, Vol. V, Nos. 2 and 3, Spring 1984, pp. 32-34.

and vocabulary influenced English in the Renaissance; and in Ireland, Gaelic exerted a special influence of its own on Irish writers, an influence which has remained strong. What matters in all these cases, especially when major languages and a major writer are in question, is that new forms and tones can enter a native tradition; so can new perceptions of experience. For the writer, language and form become relativised and are made visible. Instead of a single tongue being so instinctively used that its part in shaping thought, mood and image remains beneath the surface of consciousness, there are at least two languages at play in the writer's mind. The implications, both for language-use and adherence to (or rebellion against) a particular literary tradition, are far-reaching.

The bilingual focus of Beckett's art comes together with his aesthetic principles, and his development of forms and themes that cross national boundaries, to revivify language in his use of the animation/petrification motif at every level of his work. "Petrification", the process of turning to stone, and "animation" -- the process by which inert matter becomes a breathing being -- carry a range of implications both in form and content, bringing the matter and the manner of writing together. They are a fundamental binary pair of metaphors, as universal as patterns of light and dark, movement and stasis, childhood and old age. The petrification/animation tension can be seen as a unifying principle in Beckett's aesthetic. His art demands a sense of

the art object coming to life; yet his characters and voices are heading steadily towards death. Art is to Beckett a source of strength and hope, replacing belief in religion or science; it is a way of resisting mortality.

The stories of Pygmalion, Hermione, Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha, Echo — whose "bones" so fascinated Beckett — and the contrasting myth of Medusa who, instead of bringing stones to life, reduces the living to stone, are just some uses of the archetype which Beckett draws on, openly or indirectly. Frequently they show how inextricably it is connected with concepts of creativity, beauty, and speech, and their opposites: infertility, ugliness, and silence. If artistic forms become petrified, they die, and new life must somehow be breathed into them. If language is living, it does not petrify; each user breathes life into it and may potentially contribute to its changes. Beckett's use of the birth-cry (in, for example, Murphy (p. 52) and Breath) acknowledges his understanding that language and form-making occur only after the child's reception into a specific human culture. The birth-cry is a pure signal of life, but as yet has no semantic, no syntactic, meaning. The name Croker is a favorite one in Beckett's works, not only because of a real autobiographical connection ("Croker's Acres" lay near his childhood home), but because to "croak" is to die with a kind of corresponding signal, a death-rattle, freed once again from the specifics of a human tongue.

"Crever" as it is used at the end of Comment c'est has a similar role ("JE POURRAIS CREVER hurlements JE VAIS CREVER hurlements bon", Comment c'est, p. 228); air is expelled from the lungs like a balloon bursting. The breath that allows both life and speech is exhausted.

Beckett's art demands an acceptance of literature, the stage-play or any kind of created object or event, on its own terms. The art work exists for aesthetic reasons, not in service to any other cause. Yet it cannot be assimilated passively: process, interaction, is crucial to the actualisation, the bringing to life, of the object in the mind of the receiver. "Rupture in the lines of communication" (1) means that no fixed, absolute or rigid response is possible. If it were, the art work would be petrified and would lose all meaning.

In the tension between his creative and critical writing, Beckett seemed increasingly uneasy with the tendency of literary analysis to "pin down" and fix the meaning of a literary work. His own criticism becomes highly imaged and imaginative, before ceasing altogether, as the dominance of the creative artist grows. The three phases of Beckett's writing as a critic bear a close relation to his developing sense of the integrity of art as art, and the need for a living relation between art forms

1. Samuel Beckett, Recent Irish Poetry (1934), in Disjecta, p. 70.

and the individuals who both create and experience them. In the first phase, up to the war, he was able to write analytically about literature. His training as a scholar and a use of language for clear rational thought came together with a highly developed awareness of forms and genres in the Western cultural heritage. Often, though, his choice of allusion and illustration had a quirky individualism. The Apollonian in him was still strong enough for Beckett to write directly about other writers, though with a fiercely independent outlook.

In the second phase, coinciding with his move to France and initiation of a kind of writing very different from Murphy, he became increasingly unwilling to discuss literature in critical language, and instead put his critical talents to service in the cause of contemporary visual art. The writing, most of it in French and closely tied to the Parisian context, allowed him at least to escape the double bind of language about language; language about a non-verbal art form offered greater freedom. Yet even here a degree of dissatisfaction with the evaluating, categorising language of criticism developed; Beckett seemed alarmed lest his own words should help to petrify the works they claim to discuss.

In the third phase, both words about words and words about images became impossible; with a few small exceptions, he ceased to perform as a critic altogether. His own art had by this

stage gained a wide audience, and could speak in the living, richly creative idiom of metaphor, form, rhythm, action. All analytical discourse now seemed superfluous and distorting. An acute double consciousness of art and culture gave energy to the art object itself, an energy that is emotive and imaginative, not intellectual; each reader or spectator can engage with it personally, undergoing a cathartic experience. Beckett is not, as he has repeatedly declared, responsible for anything but the work itself. (1)

The internationalism of the movements in music and painting familiar in Paris in the 1930s and later has had a profound influence on Beckett's desire to maintain artistic bilingualism and an openness he associates with a living art. In the 1930s he was clearly frustrated with the tendency for language to remain trapped in pre-existing forms and patterns, forms that were to him almost petrified in their resistance to change. Generalizing drastically, he apparently decided that English literature was "straight out of the Chester cycle", (2) a remark that for all its impulsiveness suggests the opposition he felt to a tradition of psychological "types", hostile to the new

1. "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended) made as fully as possible, and I accept responsibility for nothing else." Letters On 'Endgame' in Disjecta, p. 109.

2. Deirdre Bair, referring to a letter from Beckett to Thomas McGreevy, in Samuel Beckett: A Biography (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 199.

expression of process, disintegrating solidities, and isolated inner consciousness that interested him. The English tradition, that of a strongly centred unilingual culture, seemed to him insular, its forms resistant to external renewal, however inaccurate such a view may actually be. "Monodialectal arcadians" (1) had earned his wrath even earlier, in the context of Joyce's revolutionary approach to the English language and literary traditions. In the Kaun letter he asks: "is literature alone to remain behind in the old lazy ways that have been so long ago abandoned by music and painting?" (2)

Yet it is not only the insular English tradition that he finds fault with; Balzac also earns his wrath in the early years as a representative of a prose tradition of psychological realism and continuation of existing forms. (3) What Beckett sought was a literature open to innovation and aware of a need to question all certainties, in the tradition of Montaigne, or of Montesquieu and Diderot. He needed the freedom to see language

1. Samuel Beckett, Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce, in Our Exagmination Round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress (1929), (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 19.

2. German Letter of 1937, in Disjecta, p. 172. The original German reads: "Oder soll die Literatur auf jenem alten faulen von Musik und Malerei längst verlassenen Wege allein hinterbleiben?" (Disjecta, p. 52).

3. For example, in an extract from "Dream of Fair to middling Women", in Disjecta, p. 47: "To read Balzac is to receive the impression of a chloroformed world. He is absolute master of his material, he can do what he likes with it, he can foresee and calculate its least vicissitude, he can write the end of his book before he has finished the first paragraph, because he has turned all his creatures into clockwork cabbages."

and form in radically new perspectives, through the challenge of other modes of expression, artistic and visual, and at a deeper level through the conjunction of cultures whose own secure traditions could not, then, remain complacent and set in their ways. In the Parisian context, cultural battles between the forces of conservatism and rebellion have long been familiar, and even enjoyed: the battles of Ancients and Moderns, the protest over *Hernani*, the Surrealist Manifestos, all form part of a historical process of continual revivification of language through experiment and debate, and a sometimes violent destructive energy. Process, change, interaction imply a constant unpredictability. Through the relativist perspective his bilingualism allowed him, he was able to consider genre and language on both sides of the balance with detachment, curiosity and acute awareness, "a mind always on the alert against itself" (From an Abandoned Work, p. 131).

Literary language and its animating powers come into special focus for the bilingual artist who also translates and, above all, self-translates. Poor translations are those that convey the matter of an original but fail to bring it to life. The good translation achieves both, demanding, therefore, a new creative process. After his experiences of translating Molloy with Beckett, Patrick Bowles wrote:

From the outset he stressed that it shouldn't merely be "translated"; we should write a new book in the new language. For with the transposition of speech occurs a transposition of thought and even, at times,

of action: "You wouldn't say exactly that, in English, you'd say something else." It shouldn't be merely a matter of setting up new signposts. To interpret a foreign book one must hope for some intuition as to how its material might have occurred in one's own mental landscape. (1)

In bringing the work to a new "mental landscape", the translator has to relive it. Beckett was adept at this even before self-translation became a central part of his literary activity. The translator of serious literature has to bring an enormous range of talents to the task: linguistic, critical, intellectual, imaginative, creative. Great translators, it is sometimes said, are even rarer than great critics. Beckett's own translating, almost entirely concentrated since the 1940s on his own French or English originals, raises crucial questions about his art: does the knowledge that a future translation will be necessary influence the use of translatable elements (such as myth and archetypes, rather than local, specific cultural allusions) in his new writings? Does the writing of new works influence translation of other, earlier works? And correspondingly, does the act of translating an earlier work activate new sources of energy, new ideas, influencing the development of new writing in either language? The answer to all three questions seems to be "yes", according to the evidence that has emerged

 1. Patrick Bowles, Introduction to Dürrenmatt's The Visit (Der Besuch der alten Dame), trans. Patrick Bowles (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), n.p.

in this study. Beckett moves between translation and bilingual creation with a creative tension that works on both; in recent years his directing activities in three languages have extended his transitional movements between languages and cultural traditions even more. The gradual development from realistic to symbolic settings, the loss of specific references to a single culture or place, and the corresponding use of universal human archetypes, behaviour patterns and experiences relate directly to his steady progress from bilingual knowledge to bilingual expression.

Eugene Kaelin points out that Beckett in his student days "imbibed a thorough draught of philosophy and linguistics and has never since lost his awe at the power of the word or the eloquence of silence." (1) True, but what a young man reads, and what a mature artist experiences over decades in a bilingual context he has made his own, are very different things. Beckett's knowledge of philosophy, his memories of the Bible and of many great European classics, are all deeply influential in the formation of his outlook on art, thought and expression, but they are not at the forefront of what he seeks to do as artist. Indeed, by the 1970s they have become no more than "bits of pipe" he happens to have with him as he writes, (2)

1. Kaelin, The Unhappy Consciousness, p. 7.

2. James Knowlson, "Beckett's 'Bits of Pipe'", in Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives, ed. Morris Beja, S.E. Gontarski, and Pierre Astier (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), p. 16.

the detritus of a vast inheritance lying about to be used. Translation, self-translation and bilingualism have gone on interacting with new work in a steady process that has developed over sixty years. That they have received relatively little attention says much about our own tendency, a very natural one, to work within existing forms and modes of discourse. We have come close to being "petrified" in certain approaches to Beckett that leave his bilingualism completely aside.

Beckett's poetic consciousness interacts with his bilingualism in his own creative treatment of the petrification-animation archetype. Creation and destruction, birth and death, represent a challenge for the creative artist who must bring works to closure, complete their form, and thus consign them to a kind of death, yet who lives with the belief that other imaginations will breathe life back into the art object created. Beckett's concern with forms that allow in "the mess", "the buzzing confusion", (1) relates closely to his desire not to create tidy, clockwork worlds in which all is predetermined and secure. The contrast between cold stone and breathing, living beings is constantly, in Beckett's works, a sign of a deeper set of

1. Tom Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia University Forum, 4 (Summer, 1961), quoted in Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage, ed. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 218.

associations that touch his art at every level.

Molloy's famous sucking-stones, for which he wishes to establish a methodical process, have caught many readers' attention. The stones are like those Malone also has in his pockets, to represent men and their seasons ("pleines de cailloux pour représenter les hommes et leurs saisons", Malone meurt, p. 117). Both may recall, in the French context, Rabelais' famous lines:

Les beaulx bastisseurs nouveaulx de pierres
mortes ne sont excriptz en mon livre de vie. Je ne
bastis que pierres vives; ce sont hommes. (1)

The stones may be sexual, in the Elizabethan sense, offering a kind of gratification when handled; they may stand for words which are savoured by turn in the mouth. Or they may simply be accepted as stones, objects of the sea-shore, worn smooth by the action of wave and tide, piled up on dry land in their myriad forms and colours. Their meaning remains indeterminate, open for each reader; through the magic of the imagination, inanimate matter is brought to life.

Beckett had a childhood fondness for the pebbles he found on the sea-shore near his home, as he told Gottfried Büttner:

Beckett's relationship to stones, which he has called "almost a love relationship," was associated by Beckett himself with death (conversation of September 9, 1967). As a child he frequently picked up stones

1. François Rabelais, Le Tiers Livre, VI, in Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: n.r.f., Gallimard, 1955), p. 349.

from the beach and carried them home, where he built nests for them and put them in trees to protect them from waves and other dangers. On the same occasion, Beckett mentioned Sigmund Freud, who had once written that man carried within him a kind of congenital yearning for the mineral kingdom. This remark followed a discussion of the phenomenon of death, of "dying off," of "petrifying," after I had spoken of "sclerotic traits" in the figure of Krapp. (1)

Wanting to make "nests" for the stones, thinking of them as alive (and therefore threatened by death), is a very common childhood fantasy. These early games with inanimate matter suggest a fascination with creativity and mortality, and an ability to "animate" matter in the imagination that is normally, in adulthood, put aside -- except by the artist, who retains the child's curious and excited interaction with the world, seeing things as if for the first time.

Stones also have a more menacing role in Beckett's imagination. In Pochade Radiophonique, Fox, who has been tortured with sexual provocation as well as verbal questioning, longs to be free of it all. He seems to represent both the artistic imagination persecuted by the need to create, and the psyche or soul being forced to confess its physicality; a variety of psychological interpretations becomes possible with the Freudian and Jungian overtones of the piece. Whipped with a Bull's Pizzle, he cries

1. Gottfried Büttner, Samuel Beckett's Novel 'Watt', trans. Joseph P. Dolan (Philadelphia: Univ. of Philadelphia Press, 1984), p. 163n.

out that he wants to "Claquer dans les galets" (1) / "Peter out in the stones". (2) The use of the infinitive, a favorite Beckettian device in the later work to increase syntactic ambiguity and multiple meaning, allows a striking double focus in the English text. Fox wants to peter out in the stones, and join their inanimate endurance, but he may also be saying: "Peter is out in the stones"; Peter, the Rock of the Christian Church, is out in a sterile landscape, faith having failed.

The use of Peter, and the Rock of Faith, is widespread in other Beckett texts; another important implication is the stoning of Christian martyrs. In Eh Joe (this time the archetype has been translated to television), the protagonist becomes a kind of martyr figure, aging lecher though he is, as he is "stoned" to death by the accusing voice which he hears inside his head. The voice is a woman's, one of his cast-off lovers, and she forces him to face up to his responsibility for another woman's suicide once Joe had discarded her:

Imagine the hands....The solitaire....Against a stone....
Imagine the eyes....Spiritlight....Month of June....
 What year of your Lord? ...Breasts in the stones...And
 the hands....Before they go....Imagine the hands....
 What are they at?...In the stones...(Eh Joe, in
Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 206-207)

In the French translation the word "pierre" appears even more frequently, possibly because the stresses of the language do not

1. Samuel Beckett, Pochade radiophonique, in Pas, suivi de quatre esquisses, p. 79.

2. Samuel Beckett, Rough for Radio II, in Collected Shorter Plays, p. 121.

allow the same emphasis as in English, so that extra repetition fulfils the same function.

The stones which the dying girl grasps, her own body carefully evoked as its life is departing, are not only a symbol of mortality and a hollow mockery of the lover's "stones"; they are also her last contact with the material world, a complex symbol on the level both of the story told and of Joe's world of lonely self-examination.

Henry, in Embers, similarly lonely and disturbed by the voices of his women-folk, clashes stones together in order to drown out the sea whose sounds haunt him. The medium is radio, and so all the sounds heard, including the thud of stone on stone, may be imaginary. The effect is powerful, though, for Henry's whole world seems bound in by a terrifying sense of life and death meeting on the shoreline where he sits.

What is significant about the archetype in all these, and many other examples, is not only its importance to Beckett's artistic world, in giving constant reminders of the vulnerability of life and the approach of death, but also its translatability. It is a perfect resource for a bilingual writer whose words must cross boundaries of language, cross the boundaries of any one culture's experience. It also crosses all boundaries of genre and medium, allowing Beckett to use it in prose, drama for the stage, radio and television, and poetry. The most direct

and powerful use of the stone archetype, uniting reproduction, sexuality, death and creative art, comes in Mal vu mal dit. (1) This text, as its title suggests, is one in which Beckett unites his perceptions, late in life, of how the artist "sees" and "says". The old division of form and content is given a new twist as the text weaves a magical pattern of imagination and doubtful memory, presenting an old woman who is both dead and living, and speaking through an "oeil", an "I" who paints a verbal picture of a strange landscape in which everywhere stone is gaining. The old woman, her bones stiffening as she petrifies gradually in the movement towards death, grieves for a man who lies beneath a tombstone. Living in this rocky landscape, the "zone of stones" (2), the old woman is fascinated by Venus; the prose has a lucid symbolic force in which stone and the miracle of life, death and sex, come together.

The human body, approaching death, leaving sexuality behind for the living, reproducing group, comes closer to stone with time, the skull visible beneath the skin, the bones asserting their presence. Many of Beckett's works since the 1960s use this symbolism freely, whether written in French or English.

1. Samuel Beckett, Mal vu mal dit (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1981).

2. Samuel Beckett, Ill Seen Ill Said (London: John Calder, 1982), p. 10 .

The body, notably in Comment c'est, Imagination morte imaginez, Bing, and all of Beckett's work for the stage, is revered even as it seems to be degraded, a symbol of beauty and strength, vulnerability and pain, to which the local specificity of a particular human tongue is irrelevant. What makes the petrification motif exceptional is that even the languages themselves, those Beckett has by chance and circumstance employed as the medium for his art, acknowledge through a word-play basic to the Christian and Latin tradition the imaginative unity of stone and man. "Tu es Petrus", states the Latin New Testament; Petrus, and Pierre, unite the disciple with the physical world, the firm foundation of faith with its earthly base. In English the link is less obvious, the name Peter coming from the Latin while "rock" comes from the Germanic roots of the language. The Authorised Version has difficulty translating the pun: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matt. XVI, 18). James Joyce delighted in the pun, transforming it into "thuartpeatrick" in Finnegans Wake (1), and writing to Harriet Weaver that it was "a pun in the original aramaic" (2).

1. James Joyce, Finnegans Wake (New York: Viking Press, 1939/1958), p. 3.

2. James Joyce, Letters, ed. Stuart Gilbert (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 248.

Beckett's Murphy contains the statement "In the beginning was the pun" (Murphy, p. 48). In both Joyce and Beckett, the deeper sense beneath the comedy is that linguistic form and the deepest levels of religious and philosophical experience do not come together in this way by accident; puns are often strangely meaningful. Peter and Pierre are words that link the matter of art with its form in language, the seeing with the saying, and thus give a satisfactory unity: the form is the content.

Beckett's transitions between languages over sixty years have made him deeply conscious of their capacities as a medium for art, and correspondingly, their inadequacy to tell anything more than a version of the truth. Visual art, music, mime, decor, props and lighting on the stage, as well as silence, escape the weight of Babel because they are not imprisoned within it. Beckett has turned to other genres more and more -- and has led his remaining verbal resources closer and closer towards them -- as his mastery over language has convinced him of its "failure". His prose syntax and the dramatic syntax of sound, image and gesture pull away from the linguistic and cultural centre of each language towards his own bilingual realm, opening the syntax and imagery of his languages to each other, and towards flexible, continuously re-animated meaning. The fear of finalising, of petrifying art into pre-existing modes that can only "kill", not bring

to life, is ironically underlined by a moment of exasperated longing for traditional discourse in that most untraditional of works, L'innommable. The speaker recollects a use of language which he might even find comforting, a confident and repeated usage in which things are established and secure, having stood the test of time. In his own world, unfortunately, such language use is no more than a memory:

Que ne parlent-ils donc d'autre chose, de quelque chose dont l'existence semble en quelque sorte établie, sur laquelle on peut bavarder sans rougir tous les trente ou quarante mille mots d'avoir à employer des locutions pareilles, et qui, enfin, garantie suprême, a déjà fait marcher les langues les mieux pendues de tous les temps, ça vaudrait mieux. (L'innommable, pp. 173-174)

Talking of something else "en quelque sorte établie" is something Beckett's mature art does, nostalgically, when it plays with forms, traditions of thought and learning, mathematics and chess, civilised values. Yet it refuses all complacency, insisting instead on an attitude of questioning and comparison. Binaries come together and turn into each other, agent and victim, bourgeois and clochard, man and woman, living and dead, awake and asleep. The mystery is between Two. Underlying the contrasts is a solid base, nevertheless, of the fundamental human experiences shared by all cultures. Through the bilingual consciousness and a heightened awareness of his languages as expressive media, Beckett succeeds in breathing new life into forms as familiar as the novel, the short story, the one-act

and full-length play . His influence on other dramatists and novelists has been exceptionally powerful, in both his language-communities and beyond, and whether or not these other artists are familiar with the bilingual foundations of his art.

In his book La tour de Babil: La Fiction du Signe, Michel Pierssens examined five writers and thinkers (Mallarmé, Saussure, Roussel, Wolfson and Brisset) in terms of their "logophilie", a love of language so strong that it becomes an equivalent, or alternative, to both sexual and spiritual experience, a kind of madness (in one view) that is also a path to extraordinary originality (1). This obsession leads in various directions: to poetry and theories of poetic language, to the scientific study of language, to a creativity dissolving into madness, to multilingualism, and to a mystical sense of the Word. Beckett, as linguist, as reader of works of religious mysticism and philosophy, as translator, and above all as bilingual artist, belongs with this group and touches all five writers at some point. His pursuit of a bilingual art through sixty years has given him an exceptional awareness of what human beings experience through and beyond language.

1. Michel Pierssens, La Tour de Babil: La Fiction du Signe (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1976).

His "logophilia" is a love of language that has allowed him to re-animate petrifying attitudes and forms. It makes him a leading exponent of the power and powerlessness of Babel in a world of increasingly international modes of communication. Ironically, English, the language he left behind and later returned to in the full strength of his writing voice, has become the world-language in which much of this communication is occurring. Only now is a climate of awareness developing in which the essentially relativist foundation for his art, that of bilingual consciousness, can be fully perceived, and used to provide a context of understanding for the works themselves.

CHAPTER II: BEYOND THE CIRCLE

1929-1938

Beckett has never been a unilingual artist; any neat division between his pre-1945 works in English and his post-1945 works in French distorts the real nature of the pre-war writing as well as the mature art that followed. This chapter will examine, through some of the early work, how Beckett gradually moved beyond his original circle of Anglo-Irish culture by experimenting, from his first years as a writer, with both his languages. The mother tongue that seemed to trap him, and the learned language, French, which provided the freedom he wanted, were in tension even then. The imaginative use of French, even through comedy, gave the young writer experience that would prove invaluable when he turned to the language more seriously and forged in it his own unmistakable voice.

The increasingly tight circle of Irish nationalism had little tolerance, in the first decade of Beckett's life as a writer, for the international modernism developing in Paris and London. In his early publications a clear desire can be discerned: to escape the constricting circle of Ireland, to draw closer to the avant-garde in Paris, and to explore the European languages and literatures which exerted a

gravitational pull upon him. Beckett's experiments in French began remarkably early; he was developing at least the first stages of the characteristic transitional, two-sided perspective which would become so powerful in the decades after World War Two. A sense of contrasting cultures and language-systems was already present but -- as his various creative experiments reveal -- could not yet be drawn into artistic form or the deepest levels of experience. The use of two languages remained superficial, at times exhibitionist, until a long apprenticeship was complete. His voice as an artist, though still unconfirmed, achieved much in its most forward-looking ventures, and began the process, wrenched into effectiveness by Watt and the war, of creating a new vision and a new syntax through the consciousness, and then the use, of French.

Between 1929 and 1938 Beckett underwent a process of repeated self-transformation, from the scholar and future teacher (always uncomfortably so, and yet brilliant in the role) to the poet and essayist who rejected academic life, to the prose writer who believed his future lay in English literary circles, and finally to the translator living in Paris and experimenting with linguistic, as with personal, isolation. What unifies these different voices is the eagerness to compare and evaluate literary tradition and innovation from a highly individualistic standpoint. Much of the early writing is too bold, too

ambitious, rather than simply bad. At the age of twenty-three he already grasped the implications of "monodialectal" opposition to his view of literature (Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce, p. 19); though the essay was written to defend Joyce, its tone of righteous indignation is very much his own. At twenty-four he wrote, in the French text Le Concentrisme, of the centripetal force pulling the artist into his own depths, away from the circle of society. (1) At twenty-eight, in Recent Irish Poetry, he precisely defined his quarrel with Irish writing in terms of the poets' centrifugal flight from their own centres into a shared and complacent external culture (Recent Irish Poetry, p. 71). The circle of the self, and the circle of society, were already subject to the scrutiny of a detached, bilingual mind.

The discussion that follows falls into three parts: Beckett's escape from the circle of Irish culture, his attraction towards the powerfully centralised culture of France, and his exploratory use of the French language in passages of prose and poetry whose witty self-consciousness often belies the importance of their contribution to his future. Bilingualism and biculturalism fuel all three aspects of the artist's

1. Samuel Beckett, Le Concentrisme, in Disjecta, p. 38: "du Chas avait une vie sociale comme vous avez une vie centripète, à savoir, inconsciemment et indifféremment".

apprenticeship and early achievements. The battle between the "old ego", both "minister of dullness" and "agent of security" (Proust, p. 21), and the new ego, freed from habit or instinctive assumptions and recreated in art, was a battle not easily won.

Escaping from Ireland

Why could Beckett not accept, and work within, a native tradition of exceptional cultural and linguistic richness? To answer this question requires a consideration of what, at the time, it offered him, and what his own literary goals required. The culture of Ireland is complex, with its overlapping circles of Celtic, Norse, Norman French, Tudor English, and later immigration, its distinctive confrontation of Gaelic and English speech, and of Catholic and Protestant religions. Richard Fallis, in The Irish Renaissance, speaks directly of a "bilingual tradition", Gaelic being deeply influential in the syntactic, lexical and phonetic patterns of Anglo-Irish speech. (1) Yet for someone of Beckett's religious, social and

1. Richard Fallis, The Irish Renaissance (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), p. 33. One striking example of this bilingual tradition's importance to Anglo-Irish writing is the career of J.M. Synge, who, as well as being fluent in French, created a personal voice blending English and Gaelic. As Declan Kiberd says, "He forged an art of surpassing beauty out of the very fusion of these languages and thereby achieved his aim of a bilingual style." Declan Kiberd, Synge and the Irish Language (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1979), p. 202.

educational background, the links with England, and with "English" uses of the English language, were also strong. The political aspects of the revival of Gaelic, intricately involved with nationalist aspirations and anti-English feeling, obviously intensified this divided consciousness just at the time Beckett was growing up on the outskirts of Dublin. "The Celtic drill of extraversion" to which he referred, with withering scorn, in 1934 (Recent Irish Poetry, p. 73) was in fact, to a more sympathetic eye, a necessary response to a need to define a distinct identity. Yet Beckett, enamoured of European tastes and attitudes, had no patience either with Celtic romanticism or with the loyalty to the Catholic Church that allowed it, after the formation of the Irish Free State, to exert control over moral and social issues. His contempt for the forces of conservatism, repression and dogma emerges^s clearly in his comic attack on Irish contraception laws, Che Sciagura, (1929) (1) in spite of its obscure surface, and, later, in the more sombre polemic directed against the Censorship Act, Censorship in the Saorstát (2) (1935).[↓]

In Ireland, according to Beckett's unsympathetic appraisal of

1. Samuel Beckett, Che Sciagura, Trinity College: A College Miscellany, XXXVI, No. 662 (14th November, 1929), p. 42.

2. Samuel Beckett, Censorship in the Saorstát, in Disjecta, pp. 84-88. Previously unpublished.

these years, natural impulses towards creativity, the artistic and the sexual, were legislated against, treated as filthy and criminal except when given sanction by the priests. The Irish Free State was to him a prison.

Even Thomas McGreevy, Beckett's close friend, whose later service to Ireland was outstanding, needed to distance himself from it. Speaking of Dublin, in 1928, in the pages of transition, he said:

For anyone who cares about living, [it] is a rather intolerable as it is a rather intolerant, strife-ridden, little town in the lesser of two unintellectually not very important islands off the coast of Europe and civilisation. (1)

More remarkable for its scorn than for its style this kind of attack on Ireland, as, indeed, on the forces of moral and artistic orthodoxy anywhere, was common among the Bohemian expatriates in Paris. McGreevy no doubt repented of such youthful contempt later. Beckett, however, has remained unshakable in his resistance to some of the Republic's attitudes, even in their post-war form. In the late 1950s, when a drama and music festival, the Tóstal, banned works by Joyce and O'Casey because of pressure from the archbishop of Dublin, Beckett withdrew his contributions, and, for a time, refused to

1. Thomas McGreevy, "James Joyce at the Half-Century", in transition 21 (1932), pp. 254-255.

allow performances of his plays anywhere in the Irish Republic. (1) In more recent years he has been a firm supporter of censored artists in other countries, dedicating Catastrophe (1982), for example, to the imprisoned Czech writer Vaclav Havel. (2) His outrage, in 1935, at censors who could classify as "blatantly indecent" (Censorship in the Saorstat, p. 85) works such as Joyce's Ulysses has never entirely faded.

The exact nature of Beckett's criticisms of his native country varies with context, year and purpose of writing. The most significant attacks, significant partly because their lack of complete coherence reveals deep emotional turmoil, occur not in his letters or essays but in his creative work in the period immediately following his decision not to be a scholar and teacher at Trinity College, Dublin. In the still unpublished "Dream of Fair to middling Women", in some of the Echo's Bones poems, and most of all in More Pricks Than Kicks, Beckett exposes or attacks through satiric comedy the aspects of Irish life that irritated him: the pretensions of Dublin literary society and weight of tradition, the provincialism of taste, the complacency of the priests, the idealising of the Gaeltacht. His compassion or gentler humour are reserved for -----

1. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 492.

2. Samuel Beckett, Catastrophe et autres dramaticules (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1982). The dedication is on p. 69.

characters such as the madwomen selling tickets for heaven in "Ding-Dong". She at least has escaped the sordid realities of her environment:

her face, ah her face, was what Belacqua had rather refer to as her countenance, it was so full of light. This she lifted up upon him and no error. Brimful of light and serene, serenissime, it bore no trace of suffering, and in this alone it might be said to be a notable face. Yet like tormented faces that he had seen, like the face in the National Gallery in Merrion Square by the Master of Tired Eyes, it seemed to have come a long way and subtend an infinitely narrow angle of affliction, as eyes focus a star. (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 47)

In her madness, the woman has gone beyond Dublin, beyond Ireland; like Murphy in London, her focus is on the stars.

Beckett also takes on the literary giants, pushing away Swift, W.B. Yeats and Joyce himself in an assertion of independence. The setting of Serena II, with its howling in the woods, its harlots and twilight, its "able-bodied swans", its "fairy tales of Meath ended" (Serena II, in Collected Poems, pp. 23-24), surely suggests a reaction against Yeats' use of such imagery. "A Wet Night" in More Pricks Than Kicks clearly responds to Joyce's "The Dead" in Dubliners. In "Fingal" Yeats, Joyce and Swift come together through the symbol of the tower. Swift's tower where he "kep a motte" "of the name of Stella" (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 34), Yeats' tower (although far to the West), Joyce's Martello Tower of Ulysses, and Ireland itself,

full of the stone ruins of towers built by its various conquerors, are a heavy weight on the young writer in a country which remains obsessed with history. "The place was as full of towers as Dun Laoghaire of steeples", as the narrator of "Fingal", speaking for Belacqua, says in obvious irritation (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 28). The only tower towards which Belacqua feels any attraction is that of the Portrane lunatic asylum. Once more madness has his sympathy; better, at this stage, asylum than exile, even for a young fellow caught up in "polyglot splendours" and making great play with his short stay abroad (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 139 and p. 26).

In Recent Irish Poetry (whether Beckett's own title or not, he may have been pleased that the initial letters also spell out "Rest In Peace"), his feelings of frustration about the politics and culture of his native land come together with a calmer and more forward-looking examination of conflicting poetic viewpoints. The Irish poets, in general, seemed anxious, to him, to avoid facing up to the challenges of modernism, instead "adoring the stuff of song as incorruptible, uninjurable and unchangeable" (Recent Irish Poetry, p. 70). "Rupture in the lines of communication" is his theme, and it is deeply, inextricably part of Beckett's own sense of relativist perspectives, and alienation from the secure group. The

breakdown of traditional presentation of the object in modern art has a direct parallel in language because this, too, is not an incorruptible medium but a conventionalised system worthy of suspicion. (1) Beckett will not admit any value to the deliverers of "Ossianic goods" (Recent Irish Poetry, p. 70). The poets he praises, including Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey, are those who have:

submitted themselves to the influences of those poets least concerned with evading the bankrupt relationship referred to at the opening of this essay - Corbière, Rimbaud, Laforgue, the surréalistes and Mr. Eliot, perhaps also to those of Mr. Pound. (Recent Irish Poetry, p. 75)

They are those, in other words, who have accepted modernist attitudes to language, self and society becoming familiar in Paris and London, but at that time still alien to the mainstream of Dublin literary opinion.

The need to escape from a country just in the throes of celebrating its Gaelic and Catholic inheritance, both politically and culturally, was clear enough for a Protestant and Francophile writer attuned to an emphasis on psychological and sexual

1. For a discussion of the ways in which, as Beckett sees it, traditional perspective in painting is no longer adequate to the expression of experience, see Jane Alison Hale's The Broken Window: Beckett's Dramatic Perspective (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1987).

liberation, internationalism and the exploration of "ruptured" communication. The crucial question to be asked, however, in examining Beckett's need to escape from the circle to which he was born, is why he could not simply use English (in London, or elsewhere) internationally, abandoning Ireland without abandoning the language he grew up with.

In the period of Murphy Beckett attempted to go on using English, but he found London unpleasant and his own artistic outlook at odds, in the mid- to late-1930s, with a politically engaged literary atmosphere. He could not, for example, enter wholeheartedly into the debate about Fascism and Communism, or commit himself or his writing, as others were doing, to the cause of the Spanish Republic. But deeper reasons can be discerned in the works themselves, works which need to be read with a sensitivity to historical context. Beckett's fight with English combines elements of pre-existing alienation (the Protestant, middle-class Dubliner could not escape consciousness of his status as part of a small, though privileged, minority in countless everyday situations in Ireland, yet he was equally alien in England, where his accent caused him to be treated like any other Irish immigrant) (1)

1. Clancy Sigal, "Is This the Person to Murder Me?" Sunday Times (Colour Magazine), March 1, 1964, pp. 17-22.

with a need to free himself from the tones and habits of much English writing popular in this period.

Beckett probably knew the Victorian poets, particularly Tennyson, Browning and Arnold, better than he would willingly have admitted. He could hardly fail to be familiar with the pre-modernist Georgian style, a lush, late Romanticism. The polemic of Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce belongs in the context of the fight against Georgian poetry. It is only in such a context that Beckett's complaints about English as a language "abstracted to death" (Dante...Bruno. Vico.. Joyce, p. 15), an unusual, and to modern eyes misleading, assessment, can be understood. Calling poetic English an abstract language allowed him to make a stirring call for a return to a vigorously physical, living language, closer to that of the Elizabethans, and to defend Joyce's style and multilingual lexical concatenations. (1) Yet Joyce's polyglot splendours, his words that "elbow their way on to the page" (Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce, p. 16) were not, in fact, a course Beckett could successfully follow beyond youthful experimentation. It was not until he returned to English (or Anglo-Irish)

1. This was also the period of rehabilitation for the "Metaphysical" poets, especially John Donne, as illustrated in T.S. Eliot's 1921 essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, London: Faber and Faber, 1932/1951, pp. 281-291).

after years of writing in French that he was able to infuse his own work with a vigorously active voice, as open to the metaphoric life of words, and to a sense of their form and shape and flavour, as that of Joyce's and yet utterly distinct from it. The anxiety of influence, not only from the Romantic and Victorian poets, but also from Joycean Modernism, contributed jointly to his need to move beyond his mother tongue and Irish inheritance.

Beckett's early story, Assumption, published in transition in 1929, (1) in part exemplifies what he criticises in Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce. It displays a use of English that could be described as "abstract", in the sense that the words do not act out the context; they simply refer to it. Assumption shows the beginnings of a preoccupation with the artist's isolation and inner voice, with a sense of language as immensely powerful in a quasi-religious sense, and yet its own language repeatedly slips back into a loose Romanticism and faded idealism which sound oddly nineteenth-century in tone:

After a timeless parenthesis he found himself alone in his room, spent with ecstasy, torn by the bitter loathing of that which he had condemned to the humanity of silence. Thus each night he died and was God, each night revived and was torn,

1. Samuel Beckett, Assumption, in transition, 16-17 (June 1929), pp. 268-271.

torn and battered, with increasing grievousness, so that he hungered to be irretrievably engulfed in the light of eternity. (Assumption, p. 271)

"Ecstasy", "bitter loathing", "grievousness" and "eternity" are words Beckett would find hard to use seriously in English again, disguising his most profound ideas instead in defensive comedy, until he had passed through his years of French. He already sensed, Assumption suggests, the enormous symbolic power certain images would have for him (the sea, the eyes, darkness), but each of these images is also familiar, central to the Romantic tradition, and he had not yet found a way of using them to advance a new expression of experience. His scholarly grasp of the literary tradition still stood in the way of what Assumption moves tentatively towards: a declaration of an aesthetic outlook in which the only possible direction for the artist was inwards and downwards, a self-perception he was to find lacking in most Irish writers. If Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce succeeds in its own terms where Assumption fails, it does so because its evangelical fervour is matched by a startlingly bold intelligence and concern for literary form, and because Beckett was as yet more critic than creator. Yet, like Text (1) and Sedendo et Quiescendo (2) — the two

1. Samuel Beckett, Text, in New Review, II (April, 1932), p. 57.
2. Samuel Beckett, Sedendo et Quiesciendo (sic), in transition, 21 (March, 1932), pp. 13-20. I have used the correct spelling of the title in my text.

fragments of "Dream of Fair to middling Women" which Beckett chose to publish — Dante... Bruno. Vico.. Joyce is in many ways a false trail for Beckett's future, whereas Assumption, with its flooding, unstoppable voice, is a fascinating early precursor of L'innommable and Not I. Text and Sedendo et Quiescendo, both obviously marching under the Joycean banner, are completely atypical of "Dream of Fair to middling Women". They are, however, the sections that Beckett at that time wanted to see published.

The problem of falling back into cliché, tradition and conventional language-use is obviously considerable for a young writer trained as a critic, and therefore adept at being sensitive and open to other writers. Beckett also had to contend with the problem that much of the original manuscript of "Dream of Fair to middling Women" would be unpublishable in England, let alone Ireland, because of its openness about homosexuality and brothels, promiscuity and alcoholic excess. More Pricks Than Kicks, though it did achieve publication, is ruined thematically and formally by the exclusion of the final chapter, called (like Beckett's poetry collection published in 1935) "Echo's Bones". (1) Again and

1. The collection of poetry called Echo's Bones and Other Precipitates was published in 1935 (Paris: The Europa Press). The poems are reprinted in Collected Poems, pp. 9-28. The story "Echo's Bones", still unpublished, exists in manuscript at the Baker Memorial Library, Dartmouth College. There is a description in Richard Admussen's The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts: a Study (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp. 103-104.

again, between 1929 and 1935, Beckett's writing in English shows an anxiety to avoid falling back into convention, combined with a frustration at the expressive medium available to him. His nervous linguistic experimentation is mingled with passages of plain, even inert, language, and his recognition of the strengths of word-order and rhythm in English syntax exists side by side with a refusal to use them as if effective communication is possible. Frequently he buries a strong and simple declarative sentence in a mountainous heap of subordinate clauses:

Up to time then after this little railway-station rectification she advanced up the railway-platform like a Gozzi-Epstein, being careful not to lose the platform ticket that yet ten Pfennigs⁽ⁱⁿ⁾ cost had, insisting on the garden of Eden in Mammy's furcoat, scarcely suggesting within the mild aphrodisiac of cheap loose black leather Russian boots legs that even flexed nervously in black stockings stretched to the absolute limit of intensity and viewed from a certain very special Blickpunkt against a very special quality of hard light during a period of oestruation were not alas reasonably exciting. (Sedendo et Quiescendo, p. 13)

The central statement in this morass of words is "she advanced", but it is certainly not easy to locate.

Yet Beckett's apprenticeship as an artisan of English letters contains work of real value, forward-looking and necessary to his later return to English, just as his early French contains perceptions and parodic stylistic experiments that foreshadow his post-war strength in that language. A Case in a

Thousand, (1) like Assumption and Sedendo et Quiescendo a story that Beckett does not want republished, shows for the most part a problematic gap between form and content. The text is built around the childhood experiences of the healer, Dr. Nye, who cannot save himself. Meeting his old nanny, whose son Dr. Nye has failed to cure of T.B., brings up some deep and powerful unconscious disturbance (the story is one of the clearest examples of Beckett's interest in psycho-analytical theories). The over-controlled form of the story, the clinical detachment of language and the narrator's poorly-prepared refusal to tell us the exact nature of the childhood problem make the ending weak. Beckett seems to have been trying to renew, on his own terms, an English tradition with which he had little sympathy, one of psychological realism in which language does not draw attention to itself. Yet the attempt was doomed before it began because his own concerns were far more drawn towards questions of communication, the mystery of consciousness, and the inexpressible strangeness of objects and events for which language cannot provide an adequate translation.

The story comes to life, paradoxically, when a kind of silence, a meditative attitude to words and things, takes over

1. Samuel Beckett, A Case in a Thousand, in The Bookman, Vol. LXXXVI (August 1934), pp. 241-242.

from the effort to use and yet conceal Freudian theorising. "The handle of the umbrella, carved in bog-oak to represent a bird, rose and fell" (A Case in a Thousand, p. 242, column 1); spirit and matter come together in an object (like the knife-rest Molloy will find) more interesting than its owner. And a supposedly realistic dialogue moves onto a deeper level as it comes to resemble the wordlessness of water flowing under the bridge:

"There's something I've been wanting to ask you," he said, looking at the water where it flowed out of the shadow of the bridge.

She replied, also looking down at the water: "I wonder would that be the same thing I've been wanting to tell you ever since that time you stretched out on his bed."

There was a silence, she waiting for him to ask, he for her to tell.

"Can't you go on?" he said. (A Case in Thousand, p. 242, column 2)

We are not told what the "thing" was. Beckett could not reveal the psychological puzzle; to have done so would have been to set himself back in the company of Balzac, whose characters Beckett saw as "clockwork", so predictably did environment and action determine their reactions. To "go on" in the English of A Case in a Thousand, over-controlled, precise, almost petrified in its desire not to flow with familiar patterns of romantic sentiment or comic excess, was impossible. He would have to write for many years in another

tongue before he could combine the measured simplicity of the lines quoted above with images of sufficient power and a syntax strong and flexible enough to carry both a love of language and a deep-seated resistance to its temptations.

The greatest effort Beckett made to remain in the English language in the 1930s was, of course, Murphy. As a comic novel of ideas exploring insanity and astrology (1), and in its concentration on the experience of solipsism, it shows great advances over what came before. Its verbal and formal coherence reveal a now patient imagination able to maintain linguistic energy and a vividly conceived variety of settings. Yet Murphy remains in some sense a curiosity, an eighteenth-century novel in a time-warped. Its classical strictness of control, and the rejecting of environment and psychology that makes Murphy subject to a rigid system of planetary influences and all the other characters, according to the narrator, "puppets", relate directly to Beckett's attempt to use English as a public language, a language to communicate with readers versed in a particular literary

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1. The astrological and astronomical patterning of the novel is explored in great detail in Sighle Kennedy's Murphy's Bed: A Study of Real Sources and Sur-real Associations in Samuel Beckett's First Novel (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1971).

tradition. The syntax often seems overworked, sometimes brittle. A satire at times dangerously close to sneering conceals subjects which (as Assumption revealed) the younger writer had wanted to treat with idealistic and lofty seriousness: the isolation of the self, the search for a voice, the experience of the sublime.

The need to conceal by means of euphemism what in Paris could have been direct and honest sexual references also makes the novel curiously "tight". As in Che Sciagura and Censorship in the Saorstat, Beckett fulminates against those who seek to entrap artistic language in a narrow and perverted attitude to sexual activity:

Celia said that if he did not find work at once she would have to go back to hers. Murphy knew what that meant. No more music.

This phrase is chosen with care, lest the filthy censors should lack an occasion to commit their filthy synecdoche. (Murphy, p. 55)

Murphy is clever, entertaining and, in the portrayal of Celia (who is not a puppet in spite of Beckett's apparent intentions), genuinely moving. She escapes the petrification in hard, comic brilliance, no doubt because, as a prostitute, she is already an outsider, a marginal figure in the circle of conventional society. Murphy gives, nevertheless, a curious overall impression of existing in a constrained world, a world

of artifice and decorative effect. What Beckett needed was a form and language capable of showing, not merely analysing, the depths of Murphy's mind, an artistic medium in which the reader's insight into that mind would be the result of an experience shared, not an observation completed and reported. (1) Such experience became possible in the post-war French novels, but was not yet available to Beckett in an English still mastering him far more than he could master it, an English full of literary and social habits he already wanted to relinquish and expose. Writing in French and self-translating into English would allow him to present directly the world of the unhoused imagination, the inchoate consciousness unanchored in society and in a defined personality.

Yet there remains a pair of pre-war English works in which Beckett did achieve a use of English that had beauty of form, resilience and metaphoric strength, without striving unnaturally for innovation. They are the brief poems

1. Beckett's praise of Marcel Proust includes the following statement: "The book is the search, stated in the full complexity of all its clues and blind alleys, for that resolution, and not the compte rendu after the event, of a round trip." Proust in Pieces, Spectator, June 23, 1934. In Disjecta, p. 65. Beckett was not, until later, able to equal this ability to show process as it occurred.

Gnome and Da Tagte Es. (1) The secret of their strength lies in their brevity, a miniaturising of form with which the Beckett of the 1970s and 1980s has become closely identified. They also share European connections, Gnome being inspired by Goethe's Xenian, and Da Tagte Es having a German title and links with Walther von der Vogelweide's Nemt, frowe, disen Kranz. (2) Beckett's love of such brief, neat forms as the epigram and the maxim in French has been illustrated much more recently in his Chamfort adaptations and his mirlitonades. But as well as the German and French connections, these short poems suggest a way of responding to the work of one English writer Beckett has always admired: Samuel Johnson, whose short pieces for the Idler and the Rambler combined a precise and polished English with bold and resonant images. Johnson's desire that English should become a language of "polite learning", as it was often then called, (3) and a true rival to French, must have had a special poignancy for Beckett. He not only knew and

1. Gnome, Dublin Magazine, IX (July-Sept. 1934), p. 8; reprinted in Collected Poems, p. 7. Da Tagte Es in Echo's Bones (Collected Poems, p. 27).

2. These details taken from Collected Poems, pp. 141-142.

3. e.g. Oxford English Dictionary, "polite", definition 2.a. "All the Lovers of Polite Learning...give me thanks", Richard Bentley, A dissertation upon the epistles of Phalaris, 1697 (1699), "Preface", p. 49.

loved the eighteenth-century English and Irish writers but had also spent years preparing for a career as a scholar-critic. Gnome seems particularly relevant to this struggle:

Spend the years of learning squandering
 Courage for the years of wandering
 Through a world politely turning
 From the loutishness of learning

This tiny tour-de-force of simple words, unified by that essentially English grammatical feature, the "-ing" ending, has a classical precision and economy that are oddly like the mirlitonades, written more than forty years later. Da Tagte Es has a similar economy. (1) In both poems Beckett allows his grasp of English stress-patterns and rhythms, his familiarity with French intellectual keenness, and his reading of German literature to come together. The small scope of the poems makes them effective and memorable

1. The entire poem, a moving farewell, consists of four brief lines.

redeem the surrogate goodbyes
 the sheet astream in your hand
 who have no more for the land
 and the glass unmisted above your eyes
 (Collected Poems, p. 27)

The balanced, four-line form is one Beckett seems to favour; Dieppe (Collected Poems, p. 48) and ^{Saint-}~~St.~~ Lô (Collected Poems, p. 32), as well as some of the mirlitonades, also share it.

in a way that most of the longer and more ambitious poems of the early 1930s are not. Yet the world-weariness which underlies these brief gems could not, apparently, sustain an artistically unified voice in English, or an intensely serious imaginative vision.

Beckett's pre-war attempt to reach that vision in drama, beneath a comic surface, failed for similar reasons: his desire to explore, in an eighteenth-century context, themes of mortality, time, communication and, above all, the need for love foundered because of a problem of language. Beckett wanted to write about Samuel Johnson and Mrs. Thrale; the part of the draft that survives (perhaps the only part he wrote) shows a concern, as in Assumption and A Case in a Thousand, with the way human beings succeed in not communicating through language, or communicating only in the form of conflict. Dr. Johnson himself does not appear, and the only possibly "merry" member of the group gathered in his sitting-room is the cat Hodge (Human Wishes, p. 159) who is, "if possible", as the stage-directions request, asleep. (1) (Human Wishes, p. 155) The speakers in the scene are nervously alert to diction and syntax, as well they might be in the home of the

1. Human Wishes, first published in Ruby Cohn's Just Play, pp. 295-305. Reprinted in Disjecta, pp. 155-166. My references are to Disjecta.

great lexicographer. Beckett has said of the play that it was his inability to get their language right that stopped him from completing it:

It was a question of putting it into the Irish accent as well as the proper language of the period. It would not do to have Johnson speaking proper language, after the manner of Boswell, while all the other characters speak only the impossible jargon I put into their mouths. (1)

Once again, the desire for a new tongue, or a new way of using his old one, is evident.

Too many constraints on Beckett's artistic freedom held him back, before the move to Paris, for him to find fulfilment in his art. Tradition, censorship, the increasing preference for socially and politically conscious writing in the 1930s, held back his experiments and prevented him from reaching the audience he wanted; even more, the mastery of his mother tongue over him stood in the way of his desire to carry out what Proust defined in A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs as: "ces altérations de la syntaxe et de l'accent qui sont en relation nécessaire avec l'originalité intellectuelle". (2)

1. In conversation with Deirdre Bair, April 13th, 1972, Paris (Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 255, and note p. 673).

2. Marcel Proust, A La Recherche du Temps Perdu, 3 vols. (Paris: n.r.f. - Gallimard, 1954), Vol. I, p. 555.

His vision before the war was far ahead of the syntax and vocabulary available to him; his various, often brilliant failures are more illuminating than his comparative successes in showing what he wished to translate into literary form. The vision was already that of an artist of bilingual and bicultural awareness for whom the fundamentals of human life, loneliness, love, death, communication, mattered far more than local concerns of nationalism, creed and history. Yet his language, still rooted in that localised and nationalistic culture, worked against his stubborn aesthetic purism. He had to leave behind the culture and its language, as well as the larger English-speaking circle, uprooting himself linguistically before he could return to it through self-translation and the invention of a personal Anglo-Irish voice freed from pre-rational levels of influence, convention and control.

Towards French

While his dissatisfaction with the constraints and conventions he felt in Irish culture and language pushed Beckett's writing away from the centre he was born to, counter-balancing forces were pulling him towards the centre of another culture. As S.E. Gontarski has recalled in a recent book, Beckett's career as an academic involved lectures on French literature

which say much about his own artistic preferences. (1)

More important still, a list of the French writers named, quoted from, alluded to and parodied in the whole of Beckett's pre-war work would be an enormously long one. (2)

Soaking up French styles and attitudes as a student, Beckett used these resources in countless ways, as I now wish to illustrate.

His tutor, T.E. Rudmose-Brown, was undoubtedly a major influence on his early love of, and tastes in, French literature. What is more, Rudmose-Brown had a story of his own published in the pages of transition at least once; he thus provided a link of a special kind with the Parisian environment. (3)

1. S.E. Gontarski, The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. xiv-xv. Gontarski quotes a student's notebook: "Beckett was already deriding naturalism and romanticism because they attribute 'absolute value to one system of reference and point of view. Only one valid vision of material'" (p.xv).

2. It would include, at the very least: Apollinaire, Balzac, Bergson, Chénier, Cocteau, Corbière, Corneille, Descartes, Fargue, France, Gide, Gourmont, Hugo, La Fontaine, Laforgue, Malherbe, Mallarmé, Malraux, Mauriac, Montaigne, de Musset, Proust, Racine, Rimbaud, Ronsard, de Sade, Stendhal, Valéry, de Vigny and Voltaire. These are only some of the writers named or referred to directly; there are undoubtedly many more, especially in "Dream of Fair to middling Women", to whom Beckett makes more distant allusions.

3. T.B. Rudmore-Broun (sic), "The Field", transition 9 (December 1927), pp. 62-75. The story, a romantic encounter between a young woman and a sensitive man with an ailing, fragile wife, contains several scenes and images similar to those in Beckett's early writing. Most notably, though, it contains an impassioned protest against Irish complacency and narrow patriotism. The central figure feels "he could not be happy in Ireland, nor happy outside Ireland" (p. 66).

Like Beckett, Rudmose-Brown admired both the cool rational strengths of French classicism, and the contemporary writing which was exploring the psychological underworld which that classicism had contained and controlled within its balanced and beautiful forms. (1) It is instructive to compare Beckett's style as a literary critic, reviewing Pound on French literature, with his teacher's own style. Rudmose-Brown's "Introduction" to a collection of French stories begins with the following words:

Vapereau's Dictionnaire des Littératures, which defines the nouvelle as a short novel, takes no account of any form of conte except the badin and the merveilleux, and includes the verse tale with the prose. For our purpose the verse conte may be entirely excluded. In other respects Vapereau's definitions are adequate in so far as the development of these genres up till the end of the eighteenth century is concerned. (2)

Beckett, writing six years later, long after his break with Trinity College and his tutor's academic aspirations for him, speaks of Ezra Pound thus:

The opening essay has a penetrating account of the deterioration of Provençal poetry after the crusade of 1298. This would have been the very place for a pronunciamento on that most fascinating question, the Minne modification of amour courtois. (3)

1. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 39.

2. T.B. Rudmose-Brown (ed.), French Short Stories (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. ix.

3. Ex Cathezra (review of Ezra Pound's Make It New), in Disjecta, p. 77.

In both, questions of form and genre, not of theme or setting, are seen as crucially important, and Beckett's reviewing style, surely not one that by this stage came naturally to him, seems at this point almost a parody of his former tutor's. Beckett, it is worth remembering, has a superb ear, an ear which, for an artist seeking escape from earlier patterns of language, can be a handicap, even though it is one of the most important of the professional linguist's gifts. The elegance, erudite precision and apparent confidence of the Pound review, taken together with his other reviews, cannot outweigh the possibility that he was far from happy with his voice in this role. The most important exceptions occur when -- as in the Feuillerat review of Proust (1) -- he was genuinely able to give an expert opinion (having written his own book on Proust) and when he passed judgement on the quality of a translation,(2) another area in which he was knowledgeable.

The mimicking, at times unconscious, of other styles and voices, the sensitivity to tone, and ability to analyse and parody successfully, were all skills learned by Beckett the scholar which Beckett the artist had to fight against, or at least adapt to other uses. His chief pre-war weapon in this was comedy;

1. Proust in Pieces in Disjecta, pp. 63-65.

2. Poems. By Rainer Maria Rilke, in Disjecta, pp. 66-67. Beckett takes issue with J.B. Leishman's translations, as well as being critical of Rilke himself; he says firmly: "The translation gets least in the way when it follows its text most closely (...) The numerous deviations are unwarrantable, that is to say, ineffective" (p. 67).

by making light even of his heroes in literary tradition or juxtaposing their vision or style with some incongruous aspect of modernity, he could free himself from the danger of using them unconsciously, of falling back into old grooves of familiar form and perception. Thus the classical French theatre, with its unities of time, place and action, so different from the Shakespearean tradition, was transformed into the spoof-play "Le Kid", which Beckett wrote with Georges Pelorson in 1931. Corneille's Le Cid and Charlie Chaplin's film The Kid of 1921 came together in the title. (1) It is noticeable, though, that much of Beckett's great post-war drama returns to the unities, or seems aware of their extraordinary capacity for theatrical effect, by limiting variety of setting and action, and, often, observing a version of the twenty-four hour rule which made Corneille pack in his hero's exploits to such an unrealistic degree. (2) In Winnie's routine, in Happy

1. "Le Kid" was performed at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin in February 1931. Unfortunately, the script has not survived. Descriptions of it suggest a comic reaction to the "unity of time" in classical French theatre: "The set was constructed with a huge alarm clock with movable hands painted onto a backdrop at the rear of the stage. Pelorson sat next to it, atop a large ladder. As the hours of the play passed, he moved the hands of the clock" (Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 127).

2. In Le Cid, as Scudéry pointed out when it appeared, the hero accomplishes a variety of battles, quarrels, and the promise of marriage with the daughter of a man he kills, all within twenty-four hours; "ce qui, loin d'être bon dans les vingt-quatre heures, ne serait pas supportable dans les vingt-quatre ans." Scudéry, "Observations sur Le Cid", reprinted in Pierre Corneille, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: n.r.f.-Gallimard, 1980), p. 786.

Days, time is dictated by the bell for waking and the bell for sleep; for her, however, it is the length and potential emptiness of the day, not a frantic variety of incidents, that dominates. (1)

Several other early texts show Beckett's delight in testing himself against the great French writers. Che Sciagura took its title (though Italian) and its biting comic satire from Voltaire, a writer whose battles with the Catholic Church made him particularly suitable for the context. As a free thinker Voltaire may have been a considerable influence on Beckett's anti-Catholic comedy, as well as encouraging a sceptical and independent attitude to systems of state authority.

Of all the allusions, and uses of French writing, in works that Beckett saw in comic or satiric terms the most serious and ambitious is Whoroscope (1929), (2) for here Beckett dared to take on the whole tradition of French rationalism, and the representative Frenchman, Descartes. A thinker who did so much to develop a mechanistic view of the universe, a view which world science has developed over the succeeding three hundred

1. Samuel Beckett, Happy Days (London: Faber and Faber, 1963/1966): "if you were to die — (smile) — to speak in the old style — (smile off) — or go away and leave me, then what would I do, what could I do, all day long, I mean between the bell for waking and the bell for sleep?" (p. 18).

2. Whoroscope, in Collected Poems, pp. 1-6.

years, yet had to reintroduce God because he couldn't do without Him is surely not the object of Beckett's unequivocal admiration. Even when he was a young scholar, adherence to the light of reason alone was alien to Beckett's developing need to express imaginatively a darker and more unconscious level of experience than science could allow. What seems to fascinate Beckett in Descartes is the courage of his introspection, chronicled in Discours de la Méthode, even more than its devastating effects upon the outer world. Reaching inside himself for "truth", Descartes laid the foundations for scientific objectivity, yet he himself had many eccentric, if not irrational, habits, as Beckett's poem takes pleasure in revealing.

In this paradoxical union of introspection and the ideal of objectivity, Beckett must have grasped the central concern which has remained through his entire work in both languages: the battle of subjective and objective experience, the conflict between reason and the forces of the unconscious. The surréalistes, drawing on psycho-analytical discoveries and on literary sources including de Nerval, Rimbaud and Lautréamont, were at the time of Beckett's first visits to Paris bringing back into serious French literature a deliberately chaotic, anti-rationalist and deeply subjective view of experience which had been beyond the pale of refined critical taste for so long. In writing Whoroscope Beckett reveals a deeply ambiguous

fascination. On the one hand, he admired the traditions of clarity, logic and constraint, the purified and precise language, of the French classical tradition, a tradition he would lecture on in 1931; on the other, his exposure to the contemporary writers in Paris, some of them friends of Rudmose-Brown, as well as to Joyce, gave him a desire to celebrate the forces of dream, of anarchic metaphor, and of time untrammelled by the mechanisms of human chronometers. Descartes' egg will "ripen" in its own time, (1) his life proceed and end in a schedule no calendar can predict. Much of what Descartes does and suffers in the poem is blatantly beyond the power of reason to control.

Beckett's interest in French classicism and in contemporary French poetry is understandable when one considers the kind of imaginative literature still emerging in the Irish culture he was so anxious to leave behind. In a passage from "Dream of Fair to middling Women" which has often been quoted to show Beckett's attraction towards French, what may not always be clear is the importance of the context. Belacqua and the Alba, his Beatrice in so far as he is capable of such idealism, sit on the sea-shore, that typical Beckettian setting, between

1. The poem opens with a reference to an egg that "stinks fresh" (Whoroscope, p. 1); Beckett's note informs us that Descartes "liked his omelette made of eggs hatched from eight to ten days; shorter or longer under the hen and the result, he says, is disgusting. (...) The shuttle of a ripening egg combs the warp of his days" (Whoroscope, Notes, p. 5).

Ireland and the ocean waves. (1) During their discussion, the Alba--who elsewhere in the novel shows her command of French, sprinkles her speech with French epithets, and, the narrator suggests, wants to go to France although she cannot do so--makes the following statement:

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

"Help yourself" he said, mollifying her with a betrayal of annoyance, "but Racine is all twilight."

"All brightness" she said. ("Dream of Fair to middling Women", p. 176)

She is thus doing more than expressing a simple aesthetic preference; rejecting Celtic Twilight, folklore, Church, history and the current trends of Irish literature, she becomes a mouthpiece for ideas that the aimless and contradictory Belacqua often seems to be circling around. He is at this point (though not necessarily elsewhere in "Dream of Fair to middling Women") perhaps thinking more of the intermediary area

1. As Lawrence Harvey points out, beaches and other "margins, edges, borders" are frequent in the poems and early prose (Harvey, Samuel Beckett; Poet and Critic, p. 327).

of psychological contradictions which Racine, in superbly clear form and language, reveals. Unlike Belacqua, the Alba forcefully and logically expresses her preference for the noonday light of the classical tradition; we see the intellectual clarity of her mind. (1) Like Belacqua's French friend Chas, the Alba has a comparative focus; but even more than Chas she articulates the French challenge to "Irishness", the ideal of precise, abstract thought set against the hazily emotive and subjective. In More Pricks Than Kicks, both she and Chas are considerably diminished in importance, and the yearnings of Belacqua himself towards France and French literature, though sparingly used, take a larger place.

Beckett's own attraction to French culture, the French language and Parisian bohemianism owes much to his two years at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (1927-1929), at the time when transition was championing the "Revolution of the Word" (2)

1. To glance for a moment at the biographical background that went towards the making of this character, it is intriguing to see that Ethna McCarthy, on whom the Alba was partly based, did indeed pursue reason and mental clarity; after studying modern languages, she turned to medicine and became a notable paediatrician (Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 53).

2. See transition 16-17 (Spring-Summer 1929).

in English, and the surréaliste movement was at its height in French. (1) The belief in the value of the avant-garde, and in a destructive as well as creative energy devoted to the search for new artistic forms and new "syntax" (in the largest sense: the way all artists assemble and juxtapose their materials), has remained with Beckett ever since, long after most writers of that time have died or moved to more traditional "centred" approaches in their own language and culture. Undoubtedly the freedom from sexual and social restraints, from censorship and narrowly utilitarian or bourgeois attitudes to art appealed to Beckett at the time. The confirmation of his own voice through the contact with living artists comes through in the tone of his early writing; to be familiar with France and with French literature was a source of power.

Beckett's experimentalism in poetry and prose between 1929 and 1934 shows his involvement with what was happening in Paris during that time, the excitement of probing dreams, insanity, sexual psychology, new scientific discoveries and new ways of using language. That Beckett viewed himself as an artist embarking on a future career that would be centrally

1. Breton's first surrealist manifesto was published in 1924.

concerned with "self-perception" (unlike the Irish "twilighters" (1) for whom he then had such contempt; their "twilight" was a very different thing from Racine's) can be seen in the unsuccessful yet ambitious surrealist poem For Future Reference, (2) a poem dealing with traumas of his past in Ireland yet in its title suggesting the material for future artistic activity. The gently organic nature of change in English literature -- relatively free of manifestos, rule-making leaders or Academicians and rebels against them -- must have seemed to the artist struggling to be revolutionary a feeble alternative (instead of, as it is, a remarkably productive one) to the lurching movement between conservatism and revolution which has characterised French literary history. Even though most of the contributors to transition were of English-speaking background (some, surprisingly, did not even speak French), the journal could flourish only in a city such as Paris, alongside revolutions in the other arts. Frustrated with Irish literary concerns, Beckett could hardly fail to be drawn towards the centre of a circle of artistic renewal in the country whose literary past he knew

1. Recent Irish Poetry, p. 71.

2. Samuel Beckett, For Future Reference, transition 19-20 (June 1930), pp. 342-343.

so intimately — more intimately, indeed, than he knew that of his own culture. He could judge the value and the importance of the revolution going on in Paris because he had deep respect for the traditions it was in rebellion against.

But knowledge of a tradition and attraction to a vibrant artistic atmosphere are not in themselves any explanation for the step that Beckett, unlike most of the English-speaking artists in Paris, was to take into the French language itself. To explain the attractions of French as a medium for expression, for this particular writer in the 1930s, demands a closer look at the relative strengths of the types of French and English (specifically the Anglo-Irish variety) which were available for Beckett to use.

French differs from English most profoundly in its unified origins. As a Romance language it has a singleness of structure and vocabulary which English, a mingling of both Romance and Germanic sources, lacks. Put the other way round, English can be said to have a richness and strength in its enormous vocabulary, its vast numbers of synonyms or near synonyms, which French lacks. Writers have compared the two languages again and again, preferring one to the other for some particular literary project or tone. St.-John Perse recorded a conversation with André Gide on the subject which is especially intriguing; when set beside Beckett's polemic about English abstractness in Dante...

Bruno. Vico.. Joyce it shows once again that the revaluing of Elizabethan English, compared with its contemporary and, it seems, feebler counterpart, was a current concern:

Then he wanted to talk about English literature; the Elizabethans, I think (...). He told me of the attraction that an exhaustive study of the English language was beginning to exert over him. I, for my part, deplored the denseness of such a concrete language, the excessive richness of its vocabulary, and its pleasure in trying to reincarnate the thing itself, as in ideographic writing; whereas French, a more abstract language, which tries to signify rather than represent the meaning, uses words only as fiduciary symbols like coins as values of monetary exchange. English for me was still at the swapping stage. (1)

This disagreement focusses on a difference in the "nature" of English and French. (If indeed it is "nature", rather than a particularly privileged type of language-use in a literary context; obviously each language has so many traditions, registers and dialects that no overall generalisation can be adequate. Here, this reservation must be taken into account in the discussions of the two languages that follows.) The contrast, in any case, allows a writer who has mastered them both to compare two quite different modes of expression. That Beckett was aware or at least able to draw on his own sense of the difference becomes clear in some of his 1937-1939 poems in French, whose abstract

1. St.-John Perse, "André Gide: 1909", in Sewanee Review LX (1952), p. 601.

conceptualising is very far from the densely physical, concrete quality of his early experiments in English. Julien Green, speaking of his use of French and English, noted with interest that use of one or the other for a piece of writing would make his imagination proceed in a very different way. (1)

In a thorough study of French-English stylistics, Vinay and Darbelnet point out many differences, semantic and structural, between the two languages that seem to corroborate St.-John Perse's remarks and add support to Julien Green's experience. English, they observe, prefers the "mot-image" to the "mot-signe" which is favoured in French. (2) This fits closely with Beckett's own remark in the 1960s -- after he had once again returned to a direct use of his native

1. "I did not say the same things in both languages, because, when writing in English, I had the feeling that in some obscure way I was not quite the same person. (...) There is an Anglo-Saxon way of approaching a subject, just as there is a French way. The difference between the two is essential, although not easily defined. Also, the choice of words — I was about to say the choice of colours — varies considerably from one language to another. (...) I am convinced that words can cause a book to completely deviate from its course". (Julien Green, "My First Book in English", p. 102)

2. "Mot-image": "susceptible d'évoquer une image ou tout autre sensation". "Mot-idée"/"mot-signe": "Mot qui tend vers l'abstraction du signe mathématique et s'adresse à l'esprit plutôt qu'à l'imagination ou aux sens". (J.-P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet, Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l'Anglais (Paris: Didier, 1958), p. 11)

tongue — that it was a good theatre language because of "its concreteness, its close relationship between thing and vocable". (1) English also has a richness of variant descriptive terms where French often has one precise word of broad generalising power; "luire" can be translated by "glimmer", "gleam", "glow", "glisten" and "glint". (2)

English retains resonant associative layers from its literary inheritance (especially Shakespeare and the King James Bible), from proverbs, idioms and verbal fossils; it was never as completely regularised, in spite of the efforts of eighteenth-century grammarians and "polished" writers, as was the literary French of the French court, subject to the decrees from the Academy, and even more the strictures of guardians of the language such as Malherbe and Boileau. Shakespeare and Racine stand at the two extremes of the contrast; for Shakespeare's vocabulary of some twenty or thirty thousand words, many of them "new-minted", Racine's equally powerful plays content themselves with some two thousand words. It is hardly surprising, then, that each playwright is difficult to translate into the other language.

1. Samuel Beckett, in conversation with a Swedish friend. Quoted in Clas Zilliacus' Beckett and Broadcasting: A Study of the Works of Samuel Beckett for and in Radio and Television (Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi, 1976), p. 30.

2. Vinay and Darbelnet, Stylistique comparée, p. 61.

The very idea of an English Academy regulating vocabulary is unthinkable. If, however, English has replaced first Latin, then French, as the language of international science and political affairs, it is almost certainly because of the vast political and economic power of the English-speaking world rather than any innate precision in the language itself. (1) While a clarity sufficient for most purposes is obviously possible, English syntax does not involve its user, in formal writing, in the same abstracting, the same intellectualising demands, as that of French. The public elegance, the precision and reliability of French syntax have long been used by defenders of French as a world language, and even today passions run high on the subject. Rivarol's proud and famous dictum "Ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas français" (2) still has its supporters.

Beckett was, as I have already suggested, caught in the 1930s between his love of French classicism (and the literature of England and Ireland influenced by it in the age of Johnson and Swift), and his opposing admiration for a Joycean or Rabelaisian use of language that could allow the free play of

1. For an illuminating study of French resistance to this process, see David C. Gordon, The French Language and National Identity, 1930-1975 (The Hague, Paris, New York: Mouton, 1978).

2. Antoine de Rivarol, De l'Universalité de la Langue Française (1784) ed. Th. Suran (Paris, Toulouse: Didier Privat, 1930), p. 255.

metaphor, of dream-worlds, of the unconscious, in literary forms brought energetically to life by a use of words which were the exact opposite of "fiduciary symbols", as St.-John Perse called them. They would indeed be bartering objects, delightful for their own form and colouring as well as their powers of reference. Beckett, as a sensitive translator, knew the value of savouring and considering a word as if it had a personality of its own; this is clear from his use of the word "viduity".

The French version of the word appeared in an Eluard poem which Beckett translated in 1932 and he retained it in the English, even though its effect in the language is quite different; (1) it sounds Latinate and abstract compared with the more homely "widowhood". Its advantage is that it can apply to both sexes ("widowerhood" is impossibly clumsy), and that it gives a wonderful echo of an idea of emptiness, "vide", the void. Thus in English the word takes on a special value, and thirty years later, in Krapp's Last Tape, the aging failed writer jumps to hear that his younger self knew the meaning of such a word: "where mother lay a-dying, (...)

1. Paul Eluard, "La Vue":

A l'heure où apparaissent les premiers symptômes de la
viduité de l'esprit

Beckett's translation:

At the hour when the first symptoms of mental viduity
make themselves felt

(Collected Poems, p. 74 and p. 75). See Bibliography
for details of original publication.

after her long viduity", (1) and hastily looks it up in his dictionary. The generalising and economical purity of such items of French lexis stand in sharp opposition to the rich, but little regularised, and often hazily emotive English Beckett could have developed had he stayed in Ireland. Murphy is a fascinating work because it seems drawn towards the great century of neo-classicism in British history, as well, as in more submerged form, towards the French tradition. When Beckett moves into French, for the major post-war works, he achieves an extraordinary mingling of his double linguistic and cultural inheritance in a different way; Rivarol's language of clarity, illumination, and rational brilliance becomes a way of anatomising darkness and logical contradictions, a language in which the underside of reason will be exposed. (2)

But the pre-war period, before the destructive chaos of war, the division of France, ~~and the~~ deportation of the Jews, had exposed the limitations of reason and civilisation with hideous force, was a time when Beckett's delight in French, his dissatisfaction with contemporary English, were still

1. Samuel Beckett, Krapp's Last Tape and Embers (London: Faber and Faber, 1959/1965), p. 14.

2. Beckett's later work, too, will be seen as having qualities of "abstraction and generalisation" (Donald Davie, "Kinds of Comedy", Spectrum, II (Winter, 1958), p. 27) which seem in keeping with the characteristics of French as defined by Vinay and Darbelnet.

very largely aesthetic concerns. The deeper psychological and moral implications of his language-use were not yet accessible. Literary French gave a different kind of pleasure, its purified and orthodox beauty seeming like polished marble suddenly available to a sculptor who had had to work in wood (the rough but malleable Anglo-Irish). (1) When Beckett spoke, thirty years later, of literary classicism in terms of neo-classical architecture, contrasting La Madeleine in Paris with Chartres, (2) he was illustrating a sense of verbal artifacts as visual creations, almost as objects, in a way that resembles the musings of Belacqua, so much earlier, on the French tongue. In this quotation from "Dream of Fair to middling Women", unlike that on page 111,

1. Oddly enough, Leonard Forster, in making this point, sees the two languages, metaphorically, the other way round: "Beckett has always neatly sidestepped the question of why he writes in French, as in his answer to the Swiss critic Nikolaus (sic) Gessner - 'Parce qu'en français c'est plus facile d'écrire sans style.' But he seems to have got close to an answer in reply to an American journalist, Israel Shenker, in 1956, when he said: 'It was a different experience from writing in English. It was more exciting for me, writing in French.' The unromantic explanation is convincing in its simplicity. It is the way a sculptor might speak of working in wood after a long period of working in stone" (Forster, The Poet's Tongues, p. 87). In general, Beckett's own metaphors for French suggest that its firmness, its clear syntactic rules, its reliability, are to him more like stone than wood.

2. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 200.

Belacqua's opinions seem more confident; but the narrator is careful to point out that Belacqua is deliberately trying out his intellectual position here, "studying to be a professor":

"Black diamond of pessimism", Belacqua thought that was a nice example, in the domain of words, of the little sparkle hid in ashes, the precious margarit and hid from many, and the thing that the conversationalist, with his contempt of the tag and the ready-made, can't give you, because the lift to the high spot is precisely from the tag and the ready-made. The same with the stylist. You couldn't experience a margarita in d'Annunzio because he denies you the pebbles and flints that reveal it. The uniform, horizontal writing, flowing without accidenc, of the man with a style, never gives you the margarita. But the writing of, say, Racine or Malherbe, perpendicular, diamanté, is pitted, is it not, and sprigged with sparkles; the flints and pebbles are there, no end of humble tags and commonplaces. They have no style, they write without style, (do they not) they give you the phrase, the sparkle, the precious margarit. Perhaps only the French can do it. Perhaps only the French^{language} can give you the thing you want.

Don't [let us] be too hard on him, he was studying to be a professor. (1)

It is in this context that Beckett's much quoted post-war remark about choosing French in order to write "sans style" must be taken. (2) Naturally, his French works are the very opposite of style-less, but they exist in the context of a

1. "Dream of Fair to middling Women", p. 42. Quoted in Disjecta, p. 47.

2. See note 1, p. 122, above.

clear norm of literary style and decorum, a norm which in English has never existed to the same degree. The reference to Racine and Malherbe suggests that these writers were for Beckett a standard of excellence even when reason itself came under suspicion; he would mention them again in the early 1960s in a way that showed the power, especially of Racine, over his dramatic and verbal imagination.

As a language learned after the age of intuitive acquisition, French was for Beckett a more controllable medium than English in the 1930s. It has apparently remained so, to some extent; Beckett complained that in How It Is, translated from Comment c'est, "The English language resisted me — it made me say more than I wanted to say". (1) French was a tongue he learned academically, and developed according to the circumstances of his contacts with French culture, all self-determined. Thus his French assimilated, as well as its erudite literary and classical base, the street argot of Paris, the colloquialisms of everyday speech (a speech so far from the language of the page that written French, some authorities now complain, is as difficult for French children to learn as for foreigners). What is interesting is Beckett's apparent

1. Raymond Federman, "The Impossibility of Saying the Same Old Thing the Same Old Way — Samuel Beckett's Fiction since Comment c'est", L'Esprit Créateur, XI, 3 (Fall 1971), p. 28. Also see Chapter VI.

indifference to much of the contemporary technocratic and political, commercial and scientific language which has expanded modern French, often to the horror of purists; his French thus retains a continuity with earlier centuries even when, as in the 1937-39 poems, his subjects include a World Cup football match on the radio or the use of a bicycle or a camera. The scholar, the lover of the literature of past ages, which to Beckett have always been in some sense contemporary, no more or less relevant than the present, is never far away, and he is, above all, a scholar of the French tradition. In "Dream of Fair to middling Women", Belacqua and Chas, two extremely modern young men, nevertheless gain great pleasure from discussions of the Alexandrine. Belacqua takes as much *delight* in his desire to draw on a long and highly respected tradition as he does in his scandalous behaviour:

"Elle a une petite gueule" moaned Chas "qui tremble comme un petit nuage." Belacqua found that a striking rapprochement, and in the long gloomy silence that ensued he was at some pains to fix it for ever in his mind:

le ténébreux visage
bouge comme un nuage..

j'adore de Ginette le ténébreux visage
qui tremblote et qui bouge comme un petit nuage

The literary discussion gathers energy:

"There is much to be done, don't you think" said Belacqua

"with a more nervous treatment of the caesura",
 meaning there was nothing at all to be done don't
 you think, with the tenebrous Ginette

and Belacqua continues to display his knowledge of French:

just as the preterites and past subjunctives
 have never since Racine, it seems to me, been
 exploited poetically to the extent they merit
 to be. You know:

"Vous mourûtes aux bords.."

"OU vous fûtes laissée" whistled Chas. (1)
 ("Dream of Fair to middling Women", pp. 127-128)

The young writer whose love of French, and France, led
 him to savour such refined pleasures was acquiring a
 knowledge of literature and poetics that would prove
 invaluable, after the war, in combination with an urgent,
 and a deeply compassionate, vision of human experience. His
 move towards the circle of French was a process as
 irresistible as the force of gravity on an object, however
 little in 1932 when he wrote these lines, he suspected that
 his first great successes would be written in that language.

Experiments with French

Having looked at Beckett's need to go beyond the circle of
 Ireland, and at the corresponding attraction towards the French
 language and French culture, I now wish to focus directly

1. The quotation is from Racine's Phèdre, I, iii, (Jean Racine, Phèdre, in Oeuvres Complètes, eds. Raymond Picard, René Groos and Edmond Pilon (Paris: n.r.f. - Gallimard, 1950), p. 775.)

on Beckett's pre-war use of French. As I have suggested, the early French writing has much to say about his bilingual awareness even before his allegiance to French and to France was translated into permanent voluntary exile. This writing includes the comic and yet revealing piece of prose Le Concentrisme, an outrageous letter written in French in "Dream of Fair to middling Women", and very brief passages of dialogue there and in More Pricks Than Kicks, some of which have already been mentioned. (See Chapter I.) Beckett also contributed to the translation into French of Joyce's "Anna Livia Plurabelle", (1) in which, of course, his specific contribution can no longer be discerned. Unfortunate, too, is the loss of "Le Kid", which would have no doubt given an enlightening view of Corneille as rewritten by Beckett and Pelorson. After a significant break while Beckett lived in London and made a determined effort to enter the English-speaking world of letters (1934-1935), there would then be a rush of poems written in Paris between 1937 and 1939, (2) the curious meditation on art, Les Deux Besoins, (3) and the

1. Translated by a group including Beckett, Alfred Perron (sic), Ivan Goll, Eugene Jolas, Paul L. Léon, Adrienne Monnier, and Philippe Soupault, and published in La Nouvelle Revue Française, 19^e Année, No 212 (1^{er} mai 1931).

2. Known as "Poèmes (19)37-(19)39"; in Collected Poems, pp. 38-51.

3. Written in 1938, unpublished until it appeared in Disjecta, pp. 55-57.

translation of Murphy (1) into French before and during the early part of the Second World War.

Of all the texts containing brief, or longer, passages of French only More Pricks Than Kicks, in which the use of French is restrained, reached publication at the time. It is therefore not surprising that until recently they have been little known or discussed, and any sense of Beckett as a writer experimenting with bilingualism before the late 1930s neglected. Obviously they are small in scale, of minor literary quality, and in several cases too mocking, too deliberately destructive, to have more than comic effect, yet for a study of Beckett's later dual-language use they are essential. The most important of them is Le Concentrisme, now available in published form.

This parodic text, the most extensive piece of Beckett's early French writing to survive, has long been known as a joke played on the Modern Languages society after Beckett's return from his two years in Paris. (2) That same year (1930) he

1. Murphy (F), translated 1938-1939, revised 1946, published by Bordas (Paris: 1947); most of unsold stock taken over by Les Editions de Minuit, who republished it (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1965). All future references are to the 1965 Minuit edition.

2. Previously thought to date from 1928 (e.g. in Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, p. 100) but now generally accepted as dating from 1930, as the internal evidence suggests. Dated as 1930 in Disjecta.

completed his monograph on Proust, a replacement in some sense for the never-finished work he was supposed to be doing on the Unanimistes. (1) Le Concentrisme clearly responds to both academic projects, its title a reversal of "unanimisme" (instead of promoting a shared or unified soul, Jean du Chas, the central figure, withdraws deliberately to the solitary centre of his), while its parodic detail alludes to Proust. What is fascinating to see, once again, is, ^{how} the academic, lucidly rational elements of Beckett's mind work with a fundamentally different interpretation of experience and view of art. Beckett's reading of Proust's great novel emphasises its darker side, in the sense that isolation, and the impossibility of communication, are to Beckett central. The artist is seen as a figure whose integrity depends on a separateness from the ordinary life of human society; friendship is seen as a lie, a distraction from the artist's movement downwards into the self. Jean du Chas, who apparently ends by committing suicide, seems very much a logical extension of this idea.

Beckett read A La Recherche du Temps perdu through twice. (2)

1. John Pilling describes Beckett's interest in them as a "passing enthusiasm", although some admiration for Jules Romains seems to have continued. (John Pilling, Samuel Beckett (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 4.)

2. Pilling, Samuel Beckett, p. 14.

As usual, his own syntax was influenced deeply by what he read, in spite of the difference of language; in fact, many parts of his own text involve rough paraphrasing or close quotation from Proust. This does not alter the fact that Proustian syntax can sound disastrous in English:

The narrator's motives for this second visit are not those -- furnished by Swann and his fantasy -- that granted him no peace while Balbec had still the mystery and beauty of its name, before reality had replaced the mirage of imagination by the mirage of memory and explained away the value of the unknown as Venice will in due course be explained away and the odyssey of the local 'tacot' through a mythical land by the etymology of Brichot and the appeasing contempt of familiarity. (Proust, p. 40)

The sentence begins with admirable clarity, but then almost loses itself in a chain of associations, employing syntactic links which, in the greater grammatical rigour of French prose, can be more sharply distinguished. In Le Concentrisme, Beckett employs French syntax with an evident relish, at the same time delighting in the freedom which the comic mode, within a tone of pretended elegance, gives him to move from the elevated ("l'harmonie cosmique") to the humdrum (Irish cloud-bursts):

De nombreuses indications textuelles m'inclinent à voir dans ce motif presque névralgique le symbole d'une de ces terribles manifestations de la nature, terribles et irrégulières, qui déchirent l'harmonie cosmique et démentissent tous ceux pour qui l'artisan de la création est le prototype de l'artiste néo-classique et l'enchaînement précaire

des mois et des saisons un manifeste rassurant et cathartique: par exemple, une de ces averses ex nihilo qui ponctuent, heureusement à des intervalles assez espacés, le climat de cette île. (Le Concentrisme, pp. 30-37)

Whereas Beckett's monograph seems at times uncomfortable, Le Concentrisme reveals a comic energy and creative exuberance that must have been a great relief. Though intended for the educated reader of English, the writing of Proust has a curiously defensive tone, no doubt a result of the central contradiction of trying to "share" the experience of a work of art when, as Beckett insists, no such community of language and feeling is possible. (1) All is a translation, more or less accurate, through a distorting realm. In Le Concentrisme, the strange survival of the manuscript after du Chas' death, (2) and its even stranger pronouncements for the edification of young artists, (3)

1. "Friendship is a social expedient, like upholstery or the distribution of garbage buckets. It has no spiritual significance. For the artist, who does not deal in surfaces, the rejection of friendship is not only reasonable, but a necessity. (...) There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication" (Proust, pp. 63-64).

2. The initial letter in Le Concentrisme is an amusing parody of the kind common in literary detective work, where a chance meeting, a passing-on of documents, and the eventual donation of the texts to a library ("cette maison des morts et des moribonds", p. 36) ensure the preservation of the records for posterity.

3. Le Concentrisme, pp. 40-41.

seem to liberate Beckett to say, more personally and vividly, what the constraints of his critical voice, idiosyncratic as it is, would not allow.

The task of writing Proust gave Beckett close imaginative contact with a total artist, one like Joyce to whom art was the supreme purpose of existence. It also put him in an unusually good position to know — and be able to imitate -- Proust's style, and Le Concentrisme does not resist the temptation to do so. The comic piece comes to a climax with a hilarious parody of the much-admired author's verbal and imaginative techniques. This is a letter, supposedly by Proust, which the chronicler of Jean du Chas' career suggests may have been invented by du Chas himself: (1)

— 'de sorte que je me vois condamné, par suite de ce funeste enchaînement de circonstances qui remonte, n'en doutez pas, à quelque coryza mérovingien refoulé, pareil à Françoise qui, en ce moment même, blottie et invisible contre la caisse sonore de ma porte, se penche sur l'abîme fatal et délicieux d'un éternuement titanique, à aspirer les torrents de lave muceuse qui se soulèvent des profondeurs de ma morve matinale, sabbataire et volcanique et assiègent les soupapes frissonnantes de mes narines. —' (Le Concentrisme, p. 41)

Again the syntax shows Beckett's fascination with the greater control possible in the French sentence than in

1. "Je n'ai jamais pu trouver cette lettre. Du Chas l'a peut-être fabriquée de toutes pièces" (Le Concentrisme, p. 42).

English, and his desire to equal Proust himself in building clause upon clause into a single sentence. The obligatory references to Françoise and to a "mérovingien" past, the ludicrous aestheticism of the description of blowing one's nose, also illustrate a comic reaction to a long and difficult study of the real Proust. The occasionally juvenile level of humour cannot conceal the brilliance of Beckett's parodic ability, an ability which in French, more than English, he can control and choose to use in future works for his own purposes.

Du Chas is an important step towards later Beckett protagonists. Within the layer on layer of discourse in Le Concentrisme, the Journal (Le Concentrisme, p. 38) is the solitary centre of a philosophy of life which bears some relation with Belacqua's as well as with the later Murphy's. All three result in early death. It is notable too that du Chas' isolation and sceptical attitude to ordinary human concerns can be traced back to childhood alienation (his father dying at his birth, his mother someone he wishes to beat) and relativism (yearly visits to Germany, a sense of not belonging). Perhaps writing in French helped Beckett, as early as 1931, to define something of the solitude he himself experienced, and wished to express in imaginative form.

The text of Le Concentrisme is full of references to French

literary figures, especially the recent masters of prose and poetry, and almost all the references are extremely iconoclastic; they show knowledge and disrespect at once. Destruction of his own academic prose can be seen in turns of phrase of Le Concentrisme which echo and simultaneously subvert those in Proust. For Proust's "an art that is perfectly intelligible and perfectly inexplicable" (Proust, p. 92), Le Concentrisme has: "cet art qui, semblable à une résolution de Mozart, est parfaitement intelligible et parfaitement inexplicable" (Le Concentrisme, p. 42). For Proust's "Swann is the corner-stone of the entire structure, and the central figure of the narrator's childhood" (Proust, p. 34), Le Concentrisme has "'Le concierge', a-t-il écrit dans un de ses cahiers, 'est la pierre angulaire de mon édifice entier'" (Le Concentrisme, p. 36).

Le Concentrisme also shows a playful, subversive attitude to language itself, in a way that has far-reaching consequences in later Beckett texts. The desire to turn clichés on their heads, to undo expectations, again shows the author's rebellion against the classical, the familiar, the publicly shared conventions. Thus the common phrase "chacun à son goût" becomes "chacun à sa gouttière" (Le Concentrisme, p. 39), "crises de nerfs" becomes "crises de négation" (Le Concentrisme, p. 37), and "mon plus profond respect" turns into "mon plus profond mépris" (Le Concentrisme, p. 36).

Beckett is proving here an ability not only to grasp but also to act against the powerful pressures of French, the orthodoxy against which, on so many occasions, literary rebellion has mounted its vocal and energetic attack.

Le Concentrisme is the fullest and most revealing example of the release into future attitudes and techniques that the use of French made possible for Beckett. "Le Kid", in the following spring (1931), may well have been another release of frustration at a pious attitude to classicism. Although, as a collaborative effort, it had less intimate private relevance (du Chas not only shared Beckett's birthday but died in the month when Beckett took up a temporary and painful teaching post in an Irish school) (1) it seems, from the accounts of it that remain, to have shown an irreverence similar to that of Le Concentrisme. The method was mock-heroic; for the noble display of motive and action, "Le Kid" substituted (apparently) slapstick comedy of the kind that makes an allusion to Chaplin very likely. This iconoclasm, like using slang in formal language, subverting bourgeois customs and beliefs, was characteristic of Beckett's techniques for many years. The desire to "épater le bourgeois" must have had special relevance for a young writer who was just about to throw aside a brilliant academic future for the insecure life of the committed artist.

1. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 56.

Just as the use of French itself for creative purposes must be seen emerging much earlier in Beckett's life than is often suggested, so the experimentation with drama has early roots; "Le Kid" is after all only a natural response to years of close study of French classical drama, which was one of Rudmose-Brown's special areas of interest. Such experiments, when joined by the play in English on Dr. Johnson, which was a far more serious project, show that En attendant Godot, or the unpublished "Eleuthéria" which preceded it, did not spring full-grown from a previously non-dramatic talent.

The rebellious delight in using French, and its much greater freedom in areas where Beckett's English was inhibited, either by his own psychological constraints or by his knowledge of the rules of censorship, led to occasional passages in that language in "Dream of Fair to middling Women", which was written in a Paris hotel but in English (1932). Free of academic commitment (perhaps guiltily so), Beckett plunged into this novel in a way which clearly exorcised a huge amount of personal frustration. He also used its pages to test out themes, characters, settings and above all a variety of prose styles that would be enormously important later. Among these are experiments with French. Sprawling and unfulfilling as it is, "Dream of Fair to middling Women" nevertheless reveals an urgency about aesthetic ideals that

are themselves taken seriously, however riotous the characters and action that explore them.

Belacqua and his Francophile and French friends share a delight in flouting conventional morality. Masturbation and homosexuality in such a context become suitable subjects for fiction; by writing one section in French, and in the further disguise of a letter from Lucien, Beckett permits himself an account of a homosexual encounter between two Parisian friends — one of whom propositions Belacqua as well — in which poetry, dawn and sex rise to a very traditional climax together; the "aubade" tradition is given a new twist. The step into French allows a controlled but explicit use of passionate material, just as elsewhere Belacqua comments on his preference for writing angry letters in that language rather than ⁱⁿ English. Even more revealing is that a further step, from French into Italian, allows even more explicit sexual reference:

Je me penche, dominando l'orgasmo comme un pilote, par la fenêtre (pour) halener seulement un peu le placenta de l'aurore (sic). Il est inodore. ("Dream of Fair to middling Women", p. 18)

Lucien's letter seems "to Belacqua a dark and rather disagreeable letter from one man to get from another and moreover unworthy of Lucien who was a young aesthetician for whom there was much to be said." ("Dream of Fair to middling

Women", p. 19) Typically, Belacqua slides away from the much blunter sexual references that French and Italian allow into disapproval and renewed concern with art. Yet the letter is an example of Beckett's feeling of release when using French for certain subjects, as it is a further indication of his pleasure in handling the language for comic effect yet with a deeper underlying meaning. In much of "Dream of Fair to middling Women", as in More Pricks Than Kicks two years later, French is not only associated with sexual and artistic freedom but with an aesthetic attitude to love-making, very different from the Dublin combination, as Beckett saw it, of elevating it to religion and suppressing it to crude physicality. French also allows comedy of a kind which would be scandalous, in Dublin, in plain English:

Toutes êtes, serez ou fûtes,
De fait ou de volonté, putes,
Et qui bien vous chercheroit
Toutes putes vous trouveroit.
(More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 81)

This old French approach to a very up-to-date insult at the end of an "unexceptionable recitation" (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 80) (and added, it seems, as a result of Chas having been struck with V.D.) shows a delight in comic rhyme and once again a pleasure in collapsing respectability into its exact opposite. Such contrasts remain a major ingredient of Beckett's humour.

Between the writing of More Pricks Than Kicks and the decision to live in Paris in 1937, Beckett's French bows before the desire to use, and succeed in, his native tongue. The nervous "polyglot splendours" (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 139) of some of Beckett's earlier prose are greatly reduced in Murphy; jokes such as the "Celia, / s'il y a" quibble of Mr. Kelly (1) seem almost nostalgic reminders of an earlier multilingual energy. After Murphy, the project on Dr. Johnson held out the attraction of a further way to subvert the security of an intuitively used and confident language; Johnson had an extraordinary linguistic consciousness and — another trait which may well have appealed to Beckett — a deep understanding of the darkness which lay below rational discourse, the non-verbal realm of chaos. The pilgrimage to Lichfield in 1935 (2) was not just idle curiosity, clearly; like the earlier visit to Ronsard's grave near Tours in 1926, (3) it expressed a desire to make imaginative contact with a writer whose influence on verbal style, on literary taste, was incalculable.

1. "He found it hard to think, impossible to expand the sad pun (for he had excellent French): Celia, s'il y a, Celia, s'il y a, throbbing steadily behind his eyes" (Murphy, pp. 81-82).

2. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 206.

3. Harvey, Samuel Beckett; Poet and Critic, p. 308.

Yet from 1937 French returned to the Beckettian world directly, as if the intervening years had confirmed Beckett at last in his absolute need for the language, or the surroundings of that culture, if his art was to develop. The first poems written in Paris are significant in showing almost for the first time an ability to speak gently and seriously to a reader, without archness, flippancy or defensive intellectualism. The simplicity and strength inherent in Beckett's mature use of language is becoming apparent, even if, as yet, the egotism of the speaker, his disillusionment and weariness, prevent the poems from having a breadth of vision or an energy of syntax, equivalent to that of Beckett's later prose and drama. In one poem, Arènes de Lutèce, a direct acknowledgement of a Parisian setting, Beckett seemed struck by the appropriateness of a huge half-circle, the remains of the Roman amphitheatre, as an emblem of dividedness in, and between, human beings. The speaker is indeed suffering from a double consciousness:

De là où nous sommes assis plus haut que les gradins
 je nous vois entrer du côté de la Rue des Arènes
 (...)
 J'ai un frisson, c'est moi qui me rejoins,
 c'est avec d'autres yeux que maintenant je regarde
 le sable, les flaques d'eau sous la bruine,
 une petite fille traînant derrière elle un cerceau

1. Samuel Beckett, Arènes de Lutèce, written 1937-1939, first published 1946. I am quoting from Collected Poems, p. 50.

He is aware of his own status as both insider and outsider; watching the little girl with her circular hoop, he knows that a single and unified circle is not possible for him. The half-circle and the full circle both suggest, in this sensitive poem, Beckett's own understanding, by the late 1930s, of his need for French, for a circle of consciousness outside the one in which he was born. Put another way, the circle of the self and the circle of society have come, through an adopted language, into a new relationship. Meanwhile, the French he uses has a dignity and directness quite different from the earlier comic and parodic experiments:

les gradins vides, les hautes maisons, le ciel
 qui nous éclaire trop tard.
 Je me retourne, je suis étonné
 de trouver là son triste visage.

He can use simple declarative sentences, and above all, talk of serious emotions seriously, in a way that, as Assumption had shown, he was not yet ready to do in English, except in one or two short poems. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, these last experiments in French before the war, though not published until later, were of great importance in preparing for the sudden outpouring of prose and drama in 1946.

Proust's statement of the need for "altérations de la syntaxe" (1) in artistic development was, in the largest sense, a message Beckett took to heart in the first ten years of his writing. Modernism, in all its forms, called for renewal and change, a new age that would not be drawn back into nineteenth-century patterns of literary expression. T.E. Hulme's famous "Lecture on Modern Poetry" had stated bluntly that living thought and new images could not exist in dead, rigid forms or tired language. (2) In "Dream of Fair to middling Women" Beckett's narrator speaks of the syntax of "post-picassian" man ("Dream of Fair to Middling Women", p. 40); it is obvious that the young artist wanted literature, like painting and music, to make dramatic advances towards a new syntax, a changed relationship between elements of a work, a sense of form and structure that challenged naturalistic approaches. Instead of accepting serenely shared, intuitive relations the receiver of the art work would now have to participate in the creative act fully, becoming a maker of meaning for whom the artist as authority has gone.

--Beckett's early need to escape from Anglo-Irish and English

1. See n. 2, p. 102.

2. "We instinctively shudder at these clichés or tags of speech. The inner explanation is thus: it is not that they are old, but that being old they have become dead, and so evoked no image. The man who wrote them not being a poet, did not see anything definitely himself, but imitated other poets' images."

T.E. Hulme, "A Lecture on Modern Poetry", 1914, reprinted in: Michael Roberts, T.E. Hulme (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), p. 269.

culture and language, and move towards the circle of French, has many elements, political, social, and personal. One crucial pressure was undoubtedly the need to escape a syntax, in literary forms, that was too deeply familiar, and therefore hard to counteract. The syntax of his native tongue, that would have been acquired, as is normal in unilingual development, largely by the age of five, lay too deep for rational control or for an artistic use in which it would not in a sense control him. His early prose, in spite of its Joycean surfaces, actually attempts an undermining, an abstracting process which is quite different from Joyce's celebratory richness of verbal play. As Beckett later stated, Joyce was a "synthesizer"; he himself an "analyser"; (1) the rationalist elements of his mind were too strong for him to write simply as an Irishman endowed with a gift of ebullient speech. Murphy falls back into an eighteenth-century mode deeply influential in Irish history since this was the great century of Dublin civilisation, and the time in which the dominating energies of Anglo-Irish rhetoric were established. It was also an age deeply influenced by French culture, and by literary traditions in which prose,

1. Samuel Beckett to Martin Esslin, Beckett Symposium, New Theatre Magazine, XI, No. 3 (1971), p. 12.

to be truly civilised, had to be as well-formed as the heroic couplet or the five-act play.

Even Eliot's and Pound's revolutionary attitude to a modern syntax, which hovers, along with the transition declarations, in the background of Beckett's Echo's Bones poems, did not seem satisfactory to a writer who wanted to achieve a language free of dense literary allusion, a language which could expose doubt about language, and challenge unified and authoritative viewpoints. Eliot and Pound had themselves studied the European and especially French and classical traditions, but Eliot's artistic direction in the late 1930s would have been anathema to Beckett, who intensely disliked the celebration of particular national traditions and cultural inwardness. Beckett's own developing loyalty to a bilingual, a decentred, perspective, surviving even in the various literary experiments he made during these years, led him towards quite a different use of the European inheritance. His letter to Axel Kaun suggests a sense of the power of the Logos, and the mystery of language, which would become deeply important in the wrenching experience of war, with its resulting dislocation of nations and languages. The weight of centuries of European culture seems in some curious sense to be toppling over into self-destruction in Beckett's imagery, behind which, evidently, stands a vision of humanity

as both supported and deluded by the languages of Babel.

It is indeed becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English. And more and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. (German Letter of 1937, p. 171) (1) (...)

An assault against words in the name of beauty. (...) from time to time I have the consolation, as now, of sinning willy-nilly against a foreign language, as I should love to do with full knowledge and intent against my own — and as I shall do — Deo juvante. (German Letter of 1937, p. 173) (2)

"Deo juvante" (a most unusual aside for Beckett in such serious terms) his desire to "sin" against his own language would finally be realised, deliberately and in full command of the implications, which are not only religious, in the widest sense, but aesthetic, social, psychological, even political. He would do so by making the leap into the prose of his adopted language. First, though, he would assault his own language, its syntax, semantic rules, and processes of

1. "Es wird mir tatsächlich immer schwieriger, ja sinnloser, ein offizielles Englisch zu schreiben. Und immer mehr wie ein Schleier kommt mir meine Sprache vor, den man zerreißen muss, um an die dahinterliegenden Dinge (oder das dahinterliegende Nichts) zu kommen." (Disjecta, p. 52)

2. "Eine Wörterstürmerei im Namen der Schönheit. (...) von Zeit zu Zeit habe ich wie jetzt den Trost, mich so gegen eine fremde Sprache unwillkürlich vergehen zu dürfen, wie ich es mit Wissen und Willen gegen meine eigene machen möchte und — Deo juvante — werde." (Disjecta, p. 54)

reasoning, using an English externalised by the circumstances of war, in the crucial and secretly bilingual experiment of Watt. The long development towards an artistic maturity of innovative power depends on the movement from circle to circle, the relativising of languages. Beckett's experience of human consciousness became a sense of being alone with language, alone with the circle language makes.

CHAPTER III: CONFLICT

1938-1946

Beckett's bilingualism in the 1930s led him steadily towards a use of French for original creative work, and the adoption of Paris as an environment in which to work. Yet the poems of 1937-1939, the essay Les Deux Besoins, and the translation of Murphy still lack total confidence and energy. They also lack a sense of audience, and remain, to some extent, the work of an artist unsure of his context in the new language. Some eight to nine years later, after the end of the war, a pair of poems in French and English, (1) a pair of articles, also in French and English, (2) and a novel and four nouvelles (3) in French mark the beginning of one of the most productive periods of any contemporary artist's career. The major works of the post-war period, all written in the adopted

1. Samuel Beckett, Saint-Lô and Mort de A.D., in Collected Poems, p. 32 and p. 54.

2. Samuel Beckett, MacGreevy (~~Sic~~) on Yeats (n.b. the spelling of the name varies in different publications. ~~Mc~~Greevy is the more usual form) and La peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon, in Disiecta, pp. 95-97 and pp. 118-132.

3. Mercier et Camier and the Nouvelles La fin, L'expulsé, Le calmant and Premier amour.

tongue, show Beckett's art to be mature, deeply attuned to the mood of the time, breathtaking in its originality and ability to draw on the unconscious, on intense levels of imagination and emotion. What had occurred in between these two periods of writing in French, the dramatic change in Beckett's bilingual consciousness, was the coming together of his own inner linguistic conflict with the conflict of nations in the outer world. Watt is the remarkable testimony to that conjunction.

In this chapter I wish to examine the three phases of Beckett's writing during the years of conflict: the immediately pre-war period and early days of the war; the time of intensity and isolation from most pre-war contacts while Hitler dominated Europe (Beckett's Resistance work being followed by his escape to the unoccupied part of France); (1) and the period at the end of the war when he was able to take up once again the life of the literary freelance writer he had begun years before. The deepening of his understanding of culture, language and languages, and the confirmation of his views of art during this period, are remarkable, and can be seen most clearly in Watt itself as a wrenching of bilingual

1. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, pp. 348-349, and Bair, Samuel Beckett, Chapters 12 and 13, give the biographical details.

allegiance into a new mode. As Beckett's own mother tongue was thrown into doubt during the war, ceasing to be habitual and instinctive, and as the language of French culture was dominated and humiliated by the presence of German -- a German used not for the literature and philosophy Beckett admired but for propaganda and aggression -- Beckett's work began to reveal a view of all languages as relative, arbitrary, a tissue of "mensonges" (L'innommable, p. 254).

Beckett's flood of French writing after 1945 does not bear witness to a trust in the adopted language but to an artistic mastery of doubt, and the beginnings of a personal philosophy of "impotence" or failure. (1) He uses a language learned after the mother tongue of early childhood, a language that has prided itself on its qualities of rationality and precision, in order to cast suspicion on all languages. "Ce qu'il faut éviter, je ne sais pourquoi, c'est l'esprit de système" (L'innommable, p. 9). Other writers in France, including Sartre, Blanchot and Sarraute, also argued for a need for a new critical outlook, disbelief, or "suspicion" in the war-time and post-war period. (2) The refinements of civilised French

¹. John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964/1970), p. 232.

². Typical of the period is Nathalie Sarraute's collection of essays L'ère du soupçon, the first two of which date from 1947 and 1950. (Paris: n.r.f. - Gallimard, 1956).

society had proved incapable of preventing the country's division and humiliation, or the acts of cruelty that were carried out on French soil. Old habits, and old forms, were no longer appropriate. Beckett's peculiar position in this is to use French, consciously and with occasional self-confessional approval, as a language chosen for its external, formal relation with his own mind. There is indeed a "rupture of the lines of communication", of a quite drastic kind, such as he had wanted even in 1934. In writing the massive manuscript that became Watt, (1) a manuscript during which English is exposed more and more by the pressure of French around it, he gained the artistic experience to create, after the war, a group of literary forms which unquestionably exist in words that belong to the "others", "aux autres" (L'innommable, p. 238), and in which, at last, he was able to develop a syntax passionate and original enough to be equal to his vision.

The beginnings of the conflict

In the late 1930s, and with the encouragement of his friend

1. Described in Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, pp.90-92. The manuscript is now in the Beckett collection of the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. In referring to it I use Admussen's numbering of the exercise-books in which it is written, A1 to A6, and their pagination.

Alfred Péron, Beckett began to test out his use of French in a variety of ways with the serious intent of gaining a French readership; Murphy, though finally published, had hardly been a notable success in London, and as the letter to Axel Kaun shows, Beckett felt both angry with, and alienated from, the tastes and preoccupation of the English literary scene:

It does not follow from this that a translated Ringelnatz could find neither interest nor success with the English public. But in this respect I am totally incapable of arriving at a judgement, as the reactions of the small as well as the large public are becoming more and more enigmatic to me, and, what is worse, of less significance.
(German Letter of 1937, p. 171) (1)

His experiments with poetry in French from 1937 onwards were one way of testing out a new voice in the language, very different, as I have suggested, from the earlier display of French for comic, bawdy and mock-academic purposes. They are different, too, from the earlier English poems of Echo's Bones, especially in their attempt to portray themes of absence, division, negation, and other somewhat abstract ideas, directly. In elles viennent, (2) for example, there is no concrete image

1. "Daraus ist gar nicht zu schliessen, dass ein Übersetzer Ringelnatz weder Interesse noch Erfolg beim englischen Publikum finden würde. In dieser Beziehung aber bin ich vollkommen unfähig, ein Urteil zu fällen, da mir die Reaktionen des kleinen wie des grossen Publikums immer rätselhafter werden, und, was noch schlimmer ist, von weniger Bedeutung" (Disjecta, p. 51).

2. Samuel Beckett, elles viennent, in Collected Poems, p. 38.

at all:

elles viennent
autres et pareilles
avec chacune c'est autre et c'est pareil
avec chacune l'absence d'amour est autre
avec chacune l'absence d'amour est pareille

In the best of them, such as La Mouche (1) and Arènes de Lutèce, carefully observed details of the new environment come together with the move towards abstraction; a notable change from the earlier poetry is the way the speaker can develop a coherent atmosphere, and an intense sense of solitude, with relatively economical means.

Les Deux Besoins, on the other hand, a fascinating but obscure reflection on art, seems somewhat regressive in its nervously intellectual and allusive approach. It mingles philosophy, theology, geometry, literature, scatological jokes and contemporary references together in an elliptical style, leaving the reader to attempt to find the overall coherence of these different parts. Although it offers glimpses of Beckett's artistic creed, its convoluted idioms and allusions seem to set up barriers to communication:

S'il est permis en pareil cas de parler d'un
principe effectif, ce n'est pas, Dieu et Poincaré
merci, celui qui régit les pétitions de principe

1. Samuel Beckett, La Mouche, in Collected Poems, p. 43.

de la science et les logoi croisés de la théologie, qui alimente les tempêtes de pets affirmatifs et négatifs d'où sont sortis et sortent toujours ces foireux aposterioris de l'Esprit et de la Matière qui font le désespoir des peuples sauvages. (Les Deux Besoins, pp. 56-57)

It is as if all of Beckett's learning is exploding outwards into his new language; as yet, though, he seems unsure of just what his new audience can or will accept, so that many of his shafts of brilliant wit fall short of their target. A further curiosity of the essay, its use of a geometric figure to illustrate a theme (Les Deux Besoins, p. 56), seems to relate to one serious preoccupation Beckett did have in these years, especially after his travels in Germany in 1936: the treatment of Jewish dissidents and artists. The figure used is the six-pointed Star of David; are the artist and the unfortunate Europeans who were already being turned into scapegoats by Nazism to be linked together here? In 1938 a poem in English, but with a Yiddish title, Ooftish, (1) also suggests an awareness of Jewish culture; the poem extends its angry compassion to all varieties of pain and distress, physical and emotional, and ends with a

1. Samuel Beckett, Ooftish, in Collected Poems, p. 31.

barbed reference to the Christian idea that suffering is blessed:

so parcel up the whole issue and send it along
the whole misery diagnosed undiagnosed misdiagnosed
(...)
we'll make sense of it we'll put it in the pot with the rest
it all boils down to blood of lamb (Ooftish, p. 31)

As such poems suggest, Beckett's earlier, somewhat indulgent aestheticism was beginning to give way to a passionately committed union of ideas about art, suffering and the need for an honest response, freed from cliché, to the contemporary world. In French, and in Paris, he was far more free to do this. Though he is never openly political, these veiled references show the kind of awareness that would lead him to join the Resistance movement, not out of an abstract idealism, but out of loyalty to French Jewish friends.

Meanwhile, a rejection of the past, both personal and general, becomes clear in Beckett's works of the period. Again and again, often under the guise of comedy, Beckett emphasises his decisive break from the Anglo-Irish world he was born to. His Murphy translation (1938-1939) contains some revealing changes from the original, pointing out, for example, the contrasting attitude to sexually explicit material in Ireland and in France, as if it matters to him that the French readership should be aware of the difference. After a particularly lascivious description of Wylie's manner of kissing, the English

text continues: "The above passage is carefully calculated to deprave the cultivated reader" (Murphy (E), p. 83). In French Beckett translates it with an addition: "Les termes du passage ci-dessus furent choisis avec soin, lors de la rédaction en anglo-irlandais, afin de corrompre le lecteur cultivé" (Murphy (F), p. 89). (1) Significantly he also distinguishes the idiom itself, "anglo-irlandais", from "anglais" as if it works by quite different rules; in matters of sexuality, given the level of censorship, this was indeed the case. Later in the translation he adds a comic passage in which Gaelic life is seen as characterised by extraordinarily irregular reproductive practices, perhaps connected with the backward-looking tendencies Beckett attacked in 1934:

Mais le directeur, Docteur Angus Killiecrankie, conçu aux Shetlands après quinze ans de coït, né aux Orcades après six mois d'utérus, sevré aux Hébrides après une semaine de sein, et ~~au~~ demeurant grand admirateur d'Ossian, croyait s'y connaître en voix schizoïdes. Elles ne ressemblaient guère aux voix hébridiennes, ni aux voix orcadiennes, ni aux voix shetlandiennes. (Murphy (F), p. 135)

The English simply says: "But Dr. Killiecrankie, the Outer Hebridean R.M.S., had some experience of the schizoid voice"

1. The point is also made earlier (Murphy is a novel full of deliberate repetitions): "Cette phrase, lors de la rédaction en anglo-irlandais, fut choisie avec soin, de crainte qu'il ne manquât aux censeurs l'occasion de pratiquer leur synecdoche" (Murphy (F), p. 60). (See also Chapter II, p. 97).

(Murphy (E), p. 128). The link, from Beckett's new French-language perspective, of Gaelic life and schizophrenia is no accident, and he indulges once again his contempt for "Ossianic goods". (1) Nothing will, at this stage, draw him back to a world he considers artistically philistine, psychologically constricting, and likely to remain so.

The need to reject everything to do with the British Isles keeps recurring, almost like a nervous habit, before, during and even after the war. It is evident in Geer van Velde (1938): "Exhibitions (...) in private collections in Brabant, France, Germany, U.S.A. and even England". (2) The "even" is calculated to insult. In reviewing Intercessions by Devlin (1938) Beckett observes: "But the poets have always played push-pin in the country of Bentham" — a pointed attack, and a clear sign of Beckett's loathing for utilitarianism (he also derides the "politicians", "antiquaries" and "zealots" who insist on distorting poetry for their respective causes). (3) The signs of rejection in Watt are numerous and provide many comic sequences: his description of the respectable Nixons, (4)

1. The phrase he used in Recent Irish Poetry, p. 70.
2. Samuel Beckett, Geer van Velde, in Disjecta, p. 117.
3. Samuel Beckett's 'Intercessions' by Denis Devlin, in Disjecta, p. 91.
4. Samuel Beckett, Watt (London: John Calder, 1963/1970/1976) (Original edition 1953; all references are to the Calder 1976 edition), pp. 8-22.

of the Grants committee (Watt, pp. 172-196), and of the Lynch family (Watt, pp. 98-113), all explore Irish life, and prepare for the unmistakable -- yet universalised -- comic satire on his homeland in the post-war fiction. The McGreevy essay in 1945 has the belligerent statement: "The past seven years have confirmed Mr MacGreevy in the views that a dozen London publishers, not yet so fortunate as to lack paper, declined to publish" (MacGreevy on Yeats, p. 95). Beckett's own experiences with London publishers had not predisposed him towards them, to say the least. And in La peinture des van Velde, a superficial artistic judgement about Dali's painting is considered good for mass use, being "facile à prononcer pour les anglo-saxons" (La peinture des van Velde, p. 122). These asides in the reviews often add little to Beckett's arguments, seeming instead to represent the last traces of a mixture of guilt and resentment, defensiveness and a need to emphasise changed allegiance -- the signs, in short, of a knowledge of self-uprooting from the mother tongue and mother culture. After 1946, such insults became rare; they were no longer necessary.

Before the war, however, Beckett's separation from the Anglo-Irish world was still recent, his sense of a community of fellow-artists and writers in Paris apparently still shaky. It is perhaps this lack of a clear surrounding community that makes the tone of Les Deux Besoins seem self-enclosed and

the atmosphere of the poems one of intense isolation. In the Murphy translation, moreover, either circumstances or lack of conviction made Beckett's care and attention less comprehensive than in his later work; quite apart from the inherent difficulties of putting a highly mannered, allusive novel with a clear English setting into French, Beckett seems unsure as he proceeds of the degree to which to translate such details as the names of places and people. "Lord Gall", as he was in English, appears as "Le Baron Fiel d'Absinthe" (Murphy (F), p. 75) but later returns to his English name (Murphy (F), p. 198). The "Victoria Gate" (Murphy (F), p. 78) later turns into "la Porte Victoria" (Murphy (F), p. 111). Beckett has said of his translation that it was "not a very good one"; (1) it is indeed difficult to see how the artifice and nervously energetic syntax of Murphy could be translated into French without considerable creative adjustments on the part of the translator. (2)

The years leading up to the writing of Watt show Beckett still struggling with syntax, in both his languages, in the desire to

1. Letter from Samuel Beckett to George Reavey, May 14th, 1947. Quoted in Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 359.

2. The attitude of the narrator towards Murphy also becomes more severe, as Anthony Jones has shown in "The French Murphy: from 'rare bird' to 'cancre'", Journal of Beckett Studies, 6 (Autumn, 1980).

achieve a personal style capable of expressing his ideas, and of uniting form and content. He is searching for an art which will revolutionise the relationship between artist and object, producer and receiver of the art work in literature, as fully as in the other arts. He knows how to analyse what he wants, but still not how to reach it in form and language, his conscious creativity still not being entirely attuned to the full resources of his unconscious. In his prose of the period, the English of the reviews, the French of Les Deux Besoins and of the translated Murphy, syntax is itself a problem; it often has a jerky, tangled, or over-emphatic quality and at times is frankly bad, as in these lines:

Its own terms, that is terms of need, not of opinion, still less of faction; opinion being a response to and at least (at best) for a time an escape from need, from one kind of need, and art, in this case these poems, no more (!) than the approximately adequate and absolutely non-final formulation of another kind. ('Intercessions' by Denis Devlin, p. 91)

A frequent characteristic is a proliferation of relative clauses or short phrases nervously separated by commas. These contribute to the obscurity of Les Deux Besoins as much as the allusions and private leaps of association:

Dodécaèdre régulier, trop régulier, suivant les dimensions duquel l'infortuné Tout-puissant se serait proposé d'arranger les quatre éléments, signature de Pythagore, divine figure dont la construction dépend d'un irrationnel, à savoir

l'incommensurabilité de la diagonale de carré
avec le côté, sujet sans nombre et sans personne.
(Les Deux Besoins, p. 56)

Yet this use of rapid paratactic clauses points ahead; it suggests a desire to break free of the strongly built sentence, with clearly subordinated clauses, that implies a writer's confident authority over his material. First exposing English syntax in Watt, he will later, for example in the gasping rhythms of L'innommable, give French syntax a new perspective on its own functioning:

ce n'est pas moi qui parle, où est-ce que je
suis, où est-ce que c'est, là où j'ai toujours
été, où sont les autres, ce sont les autres
qui parlent, c'est à moi qu'ils parlent, c'est
de moi qu'ils parlent, je les entends, je suis
muet (L'innommable, p. 202)

The change is in the awareness of a new kind of language, in French but not of French, or at least, in open rebellion against the architectural strength of the classical French prose Beckett knew so well. It is through the comparative syntactic experiments between and within his two languages that such awareness comes into being.

The pre-war work shows a concern with presence and absence (as in the poems à elle l'acte calme and bois seul) (1) that may suggest the expatriate's acute awareness of being both

1. Samuel Beckett, à elle l'acte calme and bois seul, in Collected Poems, p. 40 and p. 45.

inside and outside the new culture and language. In musique de l'indifférence (1) there is already a hint of the detachment from surrounding sound, including meaningful language, which lies at the heart of Watt. A language heard but not understood, or heard again after many years of absence, is heard (and seen — the movements of the mouth differ from language to language) as an external, strange process, ludicrous or dream-like. When language is used on the page, a grammatical rather than phonetic estrangement can be achieved; Beckett turns his detached gaze on French even as he moves closer to it as a primary language, exposing, for example, the peculiarity of gender rules, in the translation of Murphy: "le lit, la cuisinière et l'unique armoire, tous, quoiqu'il n'y eût que le lit qui fût masculin, étaient très grands" (Murphy (F), p. 51). The grammatical aside, pointing out the dominance of masculine gender in the French language, so that "tous" rather than "toutes" is obligatory, is absent -- needless to say -- from the English original. It is a light-hearted example of the kind of questioning of linguistic convention which becomes characteristic of Watt and increasingly central to the entire scope of Beckett's works. Each language, structured and conventional, has its own compromises and idiosyncrasies, and the bilingual author is in an unusually

1. Samuel Beckett, musique de l'indifférence, in Collected Poems, p. 44.

appropriate position both to observe and to expose them in literature. He will go on doing so in works as various as All That Fall, Comment c'est, Happy Days, Bing and Company. Wherever language is present, it can be looked at as well as looked through, whether in the medium of radio sound, the stage play, or printed prose.

Watt is the crucial work of linguistic questioning. Its character bears a deep relation to the circumstances of its creation. When Beckett began the manuscript in Paris in 1941, he could have had no idea whether it, or he himself, would survive the war. He had, furthermore, no sense of audience to be constrained by, given his negative sense of the English public, and given that he had not yet published anything in French. The lack of audience may have allowed a kind of freedom, freedom to experiment, as well as to laugh at the hope of commercial literary success:

"In a word," said Arsene, "you plan a work in form, with a beginning, a middle, an end, [a title], stiff-bound, & a wrapper with a blurb on it, [between six and ten percent on the first thousand/ (...)]
 "Fifteen" we said.
 "And a title?"
 "Certainly. A title is indispensable, if the book is to be a best-seller." ("Watt" Ms. A3, p. 29)

The totally isolating circumstances of war gave freedom to explore the linguistic, philosophical, psychological puzzles which fascinated him but could not be relied on to fascinate

anyone else. These puzzles were directly related to his linguistic rootlessness. Beckett, like Kafka in Prague at an earlier time, was using a language whose status could not be innocent or automatic; although Watt is written in English, the languages around Beckett at its inception were French and German. Although Kafka had written in German, the surrounding popular language was Czech, and the Yiddish used by the Jewish people was another linguistic presence. (1) Beckett's Watt manuscript begins with the questioning words: "who is the man and what [is the man], how [is he] in mind and how in body, who to whom, what to what, is he here, is he now, doing what, seeing what, being what?" ("Watt" Ms. A1, p. 3). These questions go to the depths of Beckett's obsessive fascination with presence and absence, self and other, identity and relationship.

Once Watt himself appears in the manuscript (in "Watt" Ms. A3, by which time Beckett was in Roussillon) Beckett already has a clearer grasp of what has happened to his native tongue in his verbal exploration; "the old words, the old credentials" (Watt, p. 81) (suggesting not only tokens of status, but also

1. The state of linguistic "déterritorialisation" in Kafka is the theme of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's study Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1975). They point out that Irish writers, especially Joyce and Beckett, are also affected by the meeting of languages and cultures that leads to "une littérature mineure" (p. 35).

credence, belief) have gone hollow. The human individual — in time of war, with all the civilising influences stripped away -- has become the "high heavy hollow jointed unstable thing" (Watt, p. 81), a menacing, physically brutal creature like a monster in a dream. Beckett develops this further in Molloy; aesthetic delicacy -- Belacqua worrying over the positioning of the caesura in the Alexandrine line -- seems part of a vanished world. His art must now begin to face the fundamental issues of existence and expression. Just as the comforting everyday evasions of great needs, through a concentration on little ones, will no longer be possible, so a secure use of verbal tokens will be undermined. The fiction that responds to such pressures is not innocent, for by repetition and other devices it leads the reader towards a sense of detachment from language too. The word "pot" becomes as hollow as a pot itself, when Watt worries it into meaninglessness:

Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott's pots, of one of Mr. Knott's pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. (...) the pot remained a pot, Watt felt sure of that, for everyone but Watt. For Watt alone it was not a pot, any/more. (...) Thus of the pseudo-pot he would say, after reflexion, It is a shield, or, growing bolder, It is a raven, and so on. But the pot proved as little a shield, or a raven, or any other of the things that Watt called it, as a pot.
(Watt, pp. 78-80)

Phonetic systems, when they can be heard from the outside

as well as the inside, alienate the bilingual from any sense of the innate rightness of sound to sense that a unilingual can, in many circumstances, simply take for granted. Unilingualism and habit, the habit of language acquired before the age of rational curiosity, can elevate "the residuum of one's own fund of memory to the status of a mirror of reality" in Mauthner's words. (1) The link between world and word seems innate. The implications of this for an artist obsessively concerned with the non-reality of art, claiming, in opposition to Stendhal, that the road reflects better than the mirror, (2) conscious of artifice and the properties of form to an acute degree, cannot be over-estimated. As an artist whose bilingual consciousness is at last -- in Watt -- coming together with his use of form and syntax, Beckett explodes for good the solidity of a rooted, reliable speech. All mirrors of "reality" that reflect the human individual begin to be fragmented, as the speaker of Le calmant will beg that they should be: "que les glaces s'écroulent, les planes, les courbes, les grossissantes, les rapetissantes, et qu'il disparaisse dans le fracas de ses images" (Le calmant, p. 44).

1. As translated by Weiler, Mauthner's Critique of Language, p. 138.

2. Les Deux Besoins, p. 55: "il y a des jours, surtout en Europe, où la route reflète mieux que le miroir."

It is in Watt that the bilingual consciousness meets a bilingually motivated expression capable of translating the shattering mirrors of reality into artistic form.

'Watt': the meeting of languages

Near the start of Watt, Mr. Nixon declares of the titular hero, "He is a little strange at times, (...) but he is an experienced traveller" (Watt, p. 18). It is in the travelling from place to place, developing layer upon layer of unreality, that Watt first shows its extraordinary departure from the novelistic methods of Murphy. The experience of the Murphy translation may have played a major part in this alteration; no traditional contract with the reader in terms of (clearly) defined setting can survive the change of language in Murphy (F). Beckett's indecisiveness about whether or not to translate the names of people, places, and units of currency suggests that he was torn between a strong desire to preserve the flavour of the original and a conflicting desire to make it more accessible to the French reader. In Watt he refuses a traditional setting altogether. The city landscape of the opening, the house of the mysterious Mr. Knott, and that special transitional space the railway system, are already at a further remove from the geography of the known world than the Dublin, Cork and London of Murphy. In that novel mimetic realism mattered enough for Beckett to ascertain, via his friend A.J. Leventhal, the dimensions of the Cuchulain

statue in the Dublin General Post Office. (1) This shows the same spirit of meticulous accuracy as Jane Austen writing that she must change "Government House" to "Commissioner's" in Mansfield Park as "there is no Government House at Gibraltar." (2) In Watt such solicitude for details of the real world is inappropriate. The realist contract, the stable relation between author and fiction, fiction and reader, is impossible in a novel whose narrator shifts several times, and whose curious coherence has space for the Lynch family and for Louit's meeting with the Grants Committee.

During his revisions of the sprawling manuscript, his cutting and assembling of it into a kind of form, Beckett removed enormous quantities of material that would have fixed the setting more clearly as Ireland. (3) He also cut out references to other parts of the terrestrial globe, thereby helping to give the novel its peculiar half way position between reality and fantasy, Ireland and a symbolic no man's land. If the setting is still to be accepted as Ireland (as the initial and

1. A.J. Leventhal, "The Thirties" in Beckett at Sixty: A Festschrift, ed. John Calder (London: Calder & Boyars, 1967), p. 11.

2. Recorded by J.E. Austen-Leigh, A Memoir of Jane Austen (1870), reprinted with Jane Austen's Persuasion, ed. D.W. Harding (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 343.

3. Discussed in my article "Watt, Knott and Beckett's bilingualism", Journal of Beckett Studies, 10 (1985), pp. 64-65.

final sequences, and the Anglo-Irish idiom and humour suggest) then it is an Ireland already on the way -- for the expatriate writer isolated by the circumstances of war -- to becoming myth. Solidities of place, like those of character and plot, must now disintegrate. A relativist perspective on a world in turmoil gives the author of Watt a new combination of humour and compassion as he considers the eccentricities of local human behaviour: "My friends call me Dum, said Mr. Spiro, I am so bright and cheerful. D-U-M. Anagram of mud" (Watt, p. 25). Even the characters cannot take words, or their own titles, seriously. Hackett gets the Nixons' name wrong repeatedly (Watt, p. 15 and p. 22). "Dum" - "mud" allows further linguistic play, of a bilingual kind, in Beckett's translation of Watt with Agnès and Ludovic Janvier, more than twenty years later, where this passage gains a rare extra note: "D-U-M. Anagramme de mud (1)." "(1) Mot anglais signifiant à peu près boue": Watt (F) (1). True to the spirit of pedantic academic accuracy in the first version, the verbal contract is not allowed to be taken on trust: "à peu près" is the condition of all translation; (a) never, exactly, equals (b).

Beckett's bilingual consciousness, his sense of leaving behind a mother tongue grown strange through self-exile and war, leads to a playful use of English which at the same time bears out his deepest convictions about the arbitrary, conventional

1. Samuel Beckett, Watt (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1968), p. 28.

nature of all languages. He is more alert than ever to the oddities of fossilised or idiomatic phrasing: the expression "best foot foremost", according to the strict rules of comparative and superlative, implies that there are at least three feet under consideration, so Arsene (French in name, Anglo-Irish in idiom, and highly language-conscious) substitutes "better foot foremore" (Watt, p. 55). Any possibly valuable associations of a realistic name, Quin, (1) give way before the imperative to reverse that name into backwards language for the section of the work in which Watt feels compelled to reverse his words and phrases. The manuscript of "Watt" reveals that this, at least initially, is how the name "Knott" makes its appearance: it can be reversed to the comical "Tonk". (2) It also, of course, suggests "knot" (tangle), "naught", and "not".

In the entire novel there is a playfulness, a Through the Looking Glass atmosphere, which fits well with the underlying suggestion of a childlike quality in Watt. He drinks milk,

1. The name is also used in More Pricks Than Kicks ("Capper Quin", p. 134); in Watt Mrs. Nixon suggests Watt may already be "fast asleep in Quin's hotel" (Watt, p. 18). Watt in Mercier et Camier shouts "Vive Quin!" to the assembled drinkers (Mercier et Camier, p. 204), and in Malone meurt there are two references (Malone meurt, p. 146 and p. 206).

2. "Watt" Ms. A4, p. 117 has "in Quin's house". On p. 118 is the first sign of the name-change: "Tonk", in a passage of Watt's backwards language. p. 129 has "Quin" erased and "Knott" inserted, and by pp. 135-7 the name "Knott" is fully established.

he cries readily, he communes with the ample Mrs. Gorman by putting his head on her breast, and when he talks backwards, the words themselves are like a child's. His departure from Mr. Knott's house is like leaving the womb. He adopts a foetal pose in the ditch, and on the road he is told "the only cure is diet" (Watt, p. 225). He must presumably, give up milk for stronger stuff if he is to survive in the outer world; in his next incarnation, in Mercier et Camier, Watt is far more grown up, articulate, and a drinker of whisky (Mercier et Camier, pp. 193-204).

But what is the relevance of childhood in the novel? Once again, it has a direct bearing on questions of innocence, of pre-linguistic existence, of the acculturation that normally occurs with a child's earliest years. "The foetal soul is fully grown" (Watt, p. 248). Though not yet possessed of words, the child in the womb is an individual human consciousness, with all that that entails. Mr Hackett (a kindred spirit to Watt) remembers having the cord cut in his own pre-linguistic phase of existence (Watt, p. 12), and Watt, who seems in such need of mothering, somehow failed to receive the usual benefits from early training:

So he continued to think of himself as a man, as his mother had taught him, when she said, There's a good little man, or There's a bonny little man, or There's a clever little man. But for all the relief that this afforded him, he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn. (Watt, p. 80)

In spite of his mother's well-meaning repetitions Watt has somehow failed to accept the conventional relation between word and object. He also thinks that smiling has to be learned and practised consciously. (1) Like language, its acquisition as an element of early behaviour, later accepted as instinctive, is in this context curiously problematic. Watt is deprived, in a world created by a shifting bilingual consciousness, of a "pillow of old words" (Watt, p. 115) for his head. The reader, similarly, is deprived of the comfort of a secure, unilingually-based view of language; it is no wonder then that Watt has provoked so many contradictory opinions and detailed explanations from Beckett's interpreters. (2)

In Gottfried Büttner's book Samuel Beckett's Novel 'Watt', Watt becomes a plunge into the deepest levels of psycho-spiritual experience; he discusses it as an excavatory work moving inwards and downwards to the inner world, an experience which can be strongly felt by any reader. Yet it is curious that a passage at the heart of the layers of narration has

1. "Watt had watched people smile and thought he understood how it was done" (Watt, p. 23).

2. These include the statements that it is "too clear" (Pilling, Samuel Beckett, p. 35) to "most mysterious" (Olga Bernal, Langage et Fiction dans le roman de Beckett (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 109: "le texte à la fois le plus mystérieux et le plus bouleversant de la littérature contemporaine"; that it is "brilliant" (Richard N. Coe, Samuel Beckett (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), p. 36, and "unreadable" (A. Alvarez, Beckett (London: Fontana / Collins, 1973), p. 43.

often been overlooked. In this passage the underlying narrator seems to speak in a voice unlike that of any of the created voices, Watt's, Arsene's, or Sam's. The passage deserves close attention:

To think, when one is no longer young, when one is not yet old, that one is no longer young, that one is not yet old, that is perhaps something. To pause, towards the close of one's three-hour day, and consider: the darkening ease, the brightening trouble; the pleasure pleasure because it was, the pain pain because it shall be; the glad acts grown proud, the proud acts growing stubborn; the panting the trembling towards a being gone, a being to come; and the true true no longer, and the false true not yet. And to decide not to smile after all, sitting in the shade, hearing the cicadas, wishing it were night, wishing it were morning, saying, No, it is not the heart, no, it is not the liver, no, it is not the prostate, no, it is not the ovaries, no, it is muscular, it is nervous. Then the gnashing ends, or it goes on, and one is in the pit, in the hollow, the longing for longing gone, the horror of horror, and one is in the hollow, at the foot of all the hills at last, the ways down, the ways up, and free, free at last, for an instant free at last, nothing at last. (Watt, p. 201)

This passage leaps out from the page as a uniquely open autobiographical confession; all comic defensiveness absent, it speaks of the precise conditions of Beckett's life at the time of writing. Indeed, in the manuscript there are several passages which similarly read more as journal entries than as sections of a novel; Beckett carefully removed all the others before publication. Though Lawrence Harvey has noted the Dante-like tendency of the section, its relevance as a stock-

taking in the midst of Beckett's own life, (1) and Deirdre Bair is perhaps using it when she states that Beckett worked on Watt for three hours each day, in Roussillon (she gives no other authority), (2) its deeper implications have not been fully discussed. It is the first direct statement of the transitional space, the balance at the heart of the bilingual consciousness; a turning-point not only in time, or in outlook and expectation (pleasure belonging to the past, pain to the future) but also in perspective. The crisis-point of the mind, "the panting the trembling towards a being *gone, a being* to come, and the true true no longer, and the false true not yet", can well be seen as a reference to the writer's own bilingual conflict. The mother tongue, the pre-war culture of origin, is true no longer, and the deliberately acquired tongue is true "not yet". The speaker is for a moment hovering outside language, in a space which only the languageless know: the pre-verbal child, some of the severely handicapped and the very old. It is not a realm which rational discourse can easily describe, and it offers both horror and liberation: "for an instant free at last, nothing at last." The artist's double identity is even expressed sexually (prost~~ate~~, ovaries); he is all humanity.

1. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, pp. 350-1.
2. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 332.

The whole passage resonates with the binary oppositions which become so characteristic of the flood of works after the war, and which draw so deeply on the energy of his two creative languages. This experience is, of course, not unique, though few writers have taken its consequences as far as Beckett. A young multilingual and expatriate writer has expressed it thus:

The child in you dies because your childhood experiences cannot inform the new setting. You become split in two and your former life seems like an illusion. (...) The writer I think has to go through the same process of death, destruction, forced birth and abandonment. (...) Writer are Janus-faced, looking forward and back at the same time. (...) Trying to hold two ropes at the same time, forever in tension in the present. (1)

Beckett's words, in this crucial section of Watt, are the recognition of the "Janus-faced" nature of writing, of exile, and of his languages themselves, wrenched into focus by the outer world's conflicts. His pre-war life and language will become a story "heard long before, (...) ill-told, ill-heard, and more than half-forgotten" (Watt, p. 71).

Not only this passage, but the overall form of Watt, demands from the reader a peculiar ability to stand outside the text

1. "Interview: David Demchuk and Kristjana Gunnars", Prairie Fire, pp. 35-36.

altogether. Like much post-modernist writing, Watt challenges security and coherence in the experience of reading fiction. It is not a comfortable book, in spite of its comic brilliance and the engaging qualities of the gentle, eccentric Watt and Knott. The form is challenging; various sections -- originally separate narrative experiments in the manuscript -- are not brought successfully under the control of "Sam", the specific narrator. At times the relevance of what is being narrated to anything else in the book may be in doubt; but to hint that Sam is not in control of this mock-academic narrative is a characteristic "name" joke like the references to Mr. Beckett, and to M. Becquet, in Sedendo et Quiescendo (1) and the unpublished "Eleuthéria". (2) The exposing of language, the English language in this case, also becomes a kind of celebration of linguistic potential, involving serialising, exaggeration, games of permutations, questionnaires and puzzles.

In Watt the whole notion of the emptied sign is beautifully transferred to visual form: the painting of the circle and dot which Watt finds in Erskine's room can be interpreted endlessly according to the reader's own context and knowledge; it is the greatest Rorschach test of Beckett's entire

1. Sedendo et Quiescendo, p. 16.

2. "Eleuthéria", copy of unpublished typescript, Reading University Library MS. 1227/7/4/1, p.105.

writing. (1) Yet it remains a painting of a circle and a dot (or to be precise, for the reader a verbal description of such a painting) and Watt, at first, sensibly sticks to wordless emotional response: "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" (Watt, p. 127). But the narrator hints at the picture's sign-like powers by explaining Watt's attempts at "prolonged and irksome meditations" (Watt, p. 128) thus:

The question to this answer was the following, of great importance in Watt's opinion. Was the picture a fixed and stable member of the edifice, like Mr. Knott's bed, for example, or was it simply a manner of paradigm, here today and gone tomorrow, a term in a series, like the series of Mr. Knott's dogs... (Watt, p. 129)

"A manner of paradigm", "a term in a series" make the picture like the lexical elements in a language that can be replaced by other elements. Its meaning can depend on this paradigmatic group - or, alternatively, on its syntagmatic relations with what gives it its context. Clearly the patterns of language are at issue here. The painting is a challenge to the reader. It offers a direct focus on the

1. The way Beckett's works act as a kind of Rorschach test on those who read or view them has been noted by several critics, including George H. Szanto, Narrative Consciousness: Structure and Perception in the Fiction of Kafka, Beckett, and Robbe-Grillet (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1972), p. 8: "the result is not a description of the world, but a Rorschach test of the perceiving individual."

nature of semiotic systems.

The underlying pull away from the mother tongue, a psychological wrenching of linguistic foundations, can be clearly seen in the "Watt" manuscript. As the years of war go on, French intrudes into the manuscript more and more forcibly, but in ways which the printed version of Watt does not yield up as blatant evidence. Doodles and comments around the developing narrative begin to be written in Beckett's adopted language: a picture of a man and a dog, with the caption "Pitié pour l'aveugle" ("Watt" Ms. A2, p. 26); addresses in France written in French; unrelated pieces of Beckett's everyday French such as drafts of letters. In "Watt" Ms. A2 a poem (eventually printed in the Addenda) including the phrases "breathe head a while" and "exile air" is tried out in both languages, the French being apparently a testing of the English in the increasingly important frame of a bilingual perspective. "Airxeille" turns up again, in Ms. A5, as part of an unsuccessful crossword puzzle in French. In Ms. A3, as word-combinations multiply, Beckett's English becomes affected by French spelling ("vitamins" appears as "vitamines") ("Watt" Ms. A3, 46). And crucially, instructions and reminders by the author to himself begin to be written in French. "Watterise selon p. 8." (i.e. put in the name "Watt") in Ms. A3 (p. 62); "à insérer p.44" "à insérer K" ("Watt" Ms. A4, p. 127 and p. 151). These clearly illustrate the now

habitual use of French. The manuscript also contains French word-puzzles of various exploratory kinds, and an unfinished analysis of a French sentence according to its clausal structure ("Watt" Ms. A5, p. 72).

The importance of such evidence, although not in itself part of the printed text, is that it provides a context for the exposure of English syntax which is so evident in Watt. Beckett's pre-war fascination with the workings of syntax can now be intensified by his heightened bilingual consciousness. His undoing and subverting of traditional expressions, and above all Watt's language - reversals, reveal a mind well-versed in the symptoms of various mental disorders, especially schizophrenia, and deliberately employing language in a way that reflects states of madness, yet is not mad. (1) It is not only in Watt's obvious sequences of back-to-front phrases, in the asylum, that the method can be seen. At many points of the text, the prose rhythm itself turns hauntingly backwards as if through a desire to avoid the implacable ongoing concatenation of Subject-Verb-Object. The reversals include

1. As I suggested in Chapter I, Beckett is fascinated by madness and able to use it as material; he remains, however, an artist who does this deliberately rather than being insane himself. See G.C. Barnard, Samuel Beckett: A New Approach - A Study of the Novels and Plays (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1970), for an unequivocally psycho-analytical approach. The information about language-reversals in schizophrenics is on p. 24.

some obviously related to Watt's "backwards" period: "he (...) backwards through the hole went back, to his garden, (...) over the deep threshing shadows backwards stumbling, (...) in the tangles of underwood caught his foot" (Watt, p. 213). But others occur elsewhere in the text: Arsene's "spring in the air by some was even felt" (Watt, p. 106), and the narrator's description of Watt with Mrs. Gorman: "from waist to neck his weary hold transferring" (Watt, p. 139). Also, in Arthur's story: "slowly their sighing bodies they tore away" (Watt, p. 195).

Another way of looking at the reversals — and one the text makes equally possible -- is to see them as representing Watt's desire to go backwards in life, and re-enter the womb. "Never been properly born" (Watt, p. 248) could reflect his linguistic trouble, as well as referring to the problems of a human being ill-equipped for living, such as the little girl in the "mind-doctor's" lecture whom Maddy Rooney, in All That Fall, will speak of. (1)

1. Samuel Beckett, All That Fall (London: Faber and Faber, 1957/1965), pp. 36-37. Both allusions recall the lecture Beckett heard given by C.G. Jung at the Tavistock Clinic in 1935. The third of five, it also included Jung's statement that "the so-called unity of consciousness is an illusion." C.G. Jung, Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice; The Tavistock Lectures (New York: Random House (Pantheon Books), 1968), p. 81.

Beckett offers deliberate yet surreptitious clues, in the later stages of the writing of Watt, to the influence of another language's syntax and vocabulary on a mother tongue grown strange from distance and the loss of its context. The initial section of the novel -- Mr. Hackett's encounter with the Nixons, and the arrival of Watt -- has often been seen as the part of the book closest to Murphy. (1) In fact, it was added at a later stage, after the convoluted and mysterious narratives at Quin--Knott's house were already written. What is more, the French interference in the English, noted by John Fletcher (who assumed, justifiably, that the increasing dominance of Beckett's new language was to blame), (2) turns out to be a deliberate imposition of linguistic strangeness on the text, to add to the comic eccentricity of the characters' conversation.

For the clear gallicism of Mr. Hackett's "I do not rise, not having the force" (Watt, p. 7) the original version of the manuscript has "'I do not rise', said Mr. Hackett, 'not having the strength.'" ("Watt" Ms. A4, p. 183) The shift from the normal English to the "faux ami" is thus a careful revision.

1. e.g. in Michael Robinson, The Long Sonata of the Dead: A Study of Samuel Beckett (London: Rupert Har--Davis, 1969), p. 100.

2. John Fletcher, "Ecrivain Bilingue", in L'Herne: Samuel Beckett, ed. Tom Bishop and Raymond Federman (Paris: Editions de L'Herne, 1976), p. 213.

To the originally single appearance of "primeur" Beckett adds two repetitions, clearly intending to underline the word's somewhat affected flavour in English: "'The primeur?' said the lady. 'The primeur', said Mr. Hackett." ("Watt" Ms. A4, p. 185) Beckett had not yet, in the manuscript, hit on the delightful transformation of a Latin abbreviation into a part of English grammar: "That is the kind of thing Dee always vees" (Watt, p. 10). But his impulse to use the French "douleur", in altered form, is present: "'No trace of this [anguish] (dollar) appeared on my face'" ("Watt", Ms. A4, p. 190), as is the pretentious, and to Hackett incomprehensible, transformation of "osé": "'Not too [osé] (osy) with the sweet, I thought.' 'Not too what?' said Mr. Hackett. 'Osy' said the gentleman Goff, 'you know, not too [osé] osy'" ("Watt" Ms. A4, p. 191).

The manuscript also shows Beckett playing with the possible howlers to be obtained from a direct translation of French time constructions:

[For five years] [since five] [said the gentleman]
[he owes me five shillings] "For the past seven
years," said the gentleman, "he owes me five
shillings". ("Watt" Ms. A4, p. 201)

Similarly "at a merely facultative stop" is inserted into the manuscript ("Watt" Ms. A4, p. 205). It seems very likely that Beckett's deliberate accentuation of the French flavour of the opening section is his one clue to the underlying linguistic

tension which informs the material that has already been written. But he even plays with French, in a way that only a person reading the English with an awareness of French would notice, by inventing at this late stage the circumstance of Watt's first appearance. He is ejected from a tram -- and the French name for a tram-driver is "wattman" (in itself an indirect commemoration of the Watt whose scientific achievements are so distant from Watt's own painful quest for knowledge). This particular bilingual joke is brought to light at last in 1968 in the French translation of the novel: "Peut-être, dit Madame Nixon, a-t-il voulu contrarier le contrôleur, ou le wattman" (Watt (F), p. 20).

The Watt manuscript indicates, then, that by the end of the war Beckett was becoming increasingly committed to the idea of a future in French, even though for a non-native speaker the language as a medium of prose provides so rigorous a standard to live up to. Indulging in one of many jokes which, at the time, Beckett could little have suspected would ever appear in print, he has his "doppelgänger" Watt and Sam, both incarcerated in some kind of mental hospital, meet in a strange transitional space between their respective gardens:

In Watt's garden, in my garden, we should have been more at our ease. But it never occurred to me (...) For my garden was my garden, and Watt's garden was Watt's garden, we had no common garden any more.
(Watt, p. 162)

They meet instead in a curious fence-bound tunnel, a "couloir" (Watt, p. 158) in the English text. The French word in the English context stands out; it also beautifully represents the bilingual space at the centre of the strange un-English English in which the book is written, a "treacherous channel" (Watt, p. 155) indeed, but one of huge influence on all of Beckett's future creativity.

The end of conflict

In his reworking of the "Watt" manuscript, Beckett removed vast sections of comic narrative, rearranged parts, and provided the initial and final sections that help to give the reader a sense of plunging into and out of the mysteries of the Knott household as Watt himself must do. This technique contributes to the sense of the work as transitional, in the perspective of Beckett's developing aesthetic. The break from classical control and a narrator endowed with authority and anonymity, like those of Murphy, is hard to pinpoint; the manuscript gives an impression of control being given up progressively, transferred from an anonymous third person to Sam, and in fact to a shifting, unreliable Ur-narrator who is also the "academic" providing "Addenda", notes and asides. The break with the past is fundamental, and its repercussions can be traced through all the stages of Beckett's post-war

writing. From the writing of the Nouvelles, it is clear that Beckett's deep love for the classical beauty of controlled, ideal form has had to become a sacrifice to his conviction, already analytically present by 1937, that art must somehow learn to accommodate the "mess" directly. Le calmant is the confirmation of that conviction in creative practice, and as such leads directly to the far more ambitious formlessness of L'innommable.

Yet at the time of the great flood of liberated creative energy in 1946 and the years that followed, Beckett's bilingual practice as an artist can be seen beautifully emblemized in two language-crossing pairs: two poems, one in English, Saint-Lô, and one in French, Mort de A.D., and a pair of critical articles, both centred on the non-verbal art of painting: MacGreevy on J.B. Yeats, and La peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon. I would like to finish this examination of the central transition-period of Beckett's art by discussing them in a bilingual focus.

The two poems written after the end of the war show a binary imagination, a bridging of languages and cultures. Both concern the experiences Beckett underwent with the Irish Red Cross in France in 1945, an experience which provided a striking, unprecedented juxtaposition of his two cultures in a common bond of suffering and care — the physical suffering of the

wounded and diseased which Beckett's poem Ooftish prophetically addressed even before the war. (1) Saint-Lô, written in English yet having as its title and first words a French name, has the brief, beautifully-worked form which Beckett has often used at moments of artistic assessment and a change of direction: Gnome, Da Tagte Es and Dieppe are similar miniatures. The ruin of the French town and the -- for Beckett -- unusually hopeful hint of a new city to rise there in the future, come together with the sense of unchanging beauty of the river that winds through the landscape:

Vire will wind in other shadows
unborn through the bright ways tremble
and the old mind ghost-forsaken
sink into its havoc (Saint-Lô, p. 32)

Mort de A.D., written in French as a tribute to an Irish doctor who died at Saint-Lô among those he was helping to heal, (2) shows a willingness to test the limits of syntax yet without excess or display. The poem extends its meditations beyond the poet at his table to the dead man and his religious faith,

1. The depth of Beckett's emotional involvement in this experience is confirmed in the words of a radio broadcast he made on Radio Eirann in June 1946, The Capital of the Ruins, where he spoke of "humanity in ruins" and "the rare and famous ways of spirit that are the French ways". In As No Other Dare Fail: For Samuel Beckett on his 80th birthday, John Calder (and others) (London: John Calder, 1986), p. 76 and p. 74.

2. Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, p. 231, and Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 343.

then returns: "dévorant/la vie des saints une vie par jour de vie", "mort hier pendant que je vivais" (Mort de A.D., p. 54). As in the second half of Saint-Lô there is a final sense of the writer left with his guilt, solitude and need to find some balance between past and future, old life and new life. Just as "Vire" in Saint-Lô means "wind" (as in the verb "to wind") as well as the river's name, so the title Mort de A.D. achieves a bilingual echo in the accident of linguistic form without any straining of taste. Mort—DE A.D. is a double confirmation of the Doctor (A. D.)'s mortality; at the same time, his real initials, A.D., hint that the "years of Our Lord" of the Christian time-scheme, after the barbarity just ended, are dead themselves. Anno Domini must give way to a new calendar in an undirected world. The point is stronger still in the context of the Doctor's strong Catholicism, his belief in the value of the saints' and martyrs' suffering. The poet, isolated and without faith, has to go forward alone. In Saint-Lô the "old mind ghost-forsaken" is sinking into "havoc" -- the echo of "God-forsaken" and the idea of formlessness reinforcing the idea that an old world, an old self, have died in the war. Thus these two intimately related poems, written in two different languages, meditate on past and future, faith and despair, and the juxtaposition of countries and cultures.

In the two critical pieces a curious counteracting process is

at work. Analytical -- although packed with the usual allusions, ellipses, and images of Beckettian non-fictional prose -- they suggest the extremes of his position in each language. His last piece of criticism on a book in English -- admittedly a book about a painter -- shows an extraordinary fight going on between the new artistic commitment discovered during the war, and the loyal desire to praise an old and valued friend. The artist wins, for Beckett cannot allow even McGreevy to recall J.B. Yeats into the tight circle of a patriotically Irish art: "The national aspects of Mr. Yeats' genius have, I think, been over-stated" (MacGreevy on Yeats, p. 96). As he did with the "European" Irish poets in Recent Irish Poetry Beckett provides an internationalist counter-view:

He is with the great of our time, Kandinsky and Klee, Ballmer and Bram van Velde, Rouault and Braque, because he brings light, as only the great dare to bring light, to the issueless predicament of existence, reduces the dark where there might have been, mathematically at least, a door .
(MacGreevy on Yeats, p. 97)

The alliterative pairing of the first two sets of artists, Kandinsky and Klee, Ballmer and Bram van Velde, the firm placing of J.B. Yeats in Europe, not Ireland, and the sense of mental territory, dark and light, enclosure and door, show once again the binary habits of Beckett's voice at this time, in style, setting and image. The observer stands once again in his transitional space. What he cannot tolerate is

any reduction of a great artist -- who therefore transcends a single culture circle -- to a single, narrow, national pride. As Beckett had been careful to stress in his 1936 review of J.B. Yeats' book The Amaranthers: "The Island is not throttled into Ireland." (1) It is enlightening to set the consistency of Beckett's own positions beside McGreevy's complete change of heart, reflected in the change between the transition attack he wrote on Ireland in 1930, (2) and his later allegiance. Although Beckett may treat Gaelic and Irish life less scornfully in later works, he remains adamant in his resistance to nationalism in art and in its direction or control.

La peinture des van Velde shows Beckett's command of French prose, and (more crucial still) his sense of speaking to an audience he respects, to be vastly greater than before the war; and this is indeed his first work in French to be published. The article, one of his fullest statements of artistic principles, seems at times over-anxious in its claims of allegiance to the Parisian context and the French language. There is an element of the old club-ish élitism when Beckett uses the jargon of the Ecole Normale supérieure: "il n'est pas question ici

1. Samuel Beckett, An Imaginative Work! (The Amaranthers, by Jack B. Yeats), in Disjecta, p. 90.

2. See p. 83.

de l'animal grotesque et méprisable dont le spectre hante les ateliers, comme celui du tapir les turnes normaliennes."

(La peinture des van Velde, p. 120) He brings up McGreevy with a detachment that is perhaps easier because he writes in French: "quand McGreevy rapproche si justement Yeats de Watteau, où vont les rayons?" (La peinture des van Velde, p. 118). And he refers to criticism as "des hystérectomies à la truelle" (La peinture des van Velde, p. 118). In spite of the "si justement" there is a distinct need here to put the principles of art before the claims of friendship, at least in order to reject what Beckett seems to see more and more as self-defeating: verbal criticism of non-verbal artistic experience.

Throughout this article, Beckett returns repeatedly to the idea of "les arts plastiques" as the arts where form is crucial, and the renewal of tired forms essential. In fact, he would like all art to be understood as "plastique" in the French sense of the word, visible and malleable. Even literature involves a formal and structured response to the art of the past, to academic and critical discourse and to its own context: the experience of Watt is emerging into a language Beckett seems to find particularly well-suited for debate on aesthetic issues. The Apollonian control operating in Murphy has given way, during Watt, with its exposed English, to a

recognition of chaos. In Murphy Beckett focussed on the word "chaos" and the concept it seeks to refer to (Murphy, p. 173) but the over-determined plot kept it at bay, ensured that *chaos as presented was something to be analysed rather than to be experienced*. Now, with the release into French, Beckett can use the language of supreme classical order to show chaos directly, experimenting with form -- as so many other artists in post-war Paris were doing -- in such a way that chaos exists in the art work itself. Living in a cosmopolitan capital city full of exiles and refugees, he could begin to assess the implications, for the long-admired French vision of civilisation, of a war that had split the country in two materially and psychologically. The genres and assumptions of the pre-war world had been exposed and destroyed just as Beckett had seen some of Europe's great cathedrals destroyed. Discussing the van Velde brothers, Beckett perhaps unwittingly makes them resemble Watt and his "double" seen on the road (Watt, pp. 225-226): two men who "marchent vers le même horizon, au milieu de tant de couchés, d'assis et de transportés en commun" (La peinture des van Velde, p. 124). Like Watt and the post-war protagonists in French, the van Velde brothers symbolize in the developing Beckettian world the outsiders, the ones who do not fit in with conventional language, behaviour, and assumptions. As a writer now permanently self-exiled from his native country, wrenched free of his mother tongue and using French with a profound sense of its structural and formal

nature, Beckett grasps with unique intensity the artistic consequences of a binary split, a divided self, brought into being during years of outer and inner conflict. (1)

1. As André Martinet observed in the preface to a seminal work on bilingualism, Uriel Weinreich's Languages in Contact: "The clash, in the same individual, of two languages of comparable social and cultural value, both spoken by millions of cultured unilinguals, may be psychologically most spectacular, but unless we have to do with a literary genius, the permanent linguistic traces of such a clash will be nil." This description might have been written for Beckett.

CHAPTER IV: LIBERATION

1946-1951

The liberation of France coincided with Beckett's liberation into the French language, after the processes of repulsion from his mother tongue, attraction to the learned language, experimentation in it, and then the fundamental linguistic conflict of the war. The work of the next five years, an extraordinary flood of French, rises to the achievements which still stand as Beckett's most widely admired contributions to literature: Molloy, Malone meurt, En attendant Godot, and L'innommable. The use of French combines with a newly articulated determination to break through rational, classical concepts of form, and through the realist-psychological traditions of novel and drama, to a world of formlessness, shifting states and perceptions, more truly representative, to an artist of Beckett's outlook, of the experience of life itself. French as a consciously learned, deliberately chosen language -- and as a language which has had a specially articulate relationship with "Cartesian" thought -- allowed his artistic liberation to occur.

Only some exceptional psychological and creative release can explain the energy that -- after a five-year period when he

wrote no more than Watt, admittedly in difficult circumstances -- produced four novellas, four novels, two plays, four critical articles and seven poems, at a time when Beckett was also engaged in regular commercial translation between his two languages. The manuscripts of the trilogy confirm the intense energy of these years. Whereas the "Watt" manuscript is full of doodles, non-sequential passages, games, extraneous comments and uncompleted plans, the manuscripts of Molloy and "L'absent" (Malone meurt) (1) flow on for page after page in the same hand, much of the text reaching print unchanged, as though dictated by a voice. Fittingly, Beckett's first completed draft of a play, "Eleuthéria", acknowledges in its Greek title the central mood of the time, "love of freedom", and the detachment possible when another language is employed. The use of Greek saved the title from any immediate association with political liberation in a local and specific way; the borrowed word extends and abstracts the level of reference intended.

The liberation of France and the liberation of the bilingual artist are deeply interconnected in this flawed but fascinating work. Victor makes clear the need for movement beyond the

1. "L'absent" was the original title written in the notebook containing the first draft of the text (now in the Beckett collection of the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin).

norms, beyond even the conventional awareness of the self, when he says:

J'ai toujours voulu être libre. Je ne sais pas pourquoi. Je ne sais pas non plus ce que ça veut dire, être libre. (...) Mais loin des mots je sais ce que c'est. (...) D'abord j'étais prisonnier des autres. Alors je les ai quittés. Puis j'étais prisonnier de moi. C'était pire. Alors je me suis quitté. ("Eleuthéria", p. 115)

His meditation on liberty, and on language, will be echoed more successfully in Molloy:

Et je suis à nouveau je ne dirai pas seul, non, ce n'est pas mon genre, mais, comment dire, je ne sais pas, rendu à moi, non, je ne me suis jamais quitté, libre, voilà, je ne sais pas ce que ça veut dire mais c'est le mot que j'entends employer. (Molloy, p. 17)

It is possible to see the steady advance of Beckett's artistic logic by comparing these two passages. Victor's speech is still couched in precise language even as he speaks of ignorance and of going far away from words; form does not cohere with meaning and bring it to life. Molloy, stopping and starting, contradicting himself, shows the need to be free of the analytical onwards flow of conventional language; freedom from control moves into the syntax itself.

Victor, living alone in a bare room and rejecting his bourgeois background, has tried to "go beyond." He wants to free himself from the circles of society, family and conventional

expression which he detests, but he still employs words in a way that keeps him trapped within these circles. Molloy, like those that speak after him, lives in a realm in which the security of all expression has been exploded; both the prisons of the "others" and of the self lie in ruins, letting in the "mess". The English language between Saint-Lô in 1946 and the mid-1950s prose experiments (1) is totally submerged in Beckett's creative writing, (2) yet it works steadily beneath the surface to undermine all impulses back towards stable form and secure expression. Like the dark side of the moon, Beckett's English exists in a realm which cannot be seen but is implied by what one can see, the "lit" side facing the observer: his adopted language. Reason and the forces of the unconscious come more and more into a state of tension, of shifting focusses and states. The dark side, the hidden English, provides images, settings, experiences, even an occasional borrowed word which the light then plays on. The language of "les lumières" is constantly and deeply motivated by the presence of the other in the context of the artist's binary, bilingual consciousness.

1. These include From An Abandoned Work (circa 1954-5) and the unpublished story of Matt, Popol and Emmanuel (see Chapter V).

2. Beckett did, however, participate in discussions about contemporary artists with Georges Duthuit, which he then wrote up as Three Dialogues (with Georges Duthuit) (1949), in Proust and Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, pp. 95-126.

Dualism and unity

The fundamental level at which dualism emerges, the dark and light sides of Beckett's global space, is that of form. Form is a preoccupation of the period: in La Peinture des van Velde the word "plastique" -- in the full French sense of "capable-of-being-formed" -- occurs several times (La Peinture des van Velde, p. 121, p. 127, p. 129; as mentioned in Chapter III.) It always occurs to support the concept of art as a liberating, an artificial act. In the early pages of Molloy, forms -- instead of specific events, specific people -- become part of a visual impression of "figure and ground". "Pénultième d'une forme pâissante entre formes pâissantes" describes his "irrêel voyage" (Molloy, p. 22), (1) "de sombres formes se pressant dans un espace sombre" (Molloy, p. 33), the mass of undistinguished humanity in the place where justice is administered, the police headquarters. It is Molloy who tells us of having killed the classicist, the lover of a world that stays clear and stable in the light: "L'Egéen, assoiffé de chaleur, de lumière, je

1. When Beckett wrote Molloy, he thought of two "voyages" (that of Molloy, and that of Malone). By the time of the English translation, he knew there were three, L'innommable also having been written. So the translation is changed: "And this enables me, what is more, to know when that unreal journey began, the second last but one of a form fading among fading forms" (Molloy (E), p. 17) (My italics). One could alternatively argue that, if L'innommable is not exactly a record of a journey, the three involved are Molloy's, Moran's and Malone's.

le tuai, il se tua, de bonne heure, en moi" (Molloy, p. 43).

Molloy's immediate contrast here is with days of rain, rain such as that which falls incessantly in the world of Mercier et Camier, but an equally basic opposition, which Beckett uses in the trilogy too, is that of sun and moon. To the sun's steady and predictable brilliance, (1) its symbolic union with human reason and civilisation, Molloy (and even more Malone) prefers the shifting elusive moon, the celestial body that symbolises transitional states and inconstancy in contrast with the sun's absoluteness and lucidity. The moon's associations with lunacy, with an intuitive consciousness and with night itself are very much part of the mental worlds that Molloy and Malone, but not at first Moran, inhabit. Exceptionally lyrical passages of Malone meurt present this deity of the irrational, night-time world as a kind of emblem of a doubled, irrational consciousness:

Monde mort, sans eau, sans air. C'est ça, tes souvenirs. De loin en loin, au fond d'un cirque, l'ombre d'un lichen flétri. Et nuits de trois cents heures. Plus chère des clartés, blafarde, grêlée, moins fate des clartés. (Malone meurt, p. 49)

Vladimir and Estragon, equally, hail the moon as it rises towards the end of their day of waiting, and in an echo of

1. Predictable, because of the laws of nature, and therefore irritating to a mind concerned with process and change. As the opening lines of Murphy put it, "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new" (Murphy, p. 5).

Lasse de ma lassitude, blanche lune dernière,
 seul regret, même pas. Etre mort, avant elle, sur
 elle, avec elle, et tourner, mort sur morte,
 autour des pauvres hommes, et n'avoir plus jamais
 à mourir, d'entre les mourants. Même pas, même
 pas ça. Ma lune fut ici-bas, ici bien bas,
 le peu que j'aie su désirer. Et un jour, bientôt,
 une nuit de terre, bientôt, sous la terre, un
 mourant dira, comme moi, au clair de terre,
 Même pas, même pas ça, et mourra, sans avoir pu
 trouver un regret. (Malone meurt, p. 171)

From moon-sun to moon-earth, from looking at the moon to
 looking back from the moon, the metaphorical play of binary
 pairs, Yin and Yang, allows a huge range of archetypal
 associations. The reversals "au clair de terre", "une nuit
 de terre" and the sexually-charged blend of union and
 doubleness (even in the use of "death") aptly symbolise the
 detachment of the fully-revealed bilingual consciousness.
 Not only "unhoused" but unearthed, the voice seems to be
 drifting off into space, on its way to "le silence dont l'univers
 est fait" (Molloy, p. 188). Yet earthly language, earthly
 reality, sharply reasserts itself in both Malone meurt and
En attendant Godot: Estragon's boots, the need to get rid
 of Moll, brutally bring back to earth the revealed, serious,
 lunar self. In this self's relation with the daylight world,
 the world in which things take their places, and "sham dead" (Molloy (E), p. 140),
 the interaction and sense of contraries is central. Bilingualism
 similarly provides a constant pressure of hidden contraries,
 and a sense of process, not product, in form.

During the first phase of exploration, the nouvelles Suite (1) (La fin), L'expulsé, Premier amour and Le calmant, and the novel Mercier et Camier, a habitual impulse towards formal control struggles against a chaos which both threatens and attracts. Among the recurrent themes, home-homelessness, life-death, sanity-madness, companionship-solitude interact with a constant linguistic to-and-fro movement, especially in Mercier et Camier. Couples and pseudo-couples recur; the bonding of companionship of short or long term with a cabbie (L'expulsé), a cave-dwelling acquaintance (Suite-La fin), a woman (Premier amour), a seller of calmatives (Le calmant), and the more developed relationship of Mercier and Camier, all underline the process of communication itself. Dialogue between two beings constantly becomes problematic, as the younger, analytical Beckett had seen it become problematic in Proust's great novel. All language, mediating according to its inherited conventions, falsifies and detaches thought from inner experience and emotion; the bilingual writer for whom this process has become fully visible can put it both to comic and to serious use.

A curious formal reflection of binarism occurs in the separation of each two chapters of Mercier et Camier from the next two with summaries of the action they contain. These summaries serve, like the hilarious initial difficulty

1. Through a misunderstanding, only the first half of Suite was published, in Les Temps Modernes, 10 (July 1946), pp. 107-119.

at meeting with its table of "Arr." and "Dep." times, to frame the action in comic artifice (Mercier et Camier, p. 10), so that the reader responds to a dualist energy acting in every aspect of the work. Literary and colloquial by turn, often obscene, the language similarly alternates in a way, ^{calculated} to try even the most credulous of obedient readers. Archaic and present-day terms, oppositions of opinion and action, constantly recur. There are puns, jokes and portmanteau words that all contribute to the game of union and doubleness:

Il vient de perdre son unique enfant, dit Camier, unique au monde.

Un bijumeau, dit Mercier. (Mercier et Camier, p. 200)

Like the bijou-jumeau, Mercier and Camier are themselves two halves of a whole, correcting each other's language, loving and hating, separating and joining. They communicate through endless repartee -- as Vladimir and Estragon will do after them -- in order to push away "la bataille du soliloque" (Mercier et Camier, p. 131) which will gradually dominate as the works after this one grow darker, go deeper into Beckett's dually-structured imaginative realm to find the point at which all structure ceases and only the interactive, metaphorical world remains.

The unpublished "Eleuthéria" offers so revealing a presentation of Beckett's dualist tendencies in this period that its non-

appearance may not just be the result of its dramatic difficulties. The typescript asks for a stage divided into "un espace dualiste" ("Eleuthéria", p. 2) in which, boldly, Beckett wishes the main action on one side of the stage to be accompanied at certain moments by "l'action marginale" ("Eleuthéria", p. 1) on the other. "Les personnages des deux côtés sont arrêtés dans leurs mouvements les uns vers les autres, par la barrière qu'eux seuls voient" ("Eleuthéria", p. 2). What better visual representation could there be for a barrier of language, or of the common understanding language is supposed to convey?

During the course of the play Victor will valiantly try to maintain the separation between his former, bourgeois world and his chosen world of solitude and poverty. M. et Madame Krap will be separated by the most insuperable barrier of all, death. The "Vitrier" whose window-mending has such symbolic implications (1) stands at the centre of the play's mediating principles; he becomes the verbal window through which the two worlds look at each other. There are also mirror-image pairs of father-son relations. The Vitrier's curious blend of tenderness and didacticism towards his son is combined with an

1. The pane of glass as a dividing, yet transparent, space also struck Beckett before the war, as in the poem La Mouche (Collected Poems, p. 43): "entre la scène et moi/la vitre/vide sauf elle".

almost fatherly interest in Victor, whose own father's death affects him (as we know from the "action marginale": Victor returns discreetly to the family home to see the body) in a way that is deeply influential in Victor's determined self-dedication to a world of solitude. At the end of the play he commits the act -- difficult to achieve in the theatre -- of "leaving" before the audience, withdrawing into his own world in the foetal isolated refuge of the bed in the farthest corner of his room.

The central problem in "Eleuthéria" is the degree of rational control, the need to explain too bluntly that the hero is a solipsist who wishes to create his own self-sufficient world. Unlike the novel Murphy, whose solipsist is much more engaging and the environment energetically comical, the overall tone here is serious, even ponderous at times, in spite of the satirical wit directed at the Parisian bourgeois world of the Krap entourage. The play offers a perspective on the theme of linguistic and cultural alienation which allowed Beckett to move onwards to the far simpler and more powerful use of stage space in En attendant Godot, and a dualism which combines greater subtlety and metaphoric power with human warmth and humour. These qualities, though, obviously learned to some extent from the intervening experience of Molloy and Malone meurt, might not have become so clearly

desirable without the earlier play's exploration of vital Beckettian themes and symbols in more unwieldy form. The pair of novels, originally intended to be so, and still distinctly a pair compared with L'innommable (which came after En attendant Godot), represents a huge advance in finding and exploring the territory in which the real implications of dualism become clear. The doubleness emerges at levels of setting, theme, character, image, and language in ways that question the structure of the human mind; they do so in a syntax and form that constantly act out a shifting, alternating, relativising interaction.

Much of the dualism of Molloy has received a great deal of attention already. (1) What is extraordinary is the novel's capacity to go on yielding up new associations, new links and patterns and "doubles" to every reader who comes to it. Molloy himself -- the curiously articulate speaker who begins the novel, somehow fading into the stumbling self-contradictory traveller as he continues -- gives a representation of the

1. Well-known and relatively early examples are "The Cartesian Centaur" in Hugh Kenner's Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1961/1968), pp. 117-132, where it is the mind-body split that dominates; and "Molloy and Moran", in Fletcher's The Novels of Samuel Beckett (pp. 119-150), where the binary patterning of the two characters and their journeys is discussed.

larger pattern at work. He describes the two men A and B, going towards each other: "C'est ainsi que je vis A et B aller lentement l'un vers l'autre, sans se rendre compte de ce qu'ils faisaient" (Molloy, p. 9). The Molloy-Moran interaction is clearly foreshadowed; one can also think of the two halves of the novel as being, to adapt Hugh Kenner's bicycling image to a different use, two unicycles spinning endlessly towards each other, each circle of consciousness already a reflection of the other. Beckett's own sense of an alternate, hidden consciousness (1) has clearly found with his bilingualism and, especially in this period, with the unhindered use of his alternate language, a perfect externalisation. Abel and Cain, another symbolic pair of immense evocative power, victim and agent, brother and brother, nomad and farmer, good and evil, are also suggested when Beckett translates the text into English and replaces A and B with A and C (Molloy (E), p. 9). Cain (whose links with the moon Beckett had made use of much earlier, in "Dante and the Lobster") (More Pricks than Kicks, pp. 11-12) represents the dark and destructive forces of life; he also represents the grimmest mode of communication between two human beings, violence, which Comment C'est will take up again in

1. Beckett spoke to Laurence Harvey of "a presence, embryonic, undeveloped, of a self that might have been but never got born, an être manqué". (Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, p. 247)

a later period.

Beckett's sense of the doubled consciousness also finds expression in the idea of the mirror. Moran, initially so respectably ensconced in his "petit bourgeois" routine, apparently includes among his private weaknesses a habit of masturbating before his "miroir Brot" (Molloy, p. 158). The self-love he obviously possesses requires not only physical satisfaction but visual stimulus as well. The archetypal Beckettian protagonist, once freed from Moran's tightly regulated world, never seems to see a mirror; a long passage in Suite describing such an event is carefully removed when the nouvelle becomes La fin. (1) In Le calmant the protagonist catches glimpses of his own bulky shape in shop windows but seems scarcely able to register it as a reflection: "un~~e~~ vaste cylindre lancé à toute allure" (Le

1. "Il y avait une glace dans la rue devant laquelle je m'arrêtais toujours pour voir le visage. La barbe était comme mangée. Il y avait des endroits où elle ne poussait pas du tout. Même là où elle était épaisse on voyait des trous, comme des coupes sombres. La petite bouche amère ressemblait à un anus. Je la fronçai et du verre embué me revint l'écho d'un souffle malodorant. Je me découvris, afin de voir le crâne, me penchant et roulant les yeux. Il est difficile d'obtenir une bonne vue du crâne dans une glace. La meilleure méthode, c'est de laisser tomber carrément la tête, puis de la redresser vivement. Le crâne entier est là dans la glace pendant un instant, puis le visage le recouvre." (Suite, p. 115) The passage may well have been removed because it gives a sense of a regular routine ("m'arrêtais toujours") and a clearly visible, recognizable human individual. Yet the reflection, or assurance of life (the breath on the mirror), is significant.

calmant, p. 52). This figure resembles the one Moran finds in his inner vision as he seeks a mental picture of his quarry Molloy:

Il était massif et épais, difforme même. Et, sans être noir, de couleur sombre. (...) C'est ainsi qu'il me visitait, à des intervalles très espacés. Je n'étais plus alors que fracas, lourdeur, colère, étouffement, effort incessant, forcené et vain. Tout le contraire de moi, quoi (Molloy, p. 175)

Although Moran specifies that this is not the "real" Molloy but only an image of him (just as he himself is "une fabrication": Molloy, p. 176), he already has a clear disposition towards his alter-ego, this creature who goes towards his centre as strongly as Moran has up to now gone towards the outer world. And crucially, the doubled self is not crystal clear, easily and permanently definable, but shifting, incoherent, a dissolving form, "difforme". Beckett's richly patterned text presents the "fracas" (a key word used also in Le calmant, p. 44) directly, in a way his pre-war work and even "Eleuthéria" could not achieve. Binarism is moving from product to process, its existence moving to a deeper level.

Molloy's layout as a two-part novel is itself too explicit for the form of the next work in this sequence. The clearly separated monologues of Molloy and Moran (each of which has a further doubleness in that protagonist and narrator are at

times almost distinct; in French the "histoire" and "récit" levels are set in tension) are no longer appropriate. The author - figure in Malone meurt exists even more fully in the text as "present", and in fact spends more than half of his time on his own situation, not on the characters whose stories he tells. He is a creator of two beings; their humanity is marginal and as usual bears little relation to articulate rational conversation with their fellows. Sapo, in the first half, prefers to be a silent witness to nature and to share the scarcely verbal company of the Louis family; Macmann, falling foul of the outer world like the nouvelles' protagonists, rapidly progresses to an asylum where his most intense communicative efforts are directed at the hideous yet affectionate Moll, until her demise. Sapo and Macmann may well be externalised aspects of Malone's own life. He in turn as creator is linked to the destroyer Lemuel, whose name echoes the Sam (Samuel) of Watt (and, of course, Swift's Lemuel Gulliver). In an extraordinary blend of forms sliding into formlessness, the novel lurches towards death and a kind of closure on both levels, "histoire" and "récit", at once. It insists above all else on the union of voice and presence, silence and absence, in the moment when Malone's pencil presumably falls and Lemuel's hatchet, hammer or stick is laid to rest (Malone meurt, pp. 216-217; Malone Dies, p. 289). As in almost all

works from this crucial novel onwards, the reader is inescapably becoming a participant, a witness either to drama or to the theatre of the mind, hearing a voice or voices acutely aware of their own arbitrary, "lying" (because specific) language.

The experience of two voices or two selves in this period is related closely to the exclusive use of French and the rejection of English, and it offers a basis for the dualism so characteristic of the drama as well as the prose. En attendant Godot, the quintessence not only of Beckett's outlook but also of an entire mood of post-war European culture, emerges out of Molloy and Malone meurt and the power of doubleness within them. Its clear, formal "twos" -- two acts, two encounters, two messages from M. Godot, two tramps, two travellers -- re-emphasise an artistic conviction about the dualism basis to human experience and thought. Because the use of altered repetition makes the events part of an ongoing series, En attendant Godot creates an extraordinary sense of timeless process, in spite of the necessary formal clarity demanded by theatrical time and space. Cain and Abel are explicitly here as "toute l'humanité" (En attendant Godot, p. 118). The interplay of communication and cruelty, reason and insanity, fulfilment and disappointment provides in a startlingly simple form the central binarism of the period as a whole, that of a doubled sense of experience, a doubled sense of language, and a knowledge of what lies in the non-verbal realm between.

L'innommable, the culmination of so many levels of artistic expression,

allows binaries to proliferate into an explosion of shifting forms that are hardly established before the voice moves on, increasingly charged by its own self-escaping alternations. Even to speak of Mahood and Worm as two individual beings is to impose on the text a sense of fixed character which is grossly inappropriate. Similarly, to capitalise the unnamable calling "him" the "Unnamable," so that it becomes just another name, is to evade the point of the title. There is no fixed definable voice here, no narrator, no coherent self, and instead an anonymous voice or (better) snatches of voices, constantly shifting into alternate forms. They are not so much self-negating (which would demand something solid to negate) as "unself"-ed, a word Beckett favours in the text neither. Difficult as such a concept may be, it becomes easier in the context of two actual indefinable selves in the artistic imagination, two voices that shift, overlap and echo each other; ultimately the artist's own brain, the bilingual brain, is the setting for the unnamable voices and the exposure of language. Scientific research is now suggesting that the bilingual brain is indeed binary in a special sense, using both left and right hemispheres where the unilingual's language is concentrated in the left. (1) Such knowledge would no doubt seem unremarkable

1. See Martin L. Albert and Lorraine K. Obler, The Bilingual Brain: Neuropsychological and Neurolinguistic Aspects of Bilingualism (New York, San Francisco, London: Academic Press, 1978).

to the writer who has looked so deep into the brain's linguistic powers, even, in Worstward Ho, focussing directly on the "ooze" inside the skull (Worstward Ho, p. 40). It is also fitting that the exposure of dualism occurs first in the learned language, French, and later, through a magnificent self-translation, in the now distanced mother-tongue, the "anglo-irlandais" which has undergone a sea-change since the pre-war writing.

Settings freed from nationality

The changeability of the waxing and waning moon, the tides of the imagination, so beautifully evoked in Malone meurt, affect equally the settings of the works of this period. These settings are part-mimetic, part self-confessed fantasy, part reportage from the language in a head, and bear out Beckett's often-expressed contempt for realism. Ireland, its culture, history and above all geography, blend in the transitional realm of the unhoused imagination with the French world, to create a new territory which is the artist's own. (1) The reader can only enter this territory by suspending disbelief in a way that is unfamiliar, by accepting that the landscapes described, fields,

1. As Richard Fallis puts it, Beckett's "imaginative landscape is in some desolate place inside ourselves, neither French nor English nor Irish" (The Irish Renaissance, p. 217).

woods, towns, sea-shores, are places where strange events occur, that nothing can be relied on. Objects only pretend to be fixed; they "sham dead". (1) It should be inconceivable in any of the post-war works to require the kind of mimetic accuracy Beckett used in Murphy; instead reference to such culturally localised anchors as place and personal names, monetary and measurement systems, cultural norms of behaviour and attitude blend and fade.

In Molloy and Malone meurt, novels where shillings, pennies and miles are indications of an apparently English-speaking Irish world, some features suggest we are in France; generally, however, specific and namable places such as Dublin and Paris are as alien to the text as traditional psychological analysis of characters' motives would be. The reader of the French Molloy and Malone meurt may feel that "translation" is constantly occurring, even that the text is a translation from the Anglo-Irish. Yet this is no precise picture, for example, of a French view of Ireland. (2)

1. "Things steal back into position for the day, take their stand, sham dead" (Molloy (E), p. 140).

2. Utterly different is Michel Butor's view of a northern English town through a French narrator in L'emploi du temps, where a map using English place-names prefaces the French text (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957).

Instead the realm draws on a fantastic mingling of impressions of places; it exists in an international, a non-specific imagined world, human but not national. The drama strives towards similar conditions in En attendant Godot, in spite of the French names in the text. (1) "Eleuthéria", among its other problems, presents a "Paris" so brittle and unreal that it seems ready to shatter like one of the Glazier's windows.

Two of the poems written during this period and published bilingually in Transition 48, je suis ce cours de sable qui glisse and que ferais-je sans ce monde (2), provide a different kind of mirror of Beckett's imaginative preoccupations at the time. Their focus on mental territory, shadows and emptiness, "shifting thresholds" and the isolation of the self in a special realm combines with images of the sea shore, of places between. Yet an even clearer perspective on the

1. "la tour Eiffel" (En attendant Godot, p. 11), "Seine/Seine-et-Oise Seine-et-Marne Marne-et-Oise" and "Normandie" (p. 61), "Ja Durance" (p. 74), "le Vaucluse" and "Roussillon" (p. 86). The setting itself remains unspecific: it could be almost anywhere.

2. Samuel Beckett, je suis ce cours de sable qui glisse and que ferais-je sans ce monde, in Collected Poems, p. 56 and p. 58.

expression of the bilingual consciousness at this time lies in one of the contemporary English translations Beckett provided, an illuminating example of the attitude to his own idiom now possible for him. In an otherwise equivalent English, my way is in the sand flowing (1) (the translation of je suis ce cours...) shows a revealing alteration.

cher instant je te vois
 dans ce rideau de brume qui recule
 où je n'aurais plus à fouler ces longs seuils mouvants

becomes:

my peace is there in the receding mist
 when I may cease from treading these long shifting thresholds

No longer, in the English, does the speaker address directly, and intimately, the "cher instant" he longs for, when he will no longer be involved in the incessant movement, the flowing sand, the life "entre le galet et la dune" as it is described in the first part of the poem. Instead in English he says: "my peace" (more explanatory and specific than the French, which leaves the nature of "cher instant" open) "is there in the receding mist"; there has been a shift, a moving back in

1. Samuel Beckett, my way is in the sand flowing, in Collected Poems, p. 57.

perception from "here" to "there", to a world looked on from a distance. The implications of this change surely lie in the shift of language itself, a now thoroughly estranged English creating a different, more distant view of the place/ the time, where peace is to be found. (1) Transition's own history of championing multilingual literature, relativist and anti-authoritarian attitudes, and above all transitions of space and time make it, even in its post-war character, the most appropriate setting for this bilingual poetic statement.

In revising the poem que ferais-je Beckett adds a confirmation of the same process. The original French version, and the English version Beckett has retained, ask the question: "que ferais-je je ferais comme hier comme avant-hier", "what would I do what I did yesterday and the day before". (2) Yet the revised French separates itself by bringing the time scheme into the present: "que ferais-je je ferais comme hier comme aujourd'hui". The English is not changed to correspond. Beckett is pointing out a very personal difference; French belongs to past and present, English to past and further past.

1. Marjorie Perloff, in The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) looks at the two versions of the poem but simply sees the English as a somewhat loose translation (p. 245). It is also possible, of course, that the English reflects an earlier version of the poem, or a later revision in Beckett's mind. The difference, nevertheless, remains.

2. Samuel Beckett, what would I do without this world, in Collected Poems, p. 59.

Like so much in his works the private significance lies both exposed to, and concealed from, public view. The private "convulsive space/ among the voices voiceless /that throng my hiddenness", as the poem ends, becomes in a bilingual perspective a privacy shared.

The transitional space, a special country belonging nowhere but in the imagination and made up of a mingling of cultures and tongues, frees Beckett from the tight binarism which a desire to cling to rational and classical models would have led to. The need for such interactional space is vividly prefigured in the 1945 review of McGreevy writing on Jack B. Yeats, where Beckett sees the painter's vision as:

The being in the street, when it happens in the room, the being in the room when it happens in the street, the turning to gaze from land to sea, from sea to land, the backs to one another and the eyes abandoning, the man alone trudging in sand, the man alone thinking (thinking!) in his box... (MacGreevy on Yeats, p. 97)

The relativism of movement, the opposition between territories for which only an indefinable union is possible, come together in the major works of the period towards a conjunction of two states: "nous sommes bien entendu dans une tête" of Le calmant (Le calmant, p. 57), and "mimétique malgré lui, voilà Molloy, vu sous un certain angle" of Molloy (Molloy, p. 43). The "bien entendu" of the first and the "sous un

certain angle" of the second convey a common message: do not look here for a traditional mimetic contract in which the author (or playwright) will take you safely into the comfortable "fantasy" of a well-delineated, "realistic" setting. (1) The road reflects better than the mirror; only life itself and its chaotic formlessness, its dirt, its loose ends and contradictions, filtered through a non-judgemental consciousness, can now occupy the space where the creative act occurs.

The haunting landscapes of Molloy and En attendant Godot are clearly connected with the linguistic and social wrenching caused by war. They relate equally powerfully, however, to any human situation in which disturbance, distress, inequality, violence or alienation exists. As early as 1932 Beckett explicitly rejected the kind of realism practised by Balzac, a realism in which setting, time, place, social level, nationality and even furnishings are all in place. Yet he was still drawn for a time to some use of realist environment and details. Murphy delights in references to parts of Dublin and London, and even provides such details as Celia's parents'

1. The argument that realistic novels are actually fantasies, because they pretend to a omniscient control over life, and that fantasies are realistic, in their honest admission of their fictional status, is developed in Paul Coates' The Realist Fantasy: Fiction and Reality since 'Clarissa' (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

manner of death. (Murphy, p. 12) The strength of literary tradition made it hard to resist the temptation to give characters a past, a properly named and located personality, even motives. Comedy is itself a kind of subversion, however, and the realms of Murphy's mind are detached from the banal limitations of time and place.

Earlier still, More Pricks Than Kicks was full of the geographical and cultural density of Dublin life, and somewhat snobbish references to Paris which Beckett's then intense familiarity with Dubliners and Ulysses no doubt encouraged. It is significant, however, that the boldest and most forward-looking story, "Echo's Bones", that was considered unacceptable for the tastes of the time, leaves the Dublin setting behind to float off into a post-mortem dream fantasy. Its surreal intensity and Dante-esque references have more in common with the later work in French; only in French could Beckett bring such a narrative method to artistic maturity.

Watt combines the sparingly described and unnamed setting, still based on Dublin, with a comic unreality that completely undercuts it. Mr. Knott's house is somehow unlocatable, dream-like, although it is connected to the city by a railway line and with local commerce by the pseudo-bourgeois routines

of the household (meal-times, charity, clothing, servants' duties). It remains a place floating in its own continuum of time and space. As Beckett moves into French with the Nouvelles and Mercier et Camier, he experiments even more radically with settings and referential details freed from their moorings, culturally unfixed because they refuse to add up to a stable mirroring of a recognisable part of the real world. (1)

Of all the characters of this period, Mercier and Camier are the best anchored. They have no doubts about their whereabouts: they are in their own country, at "home", even if for a reason that remains obscure they are forced out onto the roads in all weathers.

Ils restèrent chez eux, Mercier et Camier, ils eurent cette chance inestimable. Ils n'eurent pas à affronter, avec plus ou moins de bonheur, des mœurs étrangères, une langue, un code, un climat et une cuisine bizarres, dans un décor n'ayant que peu de rapport, au point de vue de la ressemblance, avec celui auquel l'âge tendre d'abord, ensuite l'âge mûr, les avaient endurcis.
(Mercier et Camier, p. 7)

1. Two strikingly different analyses of this progression away from a realistic setting are Ludovic Janvier's essay "Lieu dire" in L'Herne: Samuel Beckett, pp. 193-205, and an unpublished Ph.D. thesis by A.M. Headlam, "Le Décor dans l'oeuvre de Beckett", Université de Nice, 1978.

Already the contrast of cultures raises a comically detached attitude to the society in which Mercier and Camier live. The key word here is "endurcis"; experience at home is superior to that in foreign climes only in the sense that Mercier and Camier are better adapted to its rigours, having been hardened to it earlier in life.

The view given of that culture establishes it, as Vivian Mercier has pointed out, beyond doubt as "Ireland" though Beckett is careful not to name, and thus ^{to} limit it. (1) Geography, history (the Masse memorial: Mercier et Camier, p. 167), currency (shillings, pennies, half-crowns), measurement (miles, not kilometres) and even the allegiance -- then -- to the British Empire (the young Camier having enjoyed "des garden-parties tous les jours" for a Boer War victory: Mercier et Camier, p. 121) all contribute to the impression. Beckett's familiar humour at the expense of Celtic revivalism recurs in the description of the ex-soldier who wishes he had devoted himself "à la langue gaélique, au

1. Vivian Mercier, Beckett/Beckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 41. Mercier insists that the novel is "set in Ireland", yet he himself goes on to mention the "Square-St.-Ruth" and say "Admittedly, there is no square in Dublin or anywhere else in Ireland named after Maréchal St. Ruth" (pp. 41-42). It is surely better to see Beckett deliberately blending features of Ireland and France precisely so that limitation to one national setting will be impossible.

raffermissement de sa foi et aux trésors d'un folklore unique au monde" (Mercier et Camier, p. 18). Yet the reader must be careful not to "throttle" the island into Ireland. To do so would be to make more mundane a deliberately surprising society and environment. The Square St.-Ruth has curiously Parisian characteristics (Mercier et Camier, p. 11). Camier's notebook - a private detective's records on those he is to locate - includes the names "Joly, Lise" and "Gérald, Gérald" as well as "Hamilton, Gertrude" (Mercier et Camier, pp. 88-89; the passage is omitted in English). "Georges" becomes "George" in English, but "M. Conaire" (M. Connor?) turns into "Mr. Conaire": Mercier et Camier, p. 101; Mercier and Camier (1). Obviously Mercier and Camier, with their strange mixture of affection and viciousness, like the other characters of the novel, are to be seen as typical of a wider circle of humanity. Their names are satisfying because they are possible in Ireland (being, like Beckett, of Huguenot stock) (2) but sound French. In the title, at least, Beckett is able to acknowledge the bicultural origins of the narrative.

Similar blends of material drawn from two cultures at different levels occur in the Nouvelles. Names suggest English speakers,

1. Samuel Beckett, Mercier and Camier (London: Calder & Boyars, 1974), p. 62.

2. Mercier, Beckett/Beckett, p. 42.

especially in La fin: M. Weir (La fin, p. 76), Madame Maxwell (La fin, p. 78), the narrator's tutor Ward (La fin, p. 97). Suite, the earlier version, contained a reference to London: "Si j'avais été à Londres, ou dans ses environs, j'aurais cherché quelque chose dans le quartier Euston-King's Cross-Islington" (Suite, p. 111). The Premier amour narrator actually makes a point of mentioning his non-French background. (1) Yet there are many ways in which culture common to both countries, and by extension to others, joins with literary allusions and references to give the reader of the French original a sense of the familiar and alien being mingled together. Catholicism, Greek or Turkish landladies, cathedrals, shop windows, sheds, town walls swim into focus in the various narratives without any need for national identification. The logic of the Beckettian realm, brought to clearer focus in the trilogy and in En attendant Godot, demands what he will later call a "vaguening" of mimetic detail; (2) the Nouvelles show the exploration of such a method in its earlier stages.

Le calmant contains the most daring experimentation in this as in so many respects. The "post-mortem" context (the text

1. See p. 27.

2. Gontarski, The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, p. 76.

begins: "Je ne sais plus quand je suis mort": Le calmant, p. 39) allows Beckett to begin the full dissolving of two worlds into each other, involving elements of both in a fluid, nightmarish place of alienated consciousness. The Porte des Bergers and the fortifications, the port and Sunday quiet, the "boucherie chevaline" (Le calmant, p. 65), the cathedral suggest aspects of an archetypal human settlement, a place whose solidity is collapsing in the narrator/protagonist's consciousness. He is truly lost, falling out of a world where the anchors of identity, name, culture, language, and home are secure. Even his request to be directed to the Shepherd's Gate, however carefully rephrased, allows him no release from his wandering (Le calmant, pp. 55-56). Only in a much more comforting world would the "Shepherd" (whose cathedral the protagonist enters without enlightenment) succour him or give him direction.

The direct use of a setting specifically named as Paris in "Eleuthéria" would be startling except for the fact that, as Fletcher and Spurling have suggested, Beckett's first trials of a new medium often involve a stepping backward into more conventional literary techniques. (1) Yet "Eleuthéria" replaces the

1. John Fletcher and John Spurling, Beckett: A Study of his Plays (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 44.

extreme "unhoused" qualities of the Nouvelles with a satirical, unreal representation of Paris on stage, a Paris in whose middle-class salons most peculiar dialogues occur. Its links in terms of setting are with More Pricks Than Kicks and Murphy rather than with the immediately preceding prose. The details such as Victor's food-forays to the "poubelles" of "Passy" ("Eleuthéria", p. 12) only heighten the unreality. If "Eleuthéria" were to be translated into English it would run into the same problems as Murphy in French: how closely to represent the existing setting while translating the dialogue. The exaggerated obsession with illness and social niceties is vaguely reminiscent of Jules Romains' Knock, in which the ingenious doctor reveals to a whole region that they have been ill without knowing it. All the social detail provided (which also includes references to art shows and other staples of Parisian cultural life) seems to be given mainly as counter-weight to Victor's disengaged, emptied realm, the bare room where he has taken refuge, and in order to be exposed as false when the apparently well-made play falls apart: a representative spectator climbs on stage to offer his comments and criticisms on what he has seen ("Eleuthéria", p. 98), and the prompter gives up in disgust and throws away the script ("Eleuthéria", p. 102). The experiment is at least an interesting one; Pirandello-like, Beckett establishes a certain kind of mimetic contract only

to break it and expose the actors as actors on a stage. En attendant Godot, of course, will do this with greater subtlety and restraint.

Perhaps as a result of what "Eleuthéria" proved, the problems inherent in using real reference to place and time, Beckett's work after this point moves more firmly to the exclusion of all fixed and solid place-naming. Any place-names slipped in begin to be as suspect as other aspects of the game of imagination. Molloy contains occasional hints of place and culture but the place-names are comic and clearly artificial; they form part of the weaving of imagery, forms and themes. Although Molloy is a resident of Bally (Molloy, p. 207) (Dublin's Irish name is Baile Athe Cliath, the town of the hurdle ford), this association is not available to most non-specialist readers. In English "bally" was a war-time euphemism used in swearing, instead of "bloody". "Bally"'s immediate effect in the French text is that of a comical-sounding and slightly unreal town, an effect compounded when Moran explains that his area is called "Shit" and the environs "Shitbaba". Cross-lingual games and a simple love of playing with sound combine with references to the peat-bog, clay or mud of Ireland which has featured so much in its literature this

century. (1) "Bloody shit" would be an alternative compounding of the world where Mollooy and Moran live.

The mud, dung or excrement of Comment c'est thus has clear prefiguring at this earlier stage. The "Molloy" manuscript even contains a long, outrageous passage about the collected excrement of the town's dutiful residents being calculated annually and used to grow magnificent vegetables in the surrounding region. (2) Obidil (an anagram for "libido"), ^{Molloy (F), p. 251, (E) (p. 162)} who appears in Molloy, figures in the cancelled section as an inspector (this time called Odibil) appointed to ensure that quotas are kept up ("Molloy", Ms. III, p. 136). In the printed text, when Moran (the Moran of such careful habits and routine) sets out to look for Molloy his explanation is singularly incongruous: "le soir, quand je me promenais, histoire de prendre le frais, en dehors de Shit, c'est le frais de Shitbaba que je prenais, et nul autre" (Molloy, p. 207). If the reader

1. Such as Patrick Kavanagh's famous opening line in "The Great Hunger" (1942), "Clay is the word and clay is the flesh", in Collected Poems (London: Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1972), p. 34; and, more recently, poems such as Seamus Heaney's "Digging" in Death of a Naturalist (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 13-14, and "Bann Clay" and "Bogland" in Door into the Dark (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 53-54 and 55-56. Beckett was looking forward to such images when, in Recent Irish Poetry, in 1934, he praised the "smell of dung" over "the attar of (...) rose" (p. 73).

2. The "Molloy" manuscript is now at the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. It consists of four note-books (see Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, pp. 68-69, for further details).

of the French text were to be totally ignorant of the English equivalent of "merde" this comic aside ("histoire de prendre le frais") would lose much of its point.

The distance between "Bally" and "Shit" is not one to be measured in terms the real world would understand, but in the gradual transformation of Moran, precise, rational, very much the Cartesian Frenchman, into his alter ego, the physically filthy and mentally chaotic Molloy. Not only Moran's name makes the point; when he mentions the "Irish stew" made for his fateful, belated Sunday dinner, he commends the country "dont il a popularisé le nom" (Molloy, p. 151). Presumably, then, he is not in it. Although Martha and the Elsner sisters seem to belong in Ireland, Jacques' son follows a French educational system (history and geography being taught together), and learns that "Condom est arrosé par la Balise" (Molloy, p. 218). Moran speaks of the "éditions Hachet", bilingually switching in the French text to the English version of "Hachette" (Molloy, p. 203). All logic of place and culture is turned upside-down, and much of the novel's remarkable power comes from the juxtaposition of opposing worlds. As long as Moran remains careful, bourgeois and analytical he is closer to the educated levels of society in the country of Descartes; as he descends to his victim's level, becoming a victim himself, he grows closer to the

"Shit" which in the wrong language names his own town. What Beckett does here marks a new departure in the tradition of the novel, one which "le nouveau roman" in France was quick to reinforce. Authority is abandoned through the mingling of realism and fantasy. In Beckett's case the detachment necessary to do this is largely an outcome of a relativist, bicultural and bilingual consciousness working beneath the surface of the adopted language.

The blending of cultures, of French and Irish material, continues. Malone meurt develops the techniques used in Molloy, though the Molloy/Moran contrast is more explicit than the Sapo/ Macmann stories which Malone, a wilful and unreliable author, decides to tell. In his own person, Malone speaks as someone who knows Ireland, has lived in London, travelled in Germany, and now decays gradually in his room in a place which, while unnamed, allows him to allude to the corridors of the "métropolitain" (Malone meurt, p. 117). The unnamable will be more specific in his reference to Parisian streets and a particular restaurant outside which he lives. Malone's feast days are French, but adapt quite readily to other Catholic countries. What is intriguing is the "placing", as far as it goes, of Sapo and Macmann. Sapo seems to be growing up in a place with some resemblance to France; he alternates between his parents' middle-class world and the earthier one

of big Louis the pig-killer. (1) Macmann exists in a more obviously Irish realm as his name and ancestral associations suggest; the "St. Jean-de-Dieu" asylum (Malone meurt, p. 155) is a Dublin landmark, earlier mentioned in Murphy (Murphy p. 34). Glasnevin cemetery is not only mentioned but explained, in a unique authorial footnote reminiscent of Watt's mock-academic character: "Nom d'un cimetière local très estimé" (Malone meurt, p. 168). This gives the impression that the novel is a translation from the Anglo-Irish, the translator kindly providing his French reader with the information necessary for a full appreciation of the reference.

Thus the author, Malone, has created a middle-class "French" boy who turns as an adult (if he and Macmann are one; it is only one improbability of a highly improbable fiction) into an Irish "clochard" who is very much at odds with his own society. The translation that one feels occurring in each direction is a translation of aspects of lived experience into the opposite language in art. When Beckett comes to self-translate a text as bilingually conscious as this, the further transition into English is just another

1. In the English text, but not the French, the "Louis" family becomes the "Lamberts"; Louis Lambert is the name of one of Balzac's novels. Beckett's cross-cultural joke can only be fully appreciated when the two texts are set side by side.

alternation, another shift in the attempt to speak the unspeakable.

En attendant Godot, seen in the context of the surrounding prose, appears as a condensing and embodying on stage of many central concerns. It is at the same time distinctive because of its warmer human interactions and its symbolic use of stage space, time and action. Gone are the complicated decor and physically split stage of "Eleuthéria", the ponderous satire on Parisian society. Instead -- in a tradition blending medieval moralities, poetic drama, silent film comedy and music hall (all of which have a strong inter-cultural dimension) -- the play frees its actors and its audience from any pretence: they are in a theatre which is at the same time a place of ritual and symbolic acting-out of human needs and fears. Using both Irish and French resources centrally, the play rises to the level of the universal; the characters' names suggest an international cast, and the emotions at the heart of the work ^{are} ~~of~~ those of any race and any tongue. En attendant Godot is crucial to L'innommable, written just afterwards, because it shows to what degree conventional settings can be thrown away; in prose, Beckett will go even further than on stage.

In L'innommable the binary patterns are finally broken,

and fluidity of place is total; a controllable world is left behind and neither language's system of reference or culture can have relevance or provide identity. References to places (Sumatra, Tunisia, Aubervilliers, Place Pigalle, Battersea) are deliberately haphazard intrusions. Any referential relationship with a stable world has broken down, so that the only level of mimesis left (even the idea of the writer is abandoned as a fiction) is a gasping, compulsively inventive voice, pluralised and fragmented.

The speaker who slips in and out of his two semi-focussed characters, Mahood and Worm, may be said to be, on one level, in Paris during the early stages of the work. Yet he himself, speaking as "Worm" (though all names are unreliable), can forget and believe on impulse that he is in the island where Mahood wanders. "Qu'est-ce qui m'interdit d'y voir une preuve suffisante de ma présence réelle, rue Brancion" (L'innommable, p. 114) is a futile question in the circumstances since there is no way except through faith that a real presence can be established in a self-exposing fiction (the theological debate about transubstantiation is echoed comically here); yet to the word "Brancion" the speaker adds "drôle d'île". A funny kind of "island"; in fact the "île" has slipped in from Mahood's level of narrative where it

belongs: "L'île, je suis dans l'île, je n'ai jamais quitté l'île, pauvre de moi. J'avais cru comprendre que je passais ma vie à faire le tour du monde, en colimaçon. Erreur, c'est dans l'île que je ne cesse de tourner" (L'innommable, p. 80). Rue Brancion is obviously not in the island; the tensions of partially retained, partially rejected mimesis are clear to "l'innommable" himself. "Le tour du monde" and the island remain necessary poles of movement and stasis.

The techniques Beckett uses in L'innommable have their closest parallels not in fiction but in painting. The work resembles a collage of allusions, images, references, voices; it is distinctly a creation in "post-picassian" syntax. The dramatic impact of cubism and later developments of modern painting had a huge effect on Beckett's work, as his art criticism testifies; the Three Dialogues with George Duthuit have become a mine of useful statements which can be transferred to his own art. L'innommable is a remarkable transposition of painterly techniques into a medium fundamentally different from visual art because of the mixed, utilitarian and inescapably signifying qualities of words. As well as freeing its author from mimesis explosively, it makes use of a post-surrealist freeing of the unconscious, associations of word and image being permitted to proliferate without constraint. Fiction, psychological outpouring, autobiography, linguistic commentary,

all combine with a deliberate exposure of the author as an artificer at the peak of his expressive powers yet with nothing to invent. He uses these powers to show language as the construct of a human community, and fiction as an illusion bred by coupling words.

L'innommable is at the heart of Beckett's artistic mastery of bilingual and bicultural awareness, and as he told Jérôme Lindon in 1951, the part of the trilogy that meant the most to him. (1) The interplay of two languages in his own mind is not explicitly stated for the reader, yet is ever-present, English haunting the French with a constant sense of otherness. Its presence-in-absence is like Malone's sense of the dark side of the moon behind its changing face. The level of mental control, of imaginative release combined with formal coherence, is a triumph for Beckett, at last fully master of his dual world, and allows him the conquest of an area beyond binary conflict and the neat contraries of reason; an area of the formless, the linguistically unknown.

1. Letter to Jérôme Lindon, published in "Première rencontre", L'Herne: Samuel Beckett. Beckett wrote: "Je suis très content que vous ayez envie d'arriver rapidement à L'innommable. Comme je vous l'ai dit, c'est à ce dernier travail que je tiens le plus" (p. 96). The letter is reprinted in Disjecta, p. 104.

"Language" freed from "languages": bilingualism as liberation

The liberation of experience into new artistic forms, and the fusing of two cultures into a single transitional realm come together with an iconoclastic attitude to the language of literature in Beckett's post-war works. The context in which his confirmation as a bilingual artist occurred deserves to be considered above all in relation to his language, a language which, while he was experimenting in it, was in the throes of an extraordinary period of self-questioning of its own.

The implications of Beckett's use of French at a crucial moment in its history are what I, ^{now} wish to turn to. English has not received, as has French, a series of catastrophic blows to its self-confidence in the twentieth century. Most relevant of these, and a fruitful subject for exploration by artists even recently, was the linguistic shock of German occupation. The humiliations in Paris of German street signs covering the French, German news reports and film-shows, the imperious commands of the occupying soldiers, are vividly illustrated in a recent film by Edgardo Cozarinsky, La Guerre d'un Seul Homme (1981), in which passages from the diaries of Ernst Junger--German writer, Francophile, and somewhat reluctant officer under Hitler's occupying generals--are spoken to the visual accompaniment of Nazi news-reels and films of the time.

The unusual separation of picture and voice achieves a powerful statement of linguistic alienation, while the reality of domination of one culture by another is made brutally clear. The novella Le Silence de la Mer by Vercors (founder, of course, of Les Editions de Minuit) similarly presents the bitter and violent shock of an imposed language and culture. Communication becomes something to be resisted instead of shared positively. To communicate (or collaborate) with the police, for example, takes on a far darker tone when the policeman is a Gestapo officer, not an amiable local (if stupid) member of the Civic Guard, as in Murphy. The idea of language as "lies" has far more force when a huge propaganda machine is exerting its powers to win over a conquered but only in part conciliatory population. Beckett is the very contrary of an overtly political writer, yet his Resistance work, suitably in counter-propaganda, has an extraordinary relevance for his concerns as a literary artist. Both an internal and external observer of the trauma of his adopted language, having studied it historically and plunged into the masterpieces of its literature, as well as being a professional translator, he was, during the war years, in a peculiarly good position to sense and articulate imaginatively the implications of this upheaval of the outer world. (1) The conflict intensified

1. For a long time the war was curiously absent as a consideration in Beckett criticism, although it is undoubtedly the crucial catalyst in his artistic development. This is less true in recent criticism, and S.E. Gontarski, in The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, says firmly: "War is latent in much of Beckett's work sitting as part of the subtext, the unstated" (p. 35).

the need -- expressed even before the war -- for a testing of language, what in L'innommable is felicitously called a "procès-verbal" (L'innommable, p. 169). The "trial" of language had become a serious commitment at the level of form, syntax and semantics in the estranged English of Watt. It continued in the French which allowed him to combine that commitment with a new language undergoing a very different stage of its cultural history.

Yet it is not only the upheaval of the outer world, the shock to a once secure language-use, that helps to provide a cultural context for the French works up to and including L'innommable. Bilingualism itself, a bilingualism intensified and changed by the number of refugees and expatriates in post-war Paris, deserves consideration as part of the surrounding reality to which these works respond even as they move to a universal level of artistic purpose. (1) Bilingualism can affect, directly or indirectly, all members of a language-circle. In the everyday life of a unilingual speaker, language succeeds, succeeds so completely that it is not consciously thought about at all. In one word-association test, bilinguals associated the word "language" with "speaking" while unilinguals

1. Bilingualism continues to arouse interest among French critics and theorists, as is illustrated by Piérssens, La tour de Babil, and the collection of talks by Bennani et al., Du bilinguisme (Paris: Denöel, 1985).

associated it with "a specific foreign language": their own language remains so far beneath the level of consciousness that it is not identified as an entity at all. (1) Yet descriptive linguistics can show, and daily experience acknowledges, that there are many circumstances where confusions of meaning occur. Exhaustion or distress can affect speech, lead to words being mixed up, misused, or mispronounced. Different dialects heard in unusual surroundings can cause amusement. Word-usage differs enormously, for example between users of French in France and in other Francophone countries. Injury to the tongue, throat and lips distorts pronunciation. Foreigners in a settled unilingual area are constantly exposed to embarrassment when their pronunciation does not approximate closely enough to local convention, or when they use a word that is old-fashioned or of an inappropriate register, or has a secondary obscene meaning they are unaware of. The more strongly-rooted and confident the language-group, and the less it is exposed to such oddities by outsiders, the more its members may be inclined to laugh at or show hostility to an "eccentric", someone who cannot fully enter the circle.

1. This test was the work of Dorothy Tilden Spoerl: "Bilinguality and Emotional Adjustment", Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 38 (1946), pp. 37-57. It is quoted in Weinreich, Languages in Contact, p. 120.

These experiences in the realm of communication can all be found chronicled by Beckett's linguistically nervous or defeated protagonists. In Suite/ La fin the speaker tells us of his communication with his landlady:

Elle avait un accent bizarre. Moi-même je parlais d'un drôle de façon, à force d'assimiler les voyelles et de supprimer les consonnes. (Suite, p. 112) (1)

The Premier amour narrator, as well as focussing on his own pronunciation, (2) shows his sensitivity to register:

"elle venait de l'acheter, pardon, de l'acquérir, à une vente de charité" (Premier amour, p. 44). He is also intrigued by words themselves: "infranchissable. Un bien grand mot, infranchissable" (Premier amour, p. 42). His language-use is so infrequent that the structures have outlived the necessary foundation for successful utterance:

J'avais si peu l'habitude de parler qu'il m'arrivait de temps en temps de laisser échapper, par la bouche, des phrases impeccables au point de vue grammatical mais entièrement denuées, je ne dirai pas de signification, car à bien les examiner elles en avaient une, et quelquefois plusieurs, mais de fondement. (Premier amour, p. 46)

Mercier and Camier, especially Camier, are language-conscious to an extreme degree, repeatedly quibbling over usage and

1. La fin is slightly different: "Elle avait un accent bizarre. Mais moi aussi, à force d'assimiler les voyelles et de supprimer les consonnes" (La fin, p. 81).

2. See p. 27 .

meaning; it is significant that the manuscript of "Les Bosquets de Bondy", when compared with the printed version, has fewer of the self-reflexive, language-focussing comments. (1) Again and again the published version gives a comic but carefully calculated reminder that this language is odd, or externalised, something to look at as well as to look through:

Si on s'assoyait, cela m'a vidé.
 Tu veux dire s'asseyait, dit Mercier.
 Je veux dire s'assoyait, dit Camier.
 Assoyons-nous, dit Mercier. (Mercier et Camier, p. 15)

Here in miniature is the process of language-making at work; by accepting Camier's use of the older verb form, Mercier makes a new linguistic contract with him. The development of language depends on consensus among its users.

The same technique continues, growing deeper in significance as the surface comedy declines. The Vitrier in "Eleuthéria", a curiously menacing figure in some respects, declares that he doesn't talk like a Glazier, corrects Jacques' use of the subjunctive, and also remarks "il n'y a que les mots qui m'intéressent" ("Eleuthéria", p. 63). Molloy is full of language-questioning, from Molloy's superbly ludicrous dialogue

1. "Les Bosquets de Bondy" is now in the Samuel Beckett Collection at the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. See Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, for details (p p66-67).

with the policeman (Molloy, pp. 28-32) to Moran's contemplation of the dance of the bees, a highly structured language which is one of the most complex in the animal kingdom. (1) Its value for him is as something he "can study all [his] life, and never understand" (Molloy (E), p. 170), and his description of it a perfect encapsulation of the linguistic system itself, the selection and combination of certain elements of the dance "où devaient intervenir d'autres déterminants dont je n'avais pas la moindre idée" (Molloy, p. 262).

In Malone meurt the continually revived awareness that this is an author writing adds a special emphasis to the connections and differences between the written and spoken word. Malone describes his communication with the woman who looks after him in a way reminiscent of the La fin protagonist communicating with his landlady:

J'ai fini quand même par les lui faire comprendre,
mes besoins et mes volontés. J'ai eu du mal. Elle

1. Barbara Strang, in Modern English Structure, gives a list of the criteria linguists have defined for a true language. These include "duality" (having a sound-and grammatical-system, or equivalent), productivity, arbitrariness, interchangeability of transmitters and receivers, specialisation, displacement, and cultural transmission. All except one are present to some extent in bee-dancing, the exception being "cultural transmission" (the property of being learnt by new users, not transmitted genetically). Barbara Strang, Modern English Structure (London: Edward Arnold, 1962), p. 13.

ne comprenait pas. Jusqu'au jour où j'ai trouvé les termes, les accents, adaptés à son cas.
(Malone meurt, pp. 18-19)

Sapo's parents employ a much simpler semiotic system, it seems, than that of Moran's bees: "Ils usaient de la parole un peu comme le chef de train de ses drapeaux, ou de sa lanterne" (Malone meurt, p. 25). Macmann's best moments as a communicator are the result of sexual attraction: "Il fit alors d'incontestables progrès dans l'exercice de la parole, et apprit en peu de temps à placer aux bons endroits les oui, non, encore et assez qui entretiennent l'amitié." (Malone meurt, p. 163)

Yet it is above all in L'innommable that the bilingual artist's acutely developed awareness of language as a subject for discourse, not just a medium of discourse, develops its fullest, most disturbing form. French is the specific human tongue explored, yet there is a real sense in which L'innommable could have been written in any language, drawing on its semantic and syntactic peculiarities. All allegiance to a single focus has gone and relativism is total; this has made L'innommable a crucially important literary text in post-modernist art as well as a treasure house for philosophical and linguistic analyses. Much of the discussion of it deals in negatives: the destruction of character, of plot, of setting, of mimesis, of authority. Yet this impression of its iconoclasm must also

face the subsequent question: what does it achieve, what does it -- positively -- express? Art cannot only deal in negation and destruction; it is an act of making. All the views of L'innommable that go "through" its language to analyse it philosophically tend to obscure its literary qualities. It is a bold, tragi-comic, and poetically inexhaustible tour-de-force of literature, extending the range of what prose has dared to present as imaginative experience, offering to its readers a creation which is both art object and communicative act. Its imaginative realm has not been familiar, but is becoming more so as artists explore indeterminacy, relativism, aleatory art, new theories of cognition of understanding of psychology, and the implications of juxtaposing different cultural materials. (1) Ultimately L'innommable does not destroy mimesis but extends it, allowing a new realist fantasy, or fantastic realism, in exploring the human brain and its generative power. It does on the page what Lucky's extraordinary outburst, in En attendant Godot, does on stage: exposes human knowledge in

1. See Perloff, The Poetics of Indeterminacy, and Christopher Butler, After the Wake: An essay on the Contemporary Avant-Garde (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) for discussions of some of these developments in literature and the other arts.

a raw, unformed state, jumbles up the resources of the mind in search of a deeper truth.

The "prison-house of language", in Fredric Jameson's phrase, (1) is not necessarily a prison, for it can be lived in comfortably and creatively for a whole lifetime; it can also be escaped by a move into another language. Beckett goes a stage further, succeeding in stepping imaginatively into a realm liberated from all prisons, as far as artistic experience is concerned -- and only returning voluntarily to either "prison", French or English, in order to translate the experience into art for a public on both sides of his language barrier. His use in more recent years of self-instructing manuscript notes to "emotionalize" (2) and "vaguen" (3) material bears out his desire to provoke a response which words cannot explain. So how does the image of the prison appear in L'innommable, a work of literature devoted to an ideal of liberation? The text gives ample evidence for the idea of a prison of isolation, an inability in the speaker to conform to the

1. Fredric Jameson, The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

2. Samuel Beckett, "Notes on the Script" in Film: by Samuel Beckett (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 61.

3. See p.222 .

language-circle's normal usage. Two counter-balancing concepts seem at work here: his eccentricity (the satellite that circles the planet, the lonely figure in strange territory, the victim surrounded by his enemies) and his awareness of being both in and not in a circle of language. "Peut-être que cette fois-ci encore je ne ferai que chercher ma leçon, sans pouvoir la dire, tout en m'accompagnant dans une langue qui n'est pas la mienne" (L'innommable, p. 39). Later, after abundant references of similar kinds, the speaker loses all restraint:

On lance la voix, elle se perd dans les voûtes, elle appelle ça des voûtes, c'est peut-être le firmament, c'est peut-être l'abîme, ce sont des mots, elle parle d'une prison, après tout je veux bien, assez grande pour tout un peuple, pour moi tout seul (...) nous aurions vécu, été libres un moment ... (L'innommable, p. 251)

Yet again the characteristic opposition appears, "prison-libre". The intensity of the voice, its conviction, allows the reader to enter a realm rarely if ever so clearly described in literature before, a prison big enough for an entire people, small enough for a single individual. Le dépeupleur, like Comment c'est, will extend the symbolism into even more disturbing visual representation, the circle in Le dépeupleur, the chain in Comment c'est. The contrast between movement and fixity in the passage above emphasises the idea of linguistic territory, and heightens the paradoxes: able to

share the language given by the voice, the speaker nevertheless believes the voice to be external (it is the voice that names things, the "voûtes" for example). The speaker speculates on the idea of not being verbally alone, imagines the people projecting their voice(s) to him, but no; "nous" is an impossible pronoun. He is alone in a public linguistic prison, and carries himself back to the here and now: "il n'y a qu'ici, il n'y a pas deux endroits, il n'y a pas deux prisons, c'est mon parloir, c'est un parloir" (L'innommable, p. 252). "Parlour" and "speaking-place" combine in the word; he is inescapably both alone and with others in language.

A text such as L'innommable would be quite impossible in an unilingual context, a literary tradition securely committed to psychological realism, social detail and an anti-metaphysical tendency. Whether rightly or not, that is how Beckett saw the literature of England in the 1930s, and he knew -- as the Axel Kaun letter showed -- that his own goals in art were utterly different. His need for a context acutely aware of the implications of multilingual experience is one of the most important reasons why Beckett's move to French was necessary, and why it was such a liberation. The Unnamable is still an eccentric work in English in spite of its power; L'innommable in French has a genuine context in a particular branch of the post-War European tradition. Yet for the reader

who simply allows the text, in either language, to lead onwards, to give up even attempts at story-telling, at describing Mahood or Worm, or the massed "they" persecuting the speaker, the ideas of a master, there is a tremendous emotional power in the novel's climax. Paragraphs, sentences, phrasal groups have collapsed in sequence, until the syntax is a clustering of gasped words, separated compulsively by commas. The speaker arrives at a whirlpool of repetition, losing the forward-moving pattern of syntax in a way that corresponds to Watt's syntactic sequences but goes far deeper in emotional terror:

Jamais que moi, qu'une parcelle de moi,
 reprise, perdue, manquée, des mots, je suis
 tous ces mots, tous ces étrangers, cette
 poussière de verbe, sans fond où se poser,
 sans ciel où se dissiper, se rencontrant
 pour dire, se fuyant pour dire, que je les suis
 tous, (...) que je suis tout autre chose, une
 chose muette, dans un endroit dur, vide, clos,
 sec, net, noir, où rien ne bouge, rien ne parle,
 et que j'écoute, et que j'entends, et que je
 cherche, comme une bête née en cage de bêtes
 nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes
 nées en cage de bêtes nées en cage de bêtes
 nées en cage de bêtes nées et mortes en cage nées
 et mortes en cage de bêtes... (L'innommable, p. 204)

The vision of an endless cycle of generations, animals born and dying in the same cage their ancestors were born and died in, beings trapped in the prison-house of language, is a crisis point for the whole post-war period, and a starting

point for Comment c'est. The fighter against language goes into this whirlpool and emerges, shaken but determined, to the novel's final section, which comes to terms as far as will ever be possible with what language is. The speaker abandons all excuses, all attempts to blame others or to hide behind other voices. Language, he has grasped, is no more than a screen between self and world, like the membranes of the ear (L'innommable, p. 196). It is neutral, not antagonistic, and instead of being used, uses the speaker so long as he resists silence.

The language acquired by a child, the mother tongue, has a control over the imagination far deeper than levels of rational analysis. The language learned as a young adult, when it becomes as powerful as Beckett's French, is one which, while it may be used on an intuitive basis, remains a language which had a beginning, a language with parameters and structures, rules in books and conventions that can be relied on. Beckett has found in bilingualism, maintaining both languages rather than passing from one to the other definitively, a special artistic and linguistic consciousness. Bilingualism has allowed him to do what he spoke of to Axel Kaun, to go through language to the darkness beyond, the irrational. His choice of French was indeed a liberation, a freeing of experience from either language as a prison, from

any language's self-belief as a world-view with a monopoly on truth (the point of view of the Nazis about German). In "Eleuthéria" Victor, Beckett's most coherent but least convincing character, a post-war solipsist in the analytical mode, explains his desire to leave the circle of his origins and his parents' world as follows:

Je ne serais jamais libre. (Pause) Mais je
me sentirai sans cesse le devenir. (Pause)
Ma vie, je vais vous dire à quoi je l'userai;
à frotter mes fers l'un contre l'autre.
("Eleuthéria", p. 128)

Beckett's own bilingualism and the cultural experiences it blends become in the art he created between 1945 and 1950 a liberating instrument. By rubbing two "irons" against each other, he develops a tool with which to break down the prison walls. The interpenetration of languages occurring because of the political and technological conditions of the post-war world makes his bilingual consciousness an increasingly appropriate reflection of the new reality developing around him.

CHAPTER V. SELF-TRANSLATION

1951-1958

Beckett's bilingual activity changed and intensified in the 1950s; his entirely French writing gave way to rapid alternations between his two languages. This seems to have occurred not because of any inner change of priorities, nor because of a dissatisfaction with French, but because of his sudden and remarkable success, and other changes in his professional life. En attendant Godot, Molloy, and Malone meurt altered his position drastically in the space of just a few years, by giving him a public status, and still more important, an audience, first in the French world and then in the English-speaking world he had left behind. The "vivifying air" of failure (1) in which he had successfully lived and created gave way to an atmosphere of achievement and fame that was clearly far harder to endure. Yet one of its consequences, the need to self-translate, also led to the only possible escape from such sudden communing with a large audience. Beckett began to develop the habit of alternating between his two language-groups so that he could remain detached, remain

1. In a letter to Alan Schneider in 1956, Beckett wrote: "Success and failure on the public level never mattered much to me, in fact I feel much more at home with the latter, having breathed deep of its vivifying air all my writing life up to the last couple of years..." (On 'Endgame', p. 106).

alone, now that both groups were clamouring at the door. In this chapter I wish to focus on the self-translation, and the "translations" of the self, in more detail.

The public self, and the need to translate, came together in a sequence of writings, self-translations, successes and failures, of considerable complexity. I will briefly summarise this sequence before moving on to look at the two questions which in this period seem central to Beckett as a bilingual artist: why, since self-translation was difficult, time-consuming, and frustrating (according to various comments by Beckett), (1) did he rapidly decide, after some collaborations, to do the vast majority of it unaided? (What made it so important for him not to entrust it to other competent translators?) Secondly, how did the self-translating, occupying so much time during these years, interact with and influence new writing? These two questions involve a somewhat unusual focus on the inter-relationship between prose and drama, successes and failures, translations and new work. Yet they prove the need to consider this period in a fresh perspective, to see it, in a sense, not as a time of relatively rare bursts of new creativity, but as a time when Beckett's imagination -- and above all his exploration of the literary resources of both

1. See, for example, On 'Endgame', p. 107 and 108.

his languages -- were set on new paths that in turn led him towards original forms and perceptions in the late 1950s and early 1960s, what Jean-Jacques Mayoux has called " un changement radical de poétique". (1)

The pattern of writing and translation in these years falls into three periods. From 1950, when he finished L'innommable, until 1952 or 1953, Beckett was still not free of the obligation to translate commercially for financial reasons. In the late 1940s he had done work in both directions: French to English (texts for Duthuit's post-war Transition) (2) and English to French (articles for Reader's Digest, (3) which must have given him wonderful exposure to somewhat banal levels of both languages). During 1950-1951 he translated an anthology of Mexican poetry, compiled by Octavio Paz, for UNESCO, a job he apparently "loathed". (4) In the summer of 1950 he had typed

1. Jean-Jacques Mayoux, "Introduction", Words and Music: Play: Eh Joe/Paroles et Musique: Comédie: Dis Joe (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1972), p. 56.

2. Raymond Federman and John Fletcher, Samuel Beckett: His Works And His Critics (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1970), p. 98.

3. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 360. This information should be treated with some caution, however, as Bair's source is unpublished, and as Federman and Fletcher do not mention it. Beckett may, of course, feel that this level of translation - work does not deserve to be recorded as part of his literary output.

4. Federman and Fletcher, Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics, p. 102.

L'innommable and also attempted to translate sections of Molloy and Malone meurt while in Ireland. His mother's death that same summer may well have had a profound effect on his relationship with a mother tongue from which he had separated himself; the works themselves support the idea that May Beckett's death finally gave Beckett freedom in a language until then dominated by her presence. (1) His fictional experiments continued, however, to be in French: not only the Textes pour rien (1950-1952) (2) but also an unpublished manuscript about characters called Matt, Popol and Emmanuel, the few legible pages of which contain fascinating insights into Beckett's imagination at the time. (3) Two failures in 1952 suggest a creative block, (4) just at the time Beckett's fame began to

1. This argument is made strongly, in a psycho-analytical perspective, by Patrick Casement in "Samuel Beckett's Relationship to his Mother-Tongue", International Review of Psycho-Analysis, 9 (1982), pp. 35-44. It is also considered briefly in Heppenstall, The Fourfold Tradition, p. 257.

2. Samuel Beckett, Textes pour rien, in Nouvelles et textes pour rien, pp. 113-206.

3. This abandoned story is contained in the same notebook as the Textes pour rien, and is now in the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. See Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, p. 108, for further details.

4. Samuel Beckett, abandoned prose passage: "Ici personne ne vient jamais..." and an abandoned story which Beckett explains at the end "ultimately is of how I killed my mother..." (Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, pp. 108-109). These texts are unfortunately not available for consultation.

increase: his purchase of land at Ussy seems an almost symbolic sign of the need to re-establish solitude.

In the second period, from 1953 to 1956, the reassessment of the resources and possibilities of an Anglo-Irish idiom began in earnest. Watt was accepted for publication, twelve years after it was begun; (1) En attendant Godot and the trilogy brought Beckett's name clearly into public focus, and the need for self-translation was accompanied by a desire for involvement in the theatre. Both activities demanded a new, and more explicit, sense of audience. Translating En attendant Godot within the context of the theatre world, La fin and later L'expulsé with Seaver, Molloy with Patrick Bowles, (2) Beckett was suddenly a writer whose use of French and intuitions in what he wrote in French were under direct scrutiny. Early efforts to create a new play in French (3) were balanced against the translating of Malone meurt into English. "Mime de Rêveur", an unpublished mime, seems in such a context to be a clear reaction against the sudden tangle of linguistic interactions into which Beckett's fame had brought him. Wordless, it focusses directly on a solitary figure in a room in a way that has close

1. The unusual circumstances of the acceptance are amusingly described in Richard Seaver's "Beckett vient à l'Olympia Press", L'Herne: Beckett, pp. 97-100.

2. Federman and Fletcher, Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics, p. 76, p. 86 and p. 78.

3. See Ruby Cohn, Just Play, pp. 172-186, and Gontarski, The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, pp. 25-41.

links with many of Beckett's later dramatic works in both languages. (1) Its own wordlessness, though, suggests a desire to go beyond the problems of Babel altogether, to leave both languages behind.

With From an Abandoned Work the title itself wryly informs the reader of an attempt to write in English again which was premature and unsuccessful. Later, before finalising a manuscript called "Pim" as Comment C'est (See Chapter VI) Beckett would publish a section of it as From an Unabandoned Work, proving that the "failure" (in his eyes) of the earlier English prose piece had at last -- through a French original -- found its counter-balancing success. Fin de partie, after considerable struggle, finally found its form as a long one-act play, breaking out of the powerful binarism of En attendant Godot (On 'Endgame', pp. 106-107). Acte sans paroles I, and later II, (2) show the continued desire to move to a theatre from which problems of translation would be mercifully absent (the translation of Fin de partie proving painful and frustrating) yet with a superb twist of Beckettian humour, Acte sans paroles I

1. It is described in Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, p. 110.

2. Samuel Beckett, Acte sans paroles I, Acte sans paroles II, in Comédie et actes divers (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972), pp. 93-101, and pp. 103-109.

reintroduces the task of translation at its most minimal level. The object which tantalises its thirst-stricken protagonist is: "une petite carafe, munie d'une grande étiquette portant l'inscription EAU" (Acte sans paroles I, p. 96). The English substitutes: "A tiny carafe, to which is attached a huge label inscribed WATER". (1) It is the simplest self-translation Beckett has ever had to do, unequivocally successful compared with the compromises necessary in every play-script and line of prose. Yet perhaps, as a poet, Beckett would see even "eau" and "water" as mere approximations of each other's meaning; "mud", after all, was a word "signifiant à peu près 'boue'" in the translation of Watt. (2)

In the third and final stage of these years of deepening bilingual creativity, from 1956 to 1958, Beckett became increasingly productive. In some cases, notably All That Fall, there was an external stimulus, (3) and the re-entry it gave him to working directly with the English language, as well as the first step into a meeting of literature and technology, were both crucial for the future, and very much subjects for awareness in the text. But more influential still was the long-delayed translation of L'innommable, a task of quite extraordinary

1. Samuel Beckett, Act Without Words I, in Collected Shorter Plays, p. 44.

2. See p. 168.

3. See Zilliagus, Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 28.

creative difficulty. It seems to have influenced the nature and form of Krapp's Last Tape and Fragment de Théâtre II —one written in each language —and also led directly to the manuscript "Pim" which would become Beckett's next major project. Beckett also, in these years, began a short stage work in English, "The Gloaming", (1) translated it somewhat later into French, and finally published it in both languages as Fragment de Théâtre I / Rough For Theatre I. (2) It is a fascinating example of revision and translation working together across his two languages, an emblem, like the later Company / Compagnie, of his bilingualism at work.

This rapid overview of the "lean" years after L'innommable, the middle period of coming to terms with the implications of fame, and the period when bilingualism began to work productively and directly for him, provides a basis for the two areas of Beckett's art I want to consider: the self-translating itself, and its effects on new works. Both subjects offer powerful support for the view that Beckett's desire as a dramatist and prose writer (he wrote no poetry at all in this period) was to somehow use languages with a sense of going beyond them, leaving

1. Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, p. 111.

2. Samuel Beckett, Fragment de Théâtre I, in Pas suivi de quatres esquisses, pp. 19-34; Rough For Theatre I, in Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 65-73.

behind the anchors of cultural and historical specificity that seemed to tie them to particular human societies. Beckett spoke with admiration of Jack B. Yeats' paintings in a way he surely wished to apply to his own art, in spite of the fundamental difference between paint and words: "cette grande oeuvre solitaire", he said, has an "étrangeté sans exemple et que laissent entière les habituels recours aux patrimoines, nationaux et autres." (1) Solitude, strangeness, and above all a freedom from national concerns fuelled his own need to bring literary and dramatic art to the international audience and to a universal focus, in a way that for hundreds of years the literary languages of Europe had been resisting in their movement away from the lingua franca of Latin.

The implications of self-translation

Self-translation differs, fundamentally, from literary translation of any other writer's work because the author obviously has the freedom to make changes, to rewrite, to adapt, according to the needs of the new language or of the work itself in its new linguistic environment, or because of a different assessment of its effects. Yet it would be wrong to see it as easy. "The more I go on", Beckett said of Endgame, "the more

1. Samuel Beckett, Hommage à Jack B. Yeats, in Disjecta, p. 148.

I think things are untranslatable." This might seem a curious remark by someone who had by then been a successful translator for many years. Yet Beckett's own artistic terms, his regard for language as a poetic medium in which every detail of image, connotation and rhythm counts, support this statement as a blunt truth. Beckett himself, even more than his friend Bram van Velde, can be seen as the "first whose hands have not been tied by the certitude that expression is an impossible act." (Three Dialogues (with Georges Duthuit), p. 121) It is translation that shows the "impossibility" in action. Translation is therefore central to Beckett's view of language as a medium for art.

Innumerable examples of the decisions he has had to face when self-translating, some of them crucially important, could be used to illustrate this sense of the impossibility of exact translation. Sometimes a passage of considerable significance refuses to transfer successfully, as when Clov, in Fin de partie, turns his telescope on the audience and says: "Je vois... une foule en délire. (Un temps.) Ca alors, pour une longue-vue c'est une longue-vue" (Fin de partie, p. 45). The English is unsatisfactory: "I see... a multitude... in transports... of joy. (Pause.) That's what I call a magnifier." (1)

1. Samuel Beckett, Endgame (London: Faber and Faber, 1958/1964), p. 25.

The English would need to be a pun of some kind on "magnifying glass" to work as well as the French. In at least one production of Endgame which Beckett directed, he omitted the passage altogether, (1) thus changing the play's effect at a crucial level. A weak joke is, obviously, worse than no joke at all, and Beckett may also have thought better of this deliberate acknowledgement that the audience is in fact present. Yet at other times a happy "trouvaille" contextualises an image or idea more successfully. The typically French *pâtisserie*, a "mille-feuille", finds an apt English (or Anglo-Irish) equivalent in "crumpets". In both, shades of Marie-Antoinette's arrogantly ignorant remark in talking of the poor are not far away. "Let them eat cake" is well-known in English as well as in French: "Quand ce n'était pas du pain c'était du mille-feuille" (Fin de partie, p. 91). "When it wasn't bread they wanted it was crumpets" (Endgame, p. 44).

Idioms in the language, used naturally and with a kind of playful alertness by a language-conscious and bilingual author, pose similar challenges: the translator must find and successfully use an alternative idiom. Molloy's play on the

1. The San Quentin Drama Workshop production which toured between London, Oxford and Dublin in May-June 1980. See Beckett's production Notebook (Reading University Library, Ms. 1975).

familiar expression in French, "il n'est pas dans son assiette", has a wonderful comic absurdity: "Je n'étais pas dans mon assiette. Elle est profonde, mon assiette, une assiette à soupe, et il est rare que je n'y sois pas" (Molloy, p. 27). The English makes a valiant attempt to compensate, but the "assiette à soupe" as an image of Molloy's mental space is a sad loss: "I was out of sorts. They are deep, my sorts, a deep ditch, and I am not often out of them" (Molloy (E), p. 20). Elsewhere, though, the closeness of the two languages allows a new pun to compensate for a lost one: "un produit quelconque destiné à m'amollir, à amollir Molloy" (Molloy, p. 70) becomes "something intended to mollify me, to mollify Molloy" (Molloy (E), p. 47). The "moll" element of the verb and name works beautifully in both.

At times the need to recreate a certain effect can raise more far-reaching questions. The "Anglais" in the asylum where Macmann finds himself in Malone meurt seems mad, in the French text, partly because of his insistence on using English. The sense of an isolated language-user in a group speaking another language is of considerable interest in a bilingual perspective: "On l'appelait l'Anglais, quoiqu'il fût loin de l'être, peut-être parce qu'il s'exprimait en anglais de temps en temps" (Malone meurt, p. 205). Like the parrot in Molloy, "l'Anglais" uses language

in a way that involves a considerable proportion of swear-words:

Good-morning, good-morning, good-morning, dit-il, avec un fort accent étranger, tout en lançant autour de lui des regards scrutateurs, fucking awful business this, no, yes? Peut-être avait-il peur de trahir sa pensée. (Malone meurt, p. 206)

Beckett's bilingual consciousness can be seen clearly in the summarising comment, humorous as it is. "Peut-être avait-il peur de trahir sa pensée" makes comic play of a serious linguistic or philosophical dilemma: how words "betray" thinking. L'Anglais' thinking, however, seems limited to greetings and colourful remarks about his circumstances.

What can a translation into English do with such a crosslingual section? The most obvious solution would be to translate the relevant words into French, as with the parrot in Molloy (E) (See Chapter I). Yet Beckett does not do this. Perhaps he prefers not to insult French as he is willing to insult English, by calling one of its speakers mad. Instead he simply combines a somewhat altered suggestion that the character is not from England with a statement (not vividly borne out by illustration on the page but simply asserted) that he has a strong foreign accent: "He was called the Saxon, though he was far from being any such thing." (1) "Good-morning, good-morning, good-

1. Samuel Beckett, Malone Dies, in Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, p. 284.

morning, he said, with a strong foreign accent and darting fearful glances all about him, fucking awful business this, no, yes?" (Malone Dies, p. 284). The consciousness of Babel that runs through Beckett's work is at this point reduced.

But all local problems of equivalence or compensation are part of the larger weaving of the text, the larger effect of language on the stage, and questions of thematic, formal and stylistic coherence. L'innommable, the translation of which Beckett put off as long as he could, is a translator's nightmare in this respect, because it has almost no separable "content" in the normal sense. It works instead through word-echoes, association of ideas, and repetition of key elements, that both formally and semantically build up larger areas of meaning. In one section of the French text of some ten pages, Beckett has the anonymous voice circling around ideas of being trapped, forgotten in language as in some strange dungeon of the mind. The text weaves links between "oubliette", a particularly unpleasant place for a prisoner as its name implies, and "oublier" -- the forgetfulness that is like being trapped in a hole; the need, too, to forget the characters created to try to fill the emptiness: "Ce n'est pas forcément des oubliettes particulières", (L'innommable, p. 168); "C'est à dire qu'on oublie. Des trous, il y en a toujours eu" (L'innommable, p. 168); "Mais il faut oublier

Mahood, on n'aurait jamais dû en parler" (L'innommable, p. 176). In the English the first of these retains the French word: "it is not necessarily an oubliette for one". (1) The second statement disappears. The third becomes: "But it's time Mahood was forgotten, he should never have been mentioned" (The Unnamable, p. 376). Obviously, the connections in the French are lost.

This single sequence of associative word-weaving patterns could be equalled by innumerable others; the English text is forced to stand on its own and, if necessary, compensate with other associations. One of these is to emphasise a Dostoievskian sense of fatality through the title of one of his most famous novels. For: "mais ceci est ma peine, c'est sur ma peine qu'ils me jugent" (L'innommable, p. 167), the English has: "but this is my punishment, my crime is my punishment" (The Unnamable, p. 372).

On a larger scale, such differences confirm that close reading of the two texts will arouse different patterns of association, concept and image; to read both is therefore an extraordinary and enriching — but far from identical — experience.

Patrick Bowles and Beckett's other collaborative translators have testified to his exceptional meticulousness and concern

1. Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable, in Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, p. 372.

when translating. (1) They all obviously benefited hugely in their own artistic and linguistic development from the experience of working with him. But why has he so rarely accepted help, above all in translating from French to English, (2) since the first experiments with Seaver and Bowles? I wish to look briefly at the possible reasons, and the underlying motivation for an active and sustained self-translating activity on Beckett's part from the mid-1950s onwards.

One reason that has been given unites the problems of time and high standards. Beckett found, apparently, that going over other translators' work took longer than doing the job himself. If one compares an early extract of Molloy, translated by Bowles with some participation by Beckett, with the version

1. See page 65, and Bowles' remarks in Ruby Cohn's Samuel Beckett: the Comic Gamut (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), p. 438. Other such testimonies include Richard Seaver's in "Introduction", I can't go on, I'll go on: a Selection from Samuel Beckett's Work (New York: Grove Press, 1976), pp. xxiii-xxvi, and Ludovic Janvier's "Au travail avec Beckett", L'Herne: Samuel Beckett, pp. 137-140. Beckett has also translated with Pierre Leyris, Robert Pinget and Anthony Bonner.

2. It seems that the translations from French to English are those Beckett prefers to do alone; he has been more willing to accept collaborators for the translation of works, such as Watt, From An Abandoned Work, Krapp's Last Tape, All That Fall, and Embers, into French. This may be because of the added linguistic resources the collaborators can bring to the task, or, more simply, because residence in Paris has allowed Beckett to make contact with translators he trusts and respects. In many cases, however, and all his recent work, he has translated alone.

finally published, it is clear that Beckett spent considerable energy and effort in going over the text, always in the direction of increasing the rhythmic beauty and emphasis, the comic energy, the Anglo-Irish flavour (instead of the kind of "international" English in which translations are so often written) and metaphoric power. Thus "like an old fool"(1) becomes "like an old ballocks" (Molloy (E), p. 8) where Beckett's word is far more colourful; "To say they were acquainted, no" (p. 90) becomes "To say they knew each other, no" (Molloy (E), p. 9) where the rhythm is better, and the strong, short English words have an alliterative link. "Towards which too one after the other my soul was straining, unmethodical, distracted" (p. 92) becomes "towards which too my soul was straining, wildly" (Molloy (E), p. 11). "Describing long girations" (p. 92) becomes "turning in slow circles" (Molloy (E), p. 12). It is not that Bowles' version is incorrect, only that it stays closer to the French, and fails to consider the "genius" of the language into which he is translating. Beckett's own creativity may well have been hindered too: seeing someone else's version of a particular passage could well block, in the author's mind, the best

1. Extract from Molloy, trans. Patrick Bowles, Merlin II (Autumn, 1953), p. 89.

creative equivalent drawn instinctively from the target language.

Perhaps even more important, collaborative translation demanded that Beckett, a supremely solitary writer, explain analytically or at least in glossing the text what he intended or wanted at a certain point. This bringing to consciousness of literary works which had been fuelled by deep unconscious metaphorical insights could have been extremely damaging. Beckett's move away from critical language after 1945 suggests an unwillingness to articulate his literary effects in rational ways.

Self-translating also allows revision, just as a new edition may allow an author to reassess an already published work and make small changes to it. Beckett's stage-scripts certainly bear this out; some of the changes in both Waiting for Godot and Endgame involve the cutting of material Beckett may well have decided was too specific, too heavy-handed in suggesting particular meaning. (1) Beckett's self-translation thus becomes an integral part of his developing revision process, the detachment of a new language giving him not only a new perspective

1. A notable example is the removal of the explicit description of the boy outside the refuge in Fin de Partie (pp. 103-104).

on the original version but a chance to employ other resources to deal with ^{any} problems of form and image that arise.

A brief but illustrative example of self-translation acting as revision is "The Gloaming". Drafted in English in 1956, it seemed doomed to join the group of works Beckett considered irretrievable failures. Yet, as I have already mentioned, after nearly eight years he published the play in French in a shorter form, as Fragment de théâtre I. He then translated the French into English, as Rough For Theatre I. What is fascinating is the clear progression through French towards an idiomatic, colourful and original Anglo-Irish English which in the first version was considerably weaker.

A blind man "scraping (a) fiddle" at the street corner is playing a "tune" in "The Gloaming". (1) In French he is playing "une vieille rengaine" (Fragment de Théâtre I, p. 24), a more idiomatic and vivid term. Returned to English, it becomes "an old jangle" (Rough For Theatre I, p. 68). The bland "Is there someone there?" ("The Gloaming", p. 1) similarly moves to more fully imagined, idiomatic usage: in French it becomes "A votre bonne coeur" (Fragment de Théâtre I, p. 21) and in English for the second time appears as "a penny for a poor

1. "The Gloaming", original manuscript December 1956, Reading University Library, Ms. 1396/4/6, p. 1 and p. 3.

old man" (Rough For Theatre I, p. 67). The voice needs to be heard in Beckett's now dominant language (by the late 1950s, there are signs of interference from French in Beckett's English). (1) It then can be transposed imaginatively back to the strongly localised, Irish English speech which for Beckett is increasingly not an idiom of a geographical place, but the language of his "inner" ear, the place where language can exist as an artistic medium, not a system for the utilitarian exchanges of everyday life. Anglo-Irish has become the more external, distanced language of the two, and through years of self-translating, Beckett perfects a voice as distinctive as Yeats' or Synge's. (2) Even in Waiting for Godot, the echoes of a musical and richly specific idiom are strongly present. It is worth considering just how great the play's success would have been had it been translated by some of Beckett's young admirers instead of by the master himself: "Ah stop blathering and help me off with this bloody

1. Usually in manuscript, such as "He renounces" for "He gives up" ("The Gloaming", p. 2) and "his fee was inferior to the butcher's" in the typescript of "Malone Dies" (Reading University Library, Ms. 1227/7/11/1, p. 31) instead of "his fee was lower than the butcher's" (Malone Dies, p. 24).

2. Whose influences on "The Gloaming" may have contributed to Beckett's desire to move the work into French. (See James Knowlson's discussion in James Knowlson and John Pilling, Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett (London: John Calder, 1979), pp. 229-231, and S.E. Gontarski's in The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, pp. 55-56).

thing "; (1) "Boots must be taken off every day, I'm tired telling you that" (Waiting For Godot, p. 10); "Tied (...) To your man" "To Godot?" (Waiting For Godot, pp. 20-21).

The delight Beckett begins to take in Anglo-Irish, freed as it now is, for him, from narrow constraints of nationalism and a particular literary tradition, shows how close it is coming to a language perceived like a painter's palette, or the orchestral sounds the composer can work with. His delight shows clearly when he translates, or rather completely recreates, La Manivelle, for his friend Robert Pinget, as The Old Tune. (2) Nowhere does he give himself such freedom to enjoy the speech-form; Anglo-Irish gives the script much of its character and energy. It is a pity, in a sense, that in Pinget's and Beckett's translating of All That Fall into French, (3) the same degree of recreation for the new context is not involved; one can imagine a French incarnation of Dan Rooney, for example, contemplating the decay of standards in written French or the decline of Latin. Often, for drama, the

1. Samuel Beckett, Waiting For Godot (London: Faber and Faber, 1956/1965), p. 10.

2. Samuel Beckett, The Old Tune, "An adaptation", in Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 175-189.

3. Samuel Beckett, Tous ceux qui tombent, "traduit de l'anglais par Robert Pinget" (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957).

most drastic recreation is the best.

What emerges from these examples of Beckett's need to self-translate, rather than simply save time and energy by allowing others to do it, is that this activity is crucial for his own art, and for his sense of how that art will appear in both his language-communities. Self-translating allows him to counteract the increasing pressures on the public man by slipping gracefully from world to world, retaining detachment and a special kind of privacy. Above all it allows him to develop, through the specific questions that every act of translation raises, a distinctive Anglo-Irish voice which becomes extremely valuable in its use for new works. Anglo-Irish is thus functioning, in some ways, as French had once functioned for the young artist irritated by his Dublin environment. After successful apprenticeship in English and French, pre-war and post-war, he now perfected his craftsmanship in both languages through bringing them together. It is worth remembering that his reputation, gained above all by En attendant Godot/Waiting for Godot and the trilogy, was established in the English-speaking world through translations, not originals. This says much for the extraordinary quality of those translations and the ability to write in a way that crosses language-barriers or, when necessary, accepts the need for complete recreation on a verbal level. The voice in each language becomes consciously

manipulated, by an artist forced to scrutinise his own artistic process in a way few artists must ever do.

Beckett's own remarks suggest a weariness if not disgust with the process of translation: "I have nothing but wastes and wilds of self-translation before me for many miserable months to come" (On 'Endgame', p. 108). But "wastes and wilds" are precisely where his imagination has seemed to flourish. He also remarked that his methods of directing (like translating, a special activity in which the author becomes part-interpreter of his own texts) would "empty the theatre" (On Endgame, p. 106). Solitude, difficulty and empty places in which to speak and act are essential to the Beckettian world. The memorable end of Company, "And you as you always were./Alone" (Company, p. 89), is one of the truest paradoxes of his art. He has needed solitude, the continuation of an ability to be a loner, to stand outside each language-group, in order to be true to his sense of the shifting, indefinable relation between the artistic self and its creative statement. Self-translation and the transitional activity it demands are not trivial tasks, interrupting the sequence of new works, but the condition for his artistic development.

Translating voices of the self: self-translation and new writing

Self-translation gives Beckett an exceptional perspective on the relation between artist and art work. Like his bilingualism, that relation is never static, nor is it easy to define. He sees

"the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all that it excludes, all that it blinds to" (Three Dialogues, pp. 124-125). The anxiety about blindness shows how concerned he is for art to see clearly, to express truthfully; it is an attempt which must always be made, even as it is doomed to failure. In literature, in a sense, all is "ill seen ill said", the language never adequate to its occasion. Yet through his shifting artistic practice, from French to English and back again, in these years, Beckett establishes a position for seeing clearly, for not being blinded. In the remaining section of this chapter, I wish to look at some of the connections and contrasts that arise in the works' bilingual development between 1950 and 1958; at the way English and French, translation and new writing, prose, drama and a new medium, radio, come together in an extraordinary "cerebral reel" (Molloy (E), p. 112).

The linguistic alternation itself works powerfully between 1950 and 1954 to help overcome an apparent creative block or weariness after the immensely fertile post-war period. The Textes pour rien give eloquent testimony, paradoxically, to a drying up of inspiration, a searching for meaning. Their haunting, dream-like settings shift between nameless places

and flashbacks to Ireland, London and Paris, as well as revisiting the mountains and plains by the sea that are familiar as far back as More Pricks Than Kicks. The brief narratives suggest a drifting observer, moving through memory or imagination undirected. The form of almost all of them is a not quite achieved circle, the voice weaving back to its starting point after its tentative outflow of words, like a kind of ritualised prayer to a vanished Muse, a set of rosary beads to "tell" in the surrounding silence. The voice claims no solid identity at all as it explores language, a doubled self, the refusal of any fiction to be sustained; it drifts in Babel alone. In a strikingly prophetic metaphor, the voice imagines a future path lived between "two parting dreams" (1) in what may be a direct reference to Beckett's two cultures, two tongues, and his own solitary place between them:

avant de reprendre avec eux un chemin qui n'est pas le mien et qui m'éloigne à chaque pas de cet autre qui ne peut l'être, non plus, ou de rester seul sur place, entre deux rêves qui vont s'écartant, ne connaissant personne, de personne connu. (2)

It is indeed difficult to see what could follow such texts.

What Beckett attempted was a prose work of more comic and

1. Samuel Beckett, Texts for Nothing in Collected Shorter Prose, p. 110.

2. Samuel Beckett, Textes pour rien in Nouvelles et textes pour rien, p. 196.

realistic type, in French, the unfinished and unpublished story of Matt, Popol and Emmanuel. This manuscript shows the three friends living together beside the sea; they are possibly all aspects of a single personality and sleep together in one bed, making strict rules as to whose turn it is to be in the middle each month. (1) Popol seems an androgynous character, gentle and domestic; he enjoys cooking and knitting. Matt (Matthew?) is a writer, the gospel author, perhaps, who is to take down on paper details of Emmanuel's words. Emmanuel himself is the first-person speaker of the text; like Jean du Chas and Samuel Beckett, Emmanuel was born on Good Friday the 13th; he carries his head a little on one side like the crucified Christ. He was born in a year of potato blight; the setting has strong Irish connotations. Emmanuel is obviously another avatar, spokesman and Christ figure like so many throughout Beckett's works. The tripling in this text foreshadows a growing use of triads at every level in Beckett's later writing (See Chapter VII). It also points back to the speaker in Texte pour rien I in manuscript, which stated "nous sommes trois" ("Textes pour rien", p. 1) whereas the printed version has "nous sommes plus d'un" (Textes pour rien, p. 116), and forward to Hamm, chief among Beckett's narrator-creators on stage, who speaks of "l'enfant solitaire qui

1. All these details are from the first six pages of the story; even here the handwriting is extremely difficult to decipher.

se met en plusieurs, deux, trois, pour être ensemble, et parler ensemble, dans la nuit" (Fin de partie, p. 92).

Yet Emmanuel, Matt and Popol remain oddly stiff, and a little passé; the story is abandoned after 43 pages. It is followed by two other aborted attempts, "ici personne ne vient jamais" and a story of "how I killed my mother", as mentioned above. The second points directly towards From an Abandoned Work ("did I kill him as well as my mother": From An Abandoned Work, p. 133) and gives support to the idea that Beckett's mother's death did trigger off a new artistic relationship with his mother tongue. The shift back into English becomes a way to break the creative block in prose (in spite of "abandoning" the "work", Beckett obviously rediscovered the concreteness, the comic energy and the emotional power of the tongue he had left behind with the writing of Watt). The recreation of the lived past also suddenly becomes possible, its transformation into fiction liberating:

Up bright and early that day, I was young then, feeling awful, and out, mother hanging out of the window in her nightdress weeping and waving. Nice fresh morning, bright too early as so often. (From An Abandoned Work, p. 129)

Echoes of the King James Bible return; they will do so more and more as Beckett draws back into a new hearing of the speech that surrounded his childhood:

Great love in my heart too for all things
still and rooted, bushes, boulders and the like,
too numerous to mention, even the flowers of
the field, not for the world when in my right
senses would I ever touch one, to pluck it.
(From An Abandoned Work, p. 129)

When in 1966, Beckett directed Jack McGowran's reading of this text for Claddagh Records, (1) he appreciated the vibrancy MacGowran's accent gave to it; "fluttering" becomes "flutthering", and "stravaging" sounds even more Irish in performance.

From An Abandoned Work makes particular point of the fact that English is being used, with the consideration of German-English phonetics ("Schimmel, nice word, for an English speaker": From An Abandoned Work, p. 130) and a self-critical aside, "awful English this" (From An Abandoned Work, p. 137). Yet the work did not, apparently, seem important to Beckett. Although he had given it to Trinity News in 1956 where it was first published, (2) he forgot to mention it when he told

1. Recorded in London, January 1966 for Claddagh Records Ltd., Baile Atha Cliath (Dublin), "under the personal supervision of Samuel Beckett".

2. "From An Abandoned Work", Trinity News, Dublin University Weekly, III (June 7th, 1956), p. 4.

Mayoux that All That Fall was "la première fois depuis 45 que j'écris directement en anglais." (1) It should be seen as a bridging work, trying out the new perceptions about Anglo-Irish which self-translation was at that stage just beginning to provoke, and beginning to explore a mother-son (or parent-child) motif which would be brought to superb focus in Fin de partie.

This movement from Textes pour rien to From An Abandoned Work occurred alongside a realisation that all questions of choice of language could be put aside in one branch of the arts to which Beckett now had access: mime. "Mime de Rêveur" occupies a fascinating and seminal position in Beckett's bilingual development. (2) If the future was to be one of audiences in two language-groups, mime would also be one way of avoiding, or reducing the scale of, the arduous duty of translation. Mime relates closely to visual art and music: like them it crosses national boundaries freely, leaving Babel behind. Used so memorably at the start of the great French film Les Enfants du Paradis, (3) with the young Jean-Louis

1. Jean-Jacques Mayoux, "Le théâtre de Samuel Beckett", Etudes Anglaises, X:4 (Oct-Dec., 1957), p.350n.

2. A detailed description and discussion can be found in S.E. Gontarski's The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, pp. 27-31.

3. Les Enfants du Paradis, Marcel Carné, 1945.

Barrault as Baptiste, mime was also extremely familiar, and had had wide acclaim in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, because of the films of Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd, which Beckett knew well. "Mime de Rêveur", with its solitary, and apparently suffering, figure in a room, grasps the idea that a human consciousness presented through setting, action and visible emotion alone can be widely communicable in a way sound-films, or plays with words, make impossible. Chaplin, in the 1930s, resisted the pressure to make "talkies" with his Little Tramp; he knew the essence of the character was non-verbal, a universal archetype of the impoverished wanderer. For Beckett the lessons of "Mime de Rêveur" were ones that he would go on developing right up to the recent and wordless Quad and Nacht und Träume. More specifically, the opening sequence of Fin de partie and Krapp's Last Tape are mimes, as Gontarski has pointed out. By the time Clov utters his paradoxical opening words: "Finì, c'est finì" (Fin de partie, p. 15) the audience is already intrigued by the stage-setting and the eloquently ritualised uncovering operations that show Clov and Hamm's relationship before a word has been spoken. "Mime de Rêveur" leads too to the Actes sans paroles I and II, in whose titles the essential element, wordlessness, is re-emphasised.

Thus crossing between his languages and considering an art that does without language altogether, Beckett found new paths for

creative exploration. Equally important are the influences of actual self-translated works on the new works' content and form. To translate well demands an imaginative re-entry into the world originally created. It is hardly surprising, then, that Malone Dies and Fin de partie have particularly strong points of contact since the novel's translation was proceeding as the play grew towards its finished version: above all, both contain a central story-telling figure who is physically in decline. (1) The prospect of an ending is attractive in many respects to both, yet the story-telling defies silence. Hamm, like Malone, savours his creative powers to the very end. The asylum in which Malone's created character Macmann finds himself reappears in vignette with Hamm telling his story of the "painter and engraver" whom he used to visit. Both Hamm and Malone have for a time an assistant and nurse-figure, Clov and the woman who brings Malone's pot and bowl; in both, these helpers abandon the declining story-teller to a solitude in which physical needs

1. Exact dating is very difficult, but Beckett's first attempts to translate Malone meurt into English date from 1950, well before even the earliest dramatic experiments that led to Fin de partie. Some of the draft of Malone Dies in a manuscript notebook at Trinity College Dublin is preceded by a fragment of a play that is an early version of Fin de partie (Ms. 4662; 1953-1954). (See Gontarski, The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, p. 42).

will no longer be met (if indeed Clov does leave; Malone is deserted definitively, much earlier on). Macmann and Moll, charming and grotesque in their decrepit amours, are strikingly close to Nagg and Nell; in both couples the female partner dies, leaving a solitary male once again. Obviously the genre difference and other aspects of each work make them completely distinct as wholes. Yet a special link does seem to exist between these two works, and they are both, in their different genres, masterpieces of their kind; translating Malone meurt, and writing Fin de Partie, Beckett was making links between his languages, and between past and present stages of his art.

The relationship between the translation of L'innommable and the writing of Krapp's Last Tape is fascinating in a quite different way. The play, begun just as the novel's translation was finished in February 1958, remains perhaps the most naturalistic, and accessible, dramatic work Beckett has written. It can at least be staged naturalistically, unlike En attendant Godot, Fin de Partie, and Happy Days. It seems a concrete and anchored externalisation of preoccupations with creativity, time, love, and loneliness, which are equally central to L'innommable/The Unnamable, but in an unrecognisably different form. L'innommable explodes authorial coherence and a single identity; Krapp's Last Tape focuses centrally on a visible author-figure

alone in his room. Instead of voices in a head, images interweaving with each other in a doubtful and fragmentary realm of consciousness, there is a traditionally-defined human figure, aging and self-conscious as he reconsiders his past choice of art over love. While the prose text dispenses not only with sections, chapters, and paragraphs but even finally with normal punctuation of sentences, the play contains words tidily and technologically contained in Krapp's numbered boxes and spools. It is as if, in Krapp's Last Tape, Beckett suddenly grasped the possibility of unifying the special "concrete" qualities of English with a play in which language would be something actually handled on stage. Similarly he had understood the appropriateness of the French prose medium to abstract and make conscious a "procès-verbal" of human discourse on paper, in L'innommable. English is a good theatre language, because of the close relation between thing and vocable; in Krapp's Last Tape the "vocable" becomes a "thing", especially when Krapp relishes the word "spool" (Krapp's Last Tape, p. 10). The use of the tape-recorder is a remarkable example of Beckett's genius in grasping an element of technology as a way of making words visible.

The play seems, then, a kind of pendulum-swing in form, genre and material from the renewed experience of L'innommable.

Krapp's Last Tape makes the return to a kind of psychological commonplace -- the aging man nostalgically recalling lost love -- a justifiable relief after L'innommable's extraordinary intellectual and emotional severity, its vortex of words that refuse to come together into familiar forms.

The relationship between L'innommable and Fragment de Théâtre II (1) is more direct. Sharing a first language, they also share a desire to expose language (not to enjoy it as sensually as Krapp does) as a system of false securities. The investigators' assessment of the alienated and apparently suicidal "C" in this play comes close to the unnamable's own constant insistence on alien status or origins; "Il n'est pas chez lui et il le sait très bien" (Fragment de Théâtre II, p. 43) could equally well refer to L'innommable's indefinable speaker. C seems an embodiment on stage of a consciousness that has struggled to communicate through words too long and too intensely; he stands impassively, gazing out of a window at the sky while A and B go through his case. Their account or report on his life shows a pattern of disturbance that once again comes close to using the idea of a psychiatric patient

1. The first draft of Fragment de Théâtre II, dated 15th August 1958 (and therefore not long after the end of The Unnamable, the beginning of Krapp's Last Tape), is in Ms. 4661 at Trinity College, Dublin.

directly; yet C is apparently at liberty, looking after the pets in an apartment, and A and B are more like bureaucrats than psychiatrists. C baffles them because they cannot find a motivation for his behaviour: he simply does not belong. The sense of an exhaustion through language is achieved strangely through C's absence-in-presence throughout the play. He is visible at all times, yet neither moves nor utters a word -- a kind of husk after the unnamable's flood of words has passed through it.

Above all, C resembles Victor of "Eleuthéria", further on the same path. Around him, as in The Unnamable, language is in a shambles. When B gestures towards the many pages of the report, saying: "Ca se tient comme une cathédrale" (Fragment de Théâtre II, p. 40), he inadvertently scatters them to the floor. Systems of words, like the cathedrals that remain the greatest symbol of Christian civilisation, can be reduced to ruins only too easily when human rationality collapses into its dark underside. The work of centuries of faith, reason and cooperation, or the dignity of a single human mind, can be senselessly smashed. L'innommable was the text in which Beckett bore witness to that outpouring of destructive energy most directly; after translating it, he refocussed, this time through the externalised medium of theatre, on the desperate

states of communication that can arise, and that literature has only in certain periods been able to look at directly. Tears, however, suggest a gentler alternative to the torture words can be; Worm in his jar, C when he hears the caged bird has died, are at last able to express inner feeling by weeping. In Fragment de Théâtre II, Beckett was once again trying to bring to a wider audience on stage preoccupations left unresolved from the period when the trilogy was written. If the play fails, it is because, as in "Eleuthéria", what he is doing negates the communal and religious origins of theatre, the confirmation and celebration of the group through ritual enactment. He tries to show on stage an isolated consciousness, one which is "not there". Not I, written fourteen years later, is perhaps the most successful and genuinely dramatic response to a similar impossible goal; once again, it uses a flood of words, not silence.

As well as creating a climate of bilingual consciousness, characterised by repeated transitions, and allowing earlier works to exert a vitally productive influence on new writing, self-translating allows a constantly refreshed vision, an alertness to the forms, genres and styles that in any one literary culture can seem natural, however elaborate their artifice. Beckett's ability to move between two literary traditions of enormous wealth keeps him detached, relatively

free of conditioning; experimentalism is thus not only possible but almost inevitable since he is not bound by the conventions of any one tradition. "Conditioning", as Mauthner said, "elevates the residuum of one's own fund of memory to the status of a mirror of reality." (1) This is as true for literary forms as for language itself. The most fascinating example, in the 1950s period, of Beckett's experimentalism in medium as well as genre is All That Fall. Although it dates from before the L'innommable translation, Krapp's Last Tape and Fragment de Théâtre II (it was written in 1956) I wish to end this chapter by discussing it, as it represents a quintessence of Beckett's new sense of the properties of his native language, and, even more crucially, reveals an imaginative response to the problem of Babel, of words meeting, conflicting and fading in a world of sound. In spite of its naturalistic features, its apparent elements of realism, it is hardly "aberrant" or a "harking back"; (2) that it has been seen to be so perhaps reflects a tendency in some productions to emphasise the rollicking "Irish" and humorous elements. (3)

1. See p. 165.

2. Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 30.

3. Comparing Donald McWhinnie's 1957 production with, for example, Everett Frost's 1986 U.S. production is enlightening; the American production, slower, darker, full of a mood of pain, is perhaps the less immediately accessible, but the more "Beckettian".

At the heart of the work, though, is a deeply lonely woman, adrift in a world of faulty communication, failed love, and pain. Its quality depends on "the whole thing's coming out of the dark". (1) Beckett seemed to sense how suitable radio would be for his imaginative concerns; while the comedy and local flavour provide some glimpses of "light", the darkness is still there, a private darkness for which radio is perfectly appropriate, and one which Beckett's bilingual consciousness had led him to understand.

The basic construction of the play is an analogy for the transitional movement, out and back again, that Beckett uses again in the poem neither; Maddy's world is one of exhausting movement between two unspeakable homes, the station where she feels humiliated, and her own home where she broods over the death of her daughter, "Little Minnie" (All That Fall, p. 9). The intervening space is a sound-world of flux, effort and various noisy forms of transport; Maddy struggles from A to B, and back to A, seeking a little comfort, excitement, love. Yet communication, the use of language, in this world is a chancy business; Beckett uses the opportunity radio offers to focus on it directly.

1. Zilliagus, Beckett and Broadcasting, letter from Samuel Beckett to Barney Rosset, quoted as epigraph.

The Gaelic or Irish language, once anathema to Beckett because of what he saw as the "antiquarian", sentimental and patriotic tendencies it seemed to encourage in Irish writing, now holds no threat. Its status in a post-war world of telephones, broadcasting, and increasing travel is changing; instead of forming the Irish soul, it seems relegated to the humiliating position of denoting the signs on public lavatories at the station. Dan, Maddy's irascible husband, considers the Gaelic word for "the men's" "Fíor as they call it now, from Vir Viris I suppose, the V becoming F, in accordance with Grimm's Law" (All That Fall, p. 36). His knowledge of historical linguistics may not extend far beyond this nugget of information, though he also points out that "buff" comes from "buffalo" (All That Fall, p. 38), but it allows an effective reminder of the transience of all languages, which decay or are destroyed by other, stronger ones. It is a "Grimm" law indeed that decrees for phonetic systems, like the human body, a future of progressive decline until their youthful forms become unrecognisable to later generations; the Lynch twins laugh at the elderly forms of the Rooneys with equal impunity.

The vulnerability of language lies at the heart of the work, human speech set beside the calls of birds and animals which do not change over time. Maddy's own speech is estranged from those around her, the language of a loneliness that leads her

to use curious and archaic expressions, mistake someone's name twice, and employ exotic terms such as "Ramdam". In a superbly evocative passage, human voices "come out of the dark" in a way that shows how deeply Beckett has experienced, and explored, the enigma of Babel. Although this passage has often been quoted, it has not been seen as a direct sign of Beckett's bilingualism responding, after several years of self-translating, to the two languages of his native land, and their implications for human tongues in any culture. English and Gaelic rivalry, Christian and Classical themes, and crucially the natural languages of animals, come together with a sense of mortality and new life. Underneath all this runs the ironic and yet nostalgic idea of Eden or Arcadia, with a divinely appointed tongue not yet split apart or subject to decay:

MR. ROONEY: Never pause... safe to haven... Do you know, Maddy, sometimes one would think you were struggling with a dead language.

(...)

MRS. ROONEY: Well, you know, it will be dead in time, just like our own poor dear Gaelic, there is that to be said.

(startled) Urgent baa.

MR. ROONEY: Good God!

MRS. ROONEY: Oh the pretty little woolly lamb, crying to suck its mother! Theirs has not changed, since Arcady.

Pause. (All That Fall, p. 35)

English too will be dead in time: "there is that to be said". Maddy's own archaisms and eccentricities of expression

are just part of a general process of decay hastened in her case by her linguistic isolation. Babel, established after the Fall (which gives a quite different twist to the title), has made paradise only a memory for humans, yet the innocent lambs are unaffected by sin. Only the Lamb of God, bringing the Word of God, can redeem the fallen -- and the Rooneys' comments about their local ministers of Christ place little faith in that Word. The animals, involved in neither Fall nor Redemption, have a language that endures unchanged from age to age: sheep speaks to sheep and is understood, the lamb is crying, not trying, to suck its mother -- the mother with whose milk come the first imitative linguistic sounds. (1) For "monodialectal arcadians" (Beckett's phrase in a younger and more sarcastic period, when to be unilingual, at least in certain circles, apparently seemed to him synonymous with old-fashioned ideas) it is still possible to believe in a God-given idiom which has security and permanence; such speakers are not "miss Fitts" (2) in their environment. Yet his

1. It is thus most important that the animal sounds in All That Fall should be real, not human impersonations. Beckett disagreed with McWhinnie's decision to use human voices for the animals. The Everett Frost production reinstates the calls of real animals. (Zilliagus, Beckett and Broadcasting, pp. 70-71)

2. Miss Fitt, an eccentric Protestant in a predominantly Catholic society, is another outsider in All That Fall.

message, more urgent here than almost anywhere else, is that each language is mortal, and relative. In this inter-weaving of words, images, mythological associations and ideas, Beckett mixes humorous pessimism with a resignation about the transience of human tongues. The grim law of time works on them all. All That Fall is a crucial work, in the perspective of Beckett's bilingualism, because in it he challenges members of an audience he once felt were beyond his understanding, and he theirs, to come to terms with a vision of existence in which all language-confidence has gone. Beneath the play's comical Irish surface lie its darker elements, its remorseless concentration on reproductive failure, the cruelty of time, and loneliness. It exposes linguistic isolation and aging in a world of cars, trains and children moving forward indifferent to the old, ailing couple whose own sexual capacity has not succeeded in creating a single language-user of the future. The object returned to Dan at the end of the play by the boy, Jerry, is at once egg, ball, testicle, pebble and word: its relationship with the child who has died (or been murdered) is deliberately left unresolved. Beckett leaves the symbolic patterning in tension, allowing the play to end in a "tempest of wind and rain", elements that are agents of the attrition and decay that characterise the natural world.

In the 1950s, Beckett's self-translating establishes his

sense of two opposing worlds, two tongues, and the private space between them which he makes his unique imaginative realm. In Textes pour rien I and II, the speaker had contrasted two contexts, "ici" and "là-haut" (Textes pour rien, p. 119 and p. 123); the "self" is from now on frequently found in a hole, in the dark, alone, while the others (society, the language-group) are "up there", in the light, together. "Je suis dans l'excavation que les siècles ont creusée" (Textes pour rien, p. 117); they are "là-haut, tout autour, comme au cimetière" (Textes pour rien, p. 117). Like "l'innommable" the speaker has fallen through norms of habit and identity that are sustained by community of feeling; he has come through centuries of attrition, of excavation in words, to a place beneath. Yet on reflection he realises he cannot simply be detached; in fact he is in both realms, in constant alternation: "Je suis là-haut et je suis ici, tel que je me vois, vautre, les yeux fermés, l'oreille en ventouse contre la tourbe qui suce." (Textes pour rien, p. 119) This text seems prophetic for the years that follow, Beckett's voices and characters listening to the "peat" (the language of Ireland) as well as searching in the "light" (the clearer and more abstract tongue of France). Gradually, a distinctive and valuable use of bilingualism becomes possible: Beckett will suit certain types of art work to one language or the other, or deliberately oppose "content" and language to gain

a new perspective or explore a new form.

The translator knows that "form" and "content" can on some level be separated and distinguished; the difference between a good and bad translation lies precisely in that gap. The artist knows that experience translates into art, subconsciously and consciously, through the leading and shaping influence of words themselves. Beckett could now move on to works of powerful doubled intensity, works in which the resources and energies of both languages meet in hidden tension. Two of these works, one for the theatre and one in prose, crown the decade with a magnificent demonstration of bilingual mastery. Comment c'est and Happy Days balance across medium and language; their translations, How It Is and Oh les beaux jours, create a second balance immediately afterwards. The next chapter will explore this further stage of bilingual vision and bilingual craft, the balance which the transitional movements of the 1950s, the constant exposure of self in translation, have made possible.

CHAPTER VI: BALANCE

1958-1962

Between 1958 and 1962 Beckett reached a stage of bilingual achievement that set his two languages, for the first time, in an equal and extraordinary state of balance. He wrote Comment c'est in French, then translated it into How It Is shortly afterwards; he created Happy Days in English, and quickly translated it into Oh les beaux jours. Both originals, the prose work and the play, were published in 1961, the translations in 1963 and 1964. All four are works of striking, independent achievement. Their characteristics and inter-relationships will form the main subject of this chapter.

This balanced bilingualism surely arose from a realisation, after the preceding years of self-translation and experimentation, that French was finally no more or less suitable or desirable as a medium for Beckett's artistic aims than English; it was simply different. Already Fin de partie and Krapp's Last Tape had shown the increased power of a doubled linguistic resource. By moving so easily from one language and mental world to the other, Beckett was able to articulate a new vision

or, more precisely, to glimpse a way of combining a direct expression of chaos with what Hugh Kenner calls an "absolute sureness of design". (1) Through a relativist focus, an ability to compare and detach himself from accepted forms, the chaos which Beckett perceived could be presented directly in art. New forms were necessary for this to occur.

In his discussion with Tom Driver in 1961, Beckett spoke with unusual openness, perhaps arising out of a sense of having reached a certain milestone in his development, and out of the fact that he had a particularly sensitive interlocutor. Driver recorded some of the main themes of the conversation. He was able to move with Beckett into areas of consciousness that go beyond the rational, beyond what can be articulated clearly. "The key word in my plays," Beckett said, "is 'perhaps'." (2) Beckett, according to Driver, "says nothing that compresses experience within a closed pattern. 'Perhaps' stands in place of commitment." (3) Beckett's refusal to stay within a "closed pattern" is the result of a bilingual and bicultural consciousness: crossing linguistic and aesthetic boundaries constantly, he becomes a master of balance, weighing up contrasts and certainties on both sides

1. Kenner, Samuel Beckett, p. 199.
2. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 220.
3. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 221.

and refusing to settle for either. He rejects the security of any one authoritative vision, maintaining instead the "perhaps", the indeterminate area between, through the relativism his alternation of languages allows. Before moving on to a detailed discussion of this process at work in Comment c'est and Happy Days, I want to look briefly at the work which most directly symbolizes the threshold area, the space between where all is doubtful: the radio play Embers. (1)

Written in 1959 while Comment c'est was still in gestation, and not long before Happy Days was drafted, Embers is a product of an intensely bilingual period. For the first and only time, Beckett uses as his entire setting the "strand" or seashore, the space between par excellence. Instead of the wet mud of Comment c'est, the desert of Happy Days, Embers takes place on the stony shore between land and sea, between and dry and wet, between solid and fluid states. (2) Though the differences of medium are crucial (the mud of Comment c'est may not be "real", since its existence can only be described

1. Samuel Beckett, Embers, in Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 91-104.

2. Jane Hale sees the seashore in a very similar way, though in the context of the life/death transition, not bilingualism: "The seashore is a space that is real but indefinable; due to the constant motion of the tide, one can never perceive the exact place where the sand ends and the water begins. Boundless, endless, characterized by rhythmic, ceaseless, back-and-forth motion, a space where two things meet but in an indeterminate and unperceivable fashion, the water's edge is the ideal setting for the dramatization of the last moments of consciousness." (The Broken Window, pp. 105-106)

verbally by a far from consistent speaker; the sound of the sea in Embers may only be happening in Henry's head), it is significant that Beckett is choosing increasingly symbolic, not realistic, settings. In their use of ancient and universal archetypes -- dry earth, stone, sea -- these settings have an inherent translatability into any culture.

Embers brings to focus a world that most truly fits the label of "perhaps". Nothing in it is sure. Alone on the stones of the strand, Henry fears the sound of the sea, though it fascinates him. Traditional symbol of death, the sea also represents the chaos against which his orthodox married life has struggled. Yet the sea's voice may be in his imagination; Henry comments on how unreal it sounds. (1) The radio medium allows Beckett to use a variety of sounds and words with acute attention. Voices, hooves, a piano lesson, the moving shingle, the sea itself: all bring together oppositions that Henry struggles with but cannot resolve; they refuse to be brought into unity. Youth/age, man/woman, child/parent, silence/sound, life/death: all circle in the hesitant, in-between space of the shore. Henry is himself

1. "That sound you hear is the sea, we are sitting on the strand. (Pause.) I mention it because the sound is so strange, so unlike the sound of the sea, that if you didn't see what it was you wouldn't know what it was." (Embers, p. 93)

both child and parent, and unhappy in both roles. The generations seem to struggle with each other on the edge of the sea, whose surging power fills them with a mingled desire and fear.

The entire work is acutely conscious of sound and language, drawing the listener into a frontier zone, a marginal territory of "shifting thresholds". (1) Similarly, the embers of the fire, in Henry's story of Bolton and Holloway, are at a threshold stage: living coals no longer in flame but not yet cold ash. They symbolise the interim, undecided phase of Henry's existence, as he lingers where his father possibly committed suicide and where Henry may have conceived his child. Suicide is the central unspoken word for Henry and his story character Bolton; the embers can be roused again to flame or permitted to die. The speaker-listener on the strand may retreat to the solidity of dry land or plunge into the formlessness of the sea.

What seems particularly significant here is the intense alertness to sound and its production, building on the experience of All That Fall, that goes with the form/formlessness contrast. The same kind of alertness leads Beckett to choose "uninterpretable"

1. Beckett's phrase in my way is in the sand flowing, Collected Poems, p. 57.

names such as Bom and Pim in Comment c'est entirely for their phonetic qualities. (1) Sound-waves travel to a listener's ears as the waves of the deep ocean roll towards the listener on the seashore; all communication by sound has an element of mystery. Beckett's sensitivity to the mystery, his knowledge that all speech, as well as non-verbal sounds, can communicate only if the receiver has the capacity for interpretation, bears a close relationship with his alternating linguistic consciousness.

This concern is paralleled in the work of another writer fascinated by cultural juxtaposition, sound and language, the novelist Russell Hoban, who has written of an intense experience he had on a quiet island in Greece:

everything was talking, the world was full of constant language (...) There is no sound, no silence, no pattern of sound and silence that will not correspond to something in your head (...) it's impossible to compose sound that has no pattern: anything you hear is a pattern of sound waves and every pattern refers to all other patterns; everything is some kind of information. (2)

The sounds of Embers, the gasping voice of Comment c'est, the

1. "he can call me Bom for more commodity that would appeal to me m at the end and one syllable the rest indifferent" (How It Is, p. 67).

2. Russell Hoban, "Pan lives", Granta, 9 (1983), p. 182.

chatter and snatches of song in Happy Days are all part of a vast patterning of sounds dominated and shaped by our ability to interpret them. If we refuse to make sense of, or cannot understand, that "language", we become closed off in a claustrophobic space. What is extraordinary about the human making of sounds is the constant need not only to interact with the world, but also to interpret or analyse that interaction. Beckett's plays, and the voices of the "speakers" in his prose narratives, are "the whispering, rustling, and murmuring of man refusing merely to exist". (1) Comment c'est, the record of a voice fighting both for words and breath, becomes one version of a pattern of sounds; How It Is readjusts that vision, as I will discuss below, to the new word- and sound-scape of a different language. Happy Days, with its extraordinary debris of a literary and bourgeois culture, its "bits of pipe" from the English (or Anglo-Irish) inheritance, undergoes a similar sea-change to re-emerge as Oh les beaux jours, which equally fits the verbal and aural landscape in which it belongs. By creating his two versions of each work, making them different but equal in a powerful bilingual balance, Beckett confirms Christopher Butler's description of Comment c'est: the "basic indeterminacy at

1. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 223.

the heart of the work, a lack of any sense of stable relationships." (1) Every perception, however expressed, is just one translation of a possible truth. As Beckett said:

What is more true than anything else? To swim is true, and to sink is true. One is not more true than the other. One cannot speak anymore of being, one must speak only of the mess. When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of him, and that now is simply the mess. (2)

Beckett is indeed not a philosopher, because he refuses to give up his creative contradictions for the abstract precision, the comforting authority of a single agreed language, or for the satisfaction of a clearly argued theory. "The mess" can be felt in works of great formal beauty because every word, every image, comes out of a buzzing confusion of perspectives, languages, sounds. Beckett refuses closed patterns, including the closed pattern of a single linguistic system, by remaining in his own solitary area, the fulcrum or centre of his bilingual balance, from which he can gauge

1. Butler, After the Wake, p. 82.

2. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 219.

and shape each effort to portray the mystery. His art is constantly transitional, raising "questions that it does not attempt to answer." (1)

'Comment c'est' and 'Happy Days': crossing over

A comparison of the two principal works of this period, Comment c'est and Happy Days, reveals the balance of Beckett's languages and cultures, and shows his ability, now, to use both English and French with equal detachment and without the problems that hindered him earlier. Though they are widely different in medium, genre and overall effect as well as in their language of origin, the two works share some details of imagery and setting. They also share a preoccupation with the effort to communicate and the effort to maintain structures to live by. Both works show evidence of "a determined rationalism" (2) constantly struggling with "the centrality of the unconscious". (3) Beckett's double resource of culture and language brings benefits to both sides. While he draws deeply on one culture's specific characteristics and concerns, he can at the same time heighten our awareness of that culture's limitations, through the bilingual focus that makes form and language so important. "The

1. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 220.

2. Butler, After the Wake, p. 81.

3. S.E. Gontarski, "The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Art", Modern Fiction Studies, 29, No. 1 (Spring 1983), p. 5.

form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates." (1) Through his ability to stand outside the accepted forms of either culture, Beckett can externalise this "preoccupation" successfully.

The connections between the two works are hardly surprising on the level of material, given their almost contemporary genesis. Those connections illustrate the increasing freedom of an imagination seeking paths beyond the constraints of Babel. Foremost among them is the human body (as it will be in many of the works to follow). The vulnerability, sexuality, and capacity for both suffering and pleasure of the body are central to both Comment c'est and Happy Days. In the French prose text a speaker, apparently gasping for breath, explains how he lies still or crawls naked in an expanse of mud, dragging a sack of provisions. At first alone, he later encounters (or projects) a perhaps imaginary companion, Pim; witness, Kram; and scribe, Krim. Throughout the text, the number and frequency of references to parts of the body make it central to the reader's imaginative experience: the head, hair, eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, buccinators (a muscle of the cheek), arms, hands, fingers, fingernails, palms, back, buttocks, testicles, stomach, heart, bladder, urethra, skin, legs and feet are all mentioned, many of them

1. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 219.

over and over again. It is almost as if the prose seeks to recreate the physical presence possible in a stage production -- or to linger obsessively on what is physical rather than what is in the mind.

In Happy Days, only half of Winnie's body is initially visible, and in Act Two even less. The directions specify how she should look at the start: "plump, arms and shoulders bare, low bodice, big bosom" (Happy Days, p. 9). In other words, what flesh there is should be amply and emphatically obvious. For the prose narrative's disturbing scenes of torture -- a special kind of physical relationship -- the play presents physically the continual reminder that Willie is out of Winnie's reach, and that she is trapped. She concerns herself with her appearance, with the objects around her and, of course, with her recollections, just as the speaker in Comment c'est dwells on his scenes in the light. In Act I she is worried that she may have "put on flesh" (Happy Days, p. 23). In Act Two, when even less of her is free, she refers directly to: "My arms. (Pause.) My breasts. (Pause.) What arms? (Pause.) What breasts? (Pause.)" (Happy Days, p. 38). Now they are gone; but ingeniously she manages to pass some time trying to see her tongue by sticking it out, as well as the nose ("the tip ... the nostrils"), "a hint of lip" and a "suspicion of brow" (Happy Days, p. 39).

Parts of Willie's anatomy also come in for comment during the course of the play (Happy Days, p. 14, p. 22, p. 29, p. 35). But it is a shock when he finally rounds the mound to appear in his full physical presence. Not surprisingly, Winnie is excited by his approach; it may, for a moment, seem an event as momentous as her long-remembered romantic evening, "The last bumper with the bodies nearly touching" (Happy Days, p. 45). In Comment c'est, if the speaker is to be believed (and all he says may be a kind of wish-fulfilment), the bodies, in Part II at least, are quite definitely touching:

dans le noir la boue ma tête contre la sienne mon
flanc collé au sein mon bras droit autour de ses
épaules il ne crie plus nous restons ainsi un bon
moment (Comment c'est, p. 85)

In a world where communication, the desire for union through spoken words, so often goes awry, the physical sensations of the body, its parts and functions, its gestures and responses, are at least a kind of alternative way of acknowledging and communicating existence. As George Steiner has pointed out, the body is also the shared inheritance of the whole human population -- a fact which makes the myriads of languages that humans have developed, the countless opportunities for misunderstanding, all the more

extraordinary. (1)

Comment c'est and Happy Days also have a striking parallel in their use of a sack or bag that takes on vast importance for figures condemned to an otherwise desolate environment. Yet just as the two works are drawn apart in terms of the reader's or audience's response to them by the essentially verbal nature of the bodies in Comment c'est compared to the visible presence of an actress in Happy Days, so too the sack or bag must be considered within the form that portrays it. In Happy Days Winnie's bag is an inescapable physical object before our eyes, a treasure-trove from which she draws the various objects she needs to help her through her day -- her toothbrush, toothpaste, mirror, spectacles, medicine, magnifying glass, and the surprising, unforgettable revolver. The primary effect is one of a curious kind of realism. We immediately recognise the bag and its objects as those we have seen a thousand times, filling the otherwise empty hands and lives of middle-aged women. As so often, though, the theatre has more cultural specificity and definition

1. "Why does homo sapiens, whose digestive track (sic) has evolved and functions in precisely the same complicated ways the world over, whose biochemical fabric and genetic potential are, orthodox science assures us, essentially common (...) -- why does this unified, though individually unique mammalian species not use one common language?" Steiner, After Babel, p. 50.

of character than the prose. Many of Winnie's objects, references and gestures do not extend to the entire human race, whereas Comment c'est, with its even more denuded setting, has a grimmer, more generalised or abstract quality. (The different languages are, of course, highly relevant here.) For the plethora of objects in Winnie's handbag, the sack contains only tins of fish and (for a time) a tin-opener. The sack's recurrent appearance in the speaker's rambling account of his life in the mud makes it a strangely symbolic resource. At times it seems far more than just the wherewithal to nourish the body, for it takes on the metaphoric significance of friend, lover, womb, pillow, burden, stomach, lungs, the egg that is penetrated by a sperm, and a place to hide. (1)

Since words are here the only medium, the sack's mere existence outside the mind of the speaker is an open question.

1. At the end of Pt. I of Comment c'est, for example, the sack is acting as pillow and comforter when its bottom bursts: "pas d'émotion tout est perdu le fond a crevé l'humidité le traînage l'abrasion les étreintes les générations un vieux sac à charbon" (Comment c'est, p. 71). What is significant is that this is the end of the period when the speaker can exist alone, nourished by memories or scenes in the light. The result of the bursting of the sack seems to be his need to find or invent human companionship: "cortège sans fin de sacs crevés au profit de tous" (Comment c'est, p. 75).

The need for a inanimate companion may have led to its invention, just as it seems to lead to the invention or discovery of Pim. Its subsequent removal from the scene suggests a desire for greater autonomy on the speaker's part. Not so with Winnie's bag, which is visible throughout the play: a constant in her world, even when she can no longer reach it. Ultimately, perhaps, the sack in Comment c'est should be seen as a word-hoard. (1) On that level it is as rich with treasures as Winnie's hoard of objects. Originally it was a sack for coal, the compressed "black sap" of decaying leaves (How It Is, p. 27). Leaves, murmuring and rustling in Beckett's sound-patterns, often recall human voices. The indeterminacy of the prose text encourages a multiple-level reading of the sack's functions, whereas the drama leaves us with a concrete, specific image. Yet the idea itself crosses languages, as it smoothly crosses genres and media.

The works share other material too: a geographically unlocated setting (dry earth/mud); the presence of a companion, or the need for one; the focus on one central figure whose words dominate. Yet inescapably, the differences of medium,

1. Or at least a store-house of human experience, human voices: "vite la tête dans le sac où révérence parler j'ai toute la souffrance de tous les temps" (Comment c'est, p. 59).

genre and form pull them apart. Not only forms but also languages with different resources and constraints "accommodate" the baffling world in which Winnie and the narrator of Comment c'est are being punished, in their own way, for having been born. It is this aspect of the works' balance I wish to turn to now.

Classical form and medieval mystery: 'Comment c'est', 'Happy Days' and Beckett's sense of doubt

Speaking to Tom Driver, Beckett contrasted the clean, classical lines of La Madeleine in Paris with the mystery, the sense of the unknown, expressed in the medieval architecture at Chartres. Gesturing at the neo-classical church, the Boulevard Malesherbes and the Rue Royale that bear "tidings of the Age of Reason" (as Driver puts it), Beckett said:

This is clear. This does not allow the mystery to invade us. With classical art, all is settled. But it is different at Chartres. There is the unexplainable, and there art raises questions that it does not attempt to answer. (1)

Two poles of experience, and of art's response to experience, are set up here; but in Beckett's own work, neither the Age of

1. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 220.

Faith, which accepted mystery, nor the neo-classical age, which tried to clear it away, is adequate alone. Instead he brings together resources of both, to create an art that, preoccupied with form, "admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else." (1)

What is fascinating, from the perspective of his bilingual artistry, is how sensitively he draws on his literary heritage across and within his languages, so as to unite the mystery of the unknowable and the beauty of form. In Comment c'est, which he chose to write in French, he develops a new challenge, building on what the trilogy has taught him, to the system which upholds all the greater systems of science, law, architecture and culture: that of logical, lucid syntax. The novel demands a new way of responding to the author, who has given up authority, given up control of the text's lucidity and meaning, and who demands that his reader too give up the need for these supports. Even punctuation has now gone: the words are freed from the authority of the sentence. Using French for this purpose brings Beckett into a direct state of tension with the language of Descartes and the Académie, the language of "les meules impersonnelles"

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1. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 219.

de la parole" (1) (a phrase which seems apt for written French; far more so than for written English). The use of French also permits him to act freely as a breaker of moulds in a language first learned academically, not bound by the powerful instinctive constraints of a mother tongue. As Ludovic Janvier has said recently:

La liberté est plus grande justement parce que ce n'est pas la langue mère, celle à laquelle on est attaché par des rapports de passion et de haine, de respect et de rejet, et qui est devenue une habitude et un bain pour l'oreille. Le français est un lieu où personne ne peut l'atteindre, où il est innocent, et qu'il peut saccager en allant jusqu'au bout du risque. (2)

His decision to find a way of going "jusqu'au bout du risque" in the language of supreme lucidity involves him in an enterprise which on one level is destructive, on another highly creative. He combines La Madeleine's columns, clear light, and neo-classical confidence with the flying buttresses, the inner darkness, the metaphorically inexhaustible windows and carvings of Chartres. Stepping outside the French context, he draws on the form of Dante's Divina Commedia

1. Fernande St.Martin, Samuel Beckett et l'univers de la fiction (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1976), p. 254.

2. Ludovic Janvier et Agnès Vaquin Janvier, "Traduire Watt avec Beckett". In Revue d'Esthétique, ed. Pierre Chabert (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 1986), p. 63.

for a tripartite structure to which the speaker of Comment c'est will constantly refer, and for a sense of timeless mystery. In his great hymn to faith, however, Dante receives clear guidance from Virgil and then Beatrice as to the limits and nature of Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso, the three realms he visits. The speaker in Comment c'est has no faith and no guide. He has only a desperately and continually evasive power of verbal reasoning, and a kind of faith in the words that come to him still. He attempts analysis of his environment, experimental testing of his companion Pim, mathematical speculations, and even apparently "rational" arguments for the necessity of a prime Creator -- all of which in turn are denied, forgotten, demolished in emotional outbursts of frustration. (1) All here is indeterminate; neither reason nor faith will sustain the figure in the mud, slime or excrement amid which, with a

1. "le voilà donc ce pas des nôtres nous y voilà enfin qui s'écoute soi-même et en prêtant l'oreille à notre murmure ne fait que la prêter à une histoire de son cru" (Comment c'est, p. 215). The English version continues: "ill-inspired ill-told and so ancient so forgotten at each telling that ours may seem faithful..." (How It Is, p. 151). Yet soon this humility and possibility of "faith" collapse once more: "a formulation that would eliminate him completely" (How It Is, p. 157); "only one voice here yes mine yes" (How It Is, p. 158).

medieval awareness of decay, he is compelled to exist.

Happy Days equally draws on elements of Beckett's different cultures to achieve a holding in tension of the certain and the unknown, and a questioning of authority, especially divine authority, that is nevertheless not a firm denial. "Perhaps" stands in place of certainty. Once again Beckett uses with sensitivity and power the resources, the "personality", one might almost say, of the language he chooses to work in. The manuscripts of Happy Days reveal a strongly rooted Irish context, (1) almost as comic, vigorous and extravagant as the Anglo-Irish of Beckett's translation The Old Tune. In revision he reduces the blatant Irish elements, yet what remains carries the audience unmistakably to a particular milieu, a world where women of Winnie's culture, years and social class are characterised by the idiom they rely on: cheerful, euphemistic, conventionally pious, "nice-minded" (Happy Days, p. 16), and sustained by romantic memories as well as practical everyday concerns. This idiom is not one of intellectual abstraction but of solid "common sense". It is a shock when Winnie's social poise lapses or when, carried away by her dramatic visualisation

1. S.E. Gontarski, Beckett's 'Happy Days': A Manuscript Study (Columbus: Publications Committee, The Ohio State University Libraries, 1977), p. 40.

of the Shower- or Cooker-couple, she suddenly indulges in a different kind of speech altogether: "stuck up to her diddies in the bleeding ground" (Happy Days, p. 32). But the instantly reproving comment "coarse fellow" restores her usual sense of decorum. Beckett chooses to expose the prosperous Anglo-Irish middle class, not an intellectual level of society, to his bringing together of chaos and form, his sense of the great sea of irrational forces surging beneath a controlled surface. He selects those circles of experiences in a particular language-world which he has most intimately known, the processes and cadences of whose speech and thought he can faithfully represent. Winnie's world is a desperate one, and at moments even she loses patience, as, for example, when she cries out: "My neck is hurting me!" (Happy Days, p. 44). Yet cheerfulness keeps breaking in, or at least appears to do so; her sense of the chaos is kept firmly at bay by her routines, stories and songs, her ticking off of "another happy day". Winnie is in many ways a typical user of a register and idiom of English which Beckett has long seen as practical, utilitarian, far from intellectually acute, but endowed at least with a certain vigour, concreteness and sense of humour.

"Anglo-Irish" as it is, however, Happy Days also owes a considerable part of its power to the formal beauty of the plays of Racine, and thus draws on Beckett's French literary

background as deeply as it draws on his English-language upbringing. (1) The relentless focus on a heroine who occupies the centre of our minds, the disciplined use of time and space, the economy and intensity of language: all recall the great French dramatist. Winnie would be a tragic heroine like Phèdre -- if, in the conditions of her world, pure tragedy were possible. The difference, though, is crucial and creates a necessary tension in Beckett's play. The Jansenist view of the creator's decrees is absent in Happy Days. Phèdre's destiny "is sealed from the beginning: she will proceed into the dark. As she goes, she herself will be illuminated." For Winnie, there is "not only darkness but also light." In Racine "clarity is possible, but for us who are neither Greek nor Jansenist there is not such clarity." (2) By both using and resisting Racine's vision, Beckett gives form to his own.

Medieval thought is seen as closer in some ways to an acknowledgement of the mystery, the tension of opposing certainties

1. The links between Beckett and Racine are mentioned by many critics; Vivian Mercier, who -- like Beckett -- studied Racine with Rudmose-Brown at Trinity College, Dublin, devotes a major part of his chapter "Classicism/Absurdism" in Beckett/Beckett to the connection (pp. 73-87).

2. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 220.

than is the thought of the neo-classical, or rationalist periods. Dante's three realms, those of darkness, light, and a place between, Augustine's doctrine of grace given and grace withheld, involve a balancing of opposites. This at least is different from the Jansenist doctrine of predestination. Yet Beckett cannot return to the spirit of the medieval world. In a modern world of increasing uncertainties, only the tension between reason and the irrational can be appropriately expressed. Purgatory -- the space between -- is a useful and constant reference for Beckett's suffering humans, but it is not a purgatory from which release into Paradise will occur. His ability to both perceive and give form to this tension derives not only from his knowledge of different European literary traditions but also from the ease with which he crosses over from one culture to another, one language to another, bringing back with him perceptions of their different responses to the problem of experience, and of the ages of faith, reason and doubt he understands so well. He is able to balance these different visions, different worlds, as calmly, now, as he balances his languages.

'Comment c'est' and 'How It Is': crossing back

When Comment c'est is transformed into How It Is, Beckett's artistic intuition, if not his conscious intentions, leads him

to change the text in ways that allow it to fit into the new language-world. The pull back to an Anglo-Irish idiom of comic richness, rhythmic power and metaphorical density can be seen to be strong in the text. Beckett spoke of the translation in 1966 as "somewhat of a failure -- the English language resisted me -- it made me say more than I wanted to say." (1) This self-criticism is unjust. How It Is does succeed, far better than if it had remained a slavish translation from the French, and it succeeds in a characteristically Beckettian manner: by "failing", deliberately, to allow reason to exert authority over the buzzing confusion of language and sensation.

A comparison of Comment c'est and How It Is quickly reveals the kinds of temptation open to the self-translator who, at the same period, is using English with such delight in the new works of Happy Days, Embers, and The Old Tune. Insertions and repetitions anchor the text more in a lingering sense of the moment, suggest a pleasure in its hovering rhythms. "de quoi me sait-on capable de chanter on veut donc que je chante" (Comment c'est, p. 99) becomes "what is not beyond my powers known not to be beyond them song it is required therefore that I sing" (How It Is, p. 70). The lengthening of the first idea by the

1. Raymond Federman, "The Impossibility of Saying the Same Old Thing the Same Old Way", p. 28.

insertion of "not beyond" and "known not to be beyond", and the separation of "song" as an isolated word, are translation decisions made entirely for the sake of the rhythm and to fit with the language's sense of poetic effect. Often French phrases become transformed into more concrete, highly imaged, strongly stressed, and indeed comic equivalents. "histoire d'entretenir l'acquis" (Comment c'est, p. 107) reappears as "lest he get rusty" (How It Is, p. 76); "un jour" (Comment c'est, p. 112) gives "one fine day" (How It Is, p. 79); "que saurais-je faire^{à la rigueur}" (Comment c'est, p. 106) becomes "If I were put to the pin of my collar" (especially comic because the speaker is naked) (How It Is, p. 75); and "pour simplifier" (Comment c'est, p. 214) turns into the wonderful "in pursuance of the principle of parsimony" (How It Is, p. 150). Even the regular refrain-phrases with which the French text is packed gain greater variety in English. "hurlements" is sometimes translated as "screams" and at other times as "howls"; "un temps énorme" emerges as "vast tracts of time" (with a pun on "tract" as written text) and also "vast stretch of time".

The process of revision between the first and later versions of the translation also allows Beckett to make a

conscious move towards such enrichment. (1) In general, the prose of the final version is more concrete, more imaged, and more vigorous than the prose of earlier drafts. For example, "visitors" (From An Unabandoned Work, p. 62) gives way to the more evocative "callers" (How It Is, p. 13), with the idea of voices calling to the figure in the mud; "spirit is indispensable" (From An Unabandoned Work, p. 63) becomes "the soul is de rigueur" (How It Is, p. 15), with a glance back at the language of the work's original creation. The rhythmic needs of the language also demand to be satisfied, so that the limping: "abject abject ages each heroic seen from the next when the last" (From An Unabandoned Work, p. 60) becomes the more lyrical: "abject abject ages each heroic seen from the next when will the last come" (How It Is, p. 10).

It is hardly surprising that Hugh Kenner, in an early reaction to the English version, spoke of a "long work, How It Is (being Comment c'est so completely rethought in English that "translated" seems an inapplicable word)" (2). It is

1. While he was still working on Comment c'est, Beckett prepared and published a short section of an English version, which he called From An Unabandoned Work (Evergreen Review, IV, Sept.-Oct. 1960, pp. 58-65). The library of the University of Reading also has a section of manuscript translation probably produced at the same time (Ms. 1227/7/3/1).

2. Kenner, Samuel Beckett, p. 207.

not only rethought but reheard, the changes giving the English a beauty, an atmosphere of its own which, while not more powerful than the French, is undoubtedly distinct from it.

Comparing the reactions of critics responding to either the French or English versions (whichever language they write in) reveals how strongly this balanced difference may affect readers. Their comments reveal a different sense of what genre the work belongs to, or moves towards, in its two manifestations. Many readers of the French text have been so deeply struck by what Beckett has done to syntax that they tend to exaggerate, to deny any remains of traditional syntactic patterning. The language is "led (...) into chaos" (Federman); (1) these are words "que ne lie plus aucun ciment syntaxique" (Janvier); (2) it is "une syntaxe éclatée" (Durozoi), (3) showing "l'éclatement de la structure logique du langage" (Fournier). (4) Rare indeed are the commentators on Comment c'est who can say, with Brée, that the syntax is

1. Raymond Federman, "'How It Is' with Beckett's Fiction", French Review, XXXVIII (1964-5), p. 468.

2. Ludovic Janvier, Pour Samuel Beckett (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1966/ ^ p. 387.
1973),

3. Gérard Durozoi, Beckett (Paris-Montréal: Bordas, 1972), p. 138.

4. Edith Fournier, "Pour que la boue me soit contée", Critique 168 (mai, 1961), p. 417.

"simplified, but (...) unimpeachable", conforming to a set of "deletion operations". (1)

In the English context, however, this understanding has been common, and reactions to an attack on logic and syntax are far more rare. Instead critics of How It Is have been struck by the text's beautiful rhythms and concrete imagery; the elision of words is seen as promoting the intensity of these qualities, thereby enhancing the work as a kind of poem. (2)

The terms critics have used to describe Comment c'est/How It Is also seem to reflect this genre-distinction, the French being seen as prose, the English as a kind of poetry. (3) The cover of the Editions de Minuit text firmly states that this is

1. Germaine Brée, "The strange world of Beckett's grands articulés" in Samuel Beckett Now, ed. Melvin Friedman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 86.

2. See for example, Josephine Jacobsen and William R. Mueller, The Testament of Samuel Beckett (London: Faber and Faber, 1964): "How It Is comes closest to the typography of poetry in its form; the verse divisions (...) and the "images", clear, unrelated, and vanishing, give the curiously vivid sense of a poem writing itself" (p. 50).

3. Germaine Brée, writing in English but of the French text, brings the two conceptions together: "The label novel is perhaps the only surprising aspect of the work; had Beckett called it a prose poem it would not have surprised anyone". "The strange world of Beckett's grands articulés", p. 86.

a "roman", and many French commentators have seen the divisions of the text as "paragraphes". (1) Yet How It Is often has its sections labelled as "verses", "versets" or even "stanzas". (2) The term "paragraphe" suggests that the longer sequences of words are being taken as the norm, while "verset", especially, implies a focus on the shorter, highly elliptical poetic speeches.

This distinction is an illuminating example of the "sensed" personality of the two versions Beckett has written. In the French original, the "paragraphes" seem to lead on, from one to the next, in an inexorable progression. One of the refrains of Comment c'est, "ça s'enchaîne (toujours)" (e.g. Comment c'est, p. 54), seems to go well with other images in the text: the speaker's discovery (or invention) of a heavy watch-chain for Pim, the idea of time as a chain of moments, the vision of part III where the vast procession of victims and torturers is a chain of human life stretching through time to infinity (e.g. Comment c'est, p. 219). "L'enchaînement" of ideas is equally important, and the

1. For example, Jean Thibaudeau, in Les Temps Modernes, XVI (April 1961), who explicitly says the sections should be termed "paragraphes" rather than "versets" (p. 1387).

2. John Pilling, in Frescoes of the Skull, speaks of "versets" (p. 63).

French delights in the comment "c'est mathématique" (Comment c'est, p. 174). "It's certain" or "it's logical", as one might translate; but "mathématique" has even more powerful connotations of scientific confidence and sequential thought behind it. Linking words, especially towards the end of the text, suggest a considerable pleasure in the working out of an almost "mathematical" argument: one group of "paragraphes" begins with the words: "d'où", "un tel", "alors", "car", "ainsi". (Comment c'est, pp. 212-213)

The speaker, self-conscious in his attempts at verbal and philosophical rigour, even as he demolishes them, still recalls the decrees of the great defenders of French: Rivarol's praise for French syntax, and his attack on English for its mystifying syntactic looseness, its rules that sometimes have more exceptions than members, (1) and Malherbe's insistence on clarity, precision and purity as the ideal qualities of the French tongue. (2) Beckett's protagonist, caught up in the "enchaînement" of words he is producing, travels in zig-zags at least some of the time, and describes his limbs in motion by saying: "ces articulations jouent" (Comment c'est, p. 28). Yet formal French, to Rivarol, should

1. Rivarol, De l'Universalité de la Langue Française, p. 248.

2. David C. Gordon has a detailed discussion of the tradition in The French Language and National Identity, pp. 21-25.

be "une ligne droite" (1) -- like the lines of the Church of La Madeleine, its "articulations" are those of logic and clarity.

The English text differs from the French above all in conveying less of a self-reflexive quality, giving a more direct portrayal of an imaginative world through words, rather than focussing on the words themselves. For "ça s'enchaîne toujours" it substitutes "that hangs together (still)", (e.g. How It Is, p. 38). The image of the chain, the inexorable on-going articulation of disciplined thought, gives way to a more local and "vertical" sense of images at the moment of speaking. The lack of gender agreements and small number of verb-forms contributes to this; more words in the English text float freely, not clearly linked to the phrase immediately before or after (the English word "round", for example, can occupy the rôle of at least five parts of speech without changing its form). But more noticeable still, since Beckett's translation makes evident use of it, is the characteristic of English known as the "-ing" ending, not merely a verbal participle but a highly productive element in nouns, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions. It is one of the most significant differences

1. Rivarol, De l'Universalité de la Langue Française, p. 255.

between French and English, as the linguist Jacques Duron suggests:

Autre trait important, caractéristique cette fois de la tendance de l'anglais à évoquer l'action en train de se faire, la sensation concrète du mouvement plutôt que sa traduction conceptuelle: la forme progressive du verbe. Là où nous employons l'infinitif, l'anglais recourt au participe présent: "Cela ne sert à rien de pleurer", It is no use crying; "Cela vous ennuerait-il que j'ouvre la fenêtre?", Would you mind my opening the window? Que l'on discerne ou non du participe présent proprement dit ce que les grammairiens appellent le nom verbal ou le gérondif, il est certain que la forme verbale en -ing remplit les fonctions les plus variées, allant jusqu'à servir de nom ("Elle pratique le canotage et la natation": She practises boating and swimming) et à tenir lieu de proposition, comme c'est le cas dans les deux phrases que voici. There being no clear evidence against him, and he denying the charge: "Comme il n'y avait contre lui aucun témoignage précis et qu'il niait l'accusation dont il était l'objet..." Sans doute les deux manières de dire sont-elles l'une et l'autre très claires; la seconde pourtant est plus précise et plus souple -- et par là révélatrice d'une organisation supérieure. C'est que l'anglais, avec la faculté qu'il a de former des propositions au participe présent, s'est contenté de juxtaposer des moments de pensée que le français préfère lier dans un ensemble: à la phrase anglaise, souvent faite de segments propositionnels mis bout à bout, la phrase française oppose un idéal d'unité organique. (1)

1. Jacques Duron, Langue Française, Langue Humaine, (Paris: Larousse, 1963), p. 104.

English rests with the process as it occurs; French neatly analyses it and closes it into a specific idea. English gives a concrete image, French an abstract conception of it. English allows juxtaposition to act as syntactic linking, French demands a higher degree of organization into a properly subordinated set of relations. Not surprisingly, all these elements of Duron's words carry an unspoken message that the French way is better, less confused, more precise. Yet the strength of English can be seen as its deliberate refusal to move so far away from practical experience. Once again Beckett's words may come to mind: that English is a good theatre language because of the close relation between "thing" and "vocal". Ludovic Janvier seems to agree with this when he says:

Le français étant une langue du commentaire et de la glose, plus que du réel, cela coïncide avec le commentaire perpétuel du Je au travail, alors que la langue anglaise, immergeant le sujet dans son bain, ne permet pas la distance, ne permet pas le rejet entre le vécu et son ombre, c'est-à-dire la glose. Le français représente donc un appauvrissement quant au concret, mais un enrichissement quant à l'ombre portée sur le travail. (1)

Both viewpoints also agree with the conclusions of Vinay

1. Janvier, "Traduire Watt avec Beckett", p. 63.

and Darbelnet in their comparative study of the two languages. (1)

In Comment c'est and How It Is Beckett demonstrates his ability to use the "genius" of each language, and where necessary to draw closer, through revision, to the language's own nature. As the text moves into English, he often increases the use of the "-ing" ending where alternative phrasing is possible. The English takes on a lingering, spatial, and very immediate quality, transforming the onward-pushing sequence of ideas, the intellectual distance, of the French. "Pas question impossible" (Comment c'est, p. 10) becomes "no knowing no asking" in the first English version, From An Unabandoned Work, (p. 59). "D'un geste de donneur de cartes" (Comment c'est, p. 15) becomes "with the gesture (...) of one dealing cards" (From An Unabandoned Work, p. 61).

More strikingly, though, the number of "-ing" words increases noticeably between From An Unabandoned Work and How It Is:

some upright (p.59)
and said to myself (p.60)
I must know I'll
need both hands (p.62)

of transient joys (p. 63)
tossed by the clouds (p. 65)

some still standing (p. 8)
saying to myself (p. 9)

knowing I'll need both hands
(p. 12)

of fleeting joys (p. 13)
tossing in the clouds (p. 18)

Clearly a reviewing of the translation allows Beckett to focus

1. See p. 117.

on phrases that do not yet seem "the way you'd say it in English" (to paraphrase Bowles' account of Beckett's translating methods). Throughout How It Is, as it liberates itself from its French original, similar stylistic decisions become apparent. "Qui se traînent" (Comment c'est, p. 74) becomes "these dragging" (How It Is, p. 53); "voyageur" (Comment c'est, p. 178) becomes "journeying" (How It Is, p. 124); "en bourreau" (Comment c'est, p. 184) becomes "tormenting" (How It Is, p. 128). At every point, Beckett intensifies the sense of the moment in process, the concrete evocation, while the French moves to a more analytical definition of the moment; the experience of reading the two versions is thus quite different.

To sum up this discussion of Comment c'est and How It Is, I wish to look back for a moment at the way in which the two texts developed. One might think of the translation evolving in a similar way to the original, but in this case the process, formally and stylistically, was totally dissimilar. The distinct evolutions of the two versions may well have a direct bearing on their "personalities".

Comment c'est grew out of the five-book manuscript "Pim", which followed the long-delayed and gruelling translation of L'innommable into English. I have already suggested that The Unnamable's completion may have had a direct link with Krapp's Last Tape and Fragment de Théâtre II; it probably also triggered off this new experiment in French prose. In the latter part of L'innommable "comment" and "commence" thud

through the outpouring of words like a torturer's blows: "chercher comment c'est, essayer de devenir" (L'innommable, p. 242); "quelqu'un a dû m'expliquer, comment c'est" (L'innommable, p. 243). The speaker tries out different settings, some of which, dust, humus, slime, reappear in Comment c'est and Happy Days. But what is significant is that the "Pim" manuscript continues, initially, the endless outpouring of language of L'innommable's speaker: there are as yet no carefully separated but unpunctuated "paragraphes". Gradually in the process of revision, formal decisions obscure the link between the recently translated L'innommable and the new work in French. A later manuscript says "Conserver virgules, plus de points". At this point a section, L'Image, (1) was published, showing that already the commas are too sparse to help to distinguish all the linked clauses or stages of thought; more often than not they coincide with what will become a break in the final French text.

Beckett then went even further, perhaps feeling that to keep to a block of prose and yet use commas was still too

 1 . Samuel Beckett, L'Image, X : A Quarterly Review, 1 (October 1959), pp. 35-37.

reminiscent of the post-war trilogy, and a kind of half-measure. So he revised the French through the bold and simple decision to abandon punctuation altogether, dividing the flow of prose into sections or paragraphs. It is this decision that gives the final French its extraordinary tension between a strong ongoing "pull" of continuous language and a breaking up of syntax seen under stress, many of its normal supports gone.

How It Is developed very differently. Beckett worked from the French text, at one stage numbering the separate sections for easier reference. (1) The fact that these clearly distinct sections already existed, and could be worked on in sequence or not, as he chose, meant that How It Is could be conceived of as a series of connected brief poems. Attention could be paid to the imaginative vision at each moment, instead of to the fight with the remorseless forward-moving syntax in the original. Comment c'est may seem more linear because it was conceived so; How It Is from its beginning allowed Beckett to consider the lingering and musical rhythms of the Anglo-Irish idiom he had, with his previous self-translations, come to appreciate.

Thus Comment c'est and How It Is reveal themselves to be

1. See Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts, p. 57 .

deeply and subtly attuned both to their language-context and to their place in Beckett's own development. Even if he would not wish to articulate the difference, Beckett sensed their distinct identities when he spoke to Federman about them. Perhaps allowing his own opinion to dominate, Federman says:

many ways,
Comment c'est, in ^{is} much too lyrical (Beckett agrees on that). It is also too well-written. It has too much style. The words in it mean too much. The words are too consistent, too resistant—perhaps less so in the French version, but certainly the English version which he considers to be "somewhat of a failure -- the English language resisted me -- it made me say more than I wanted to say". (1)

Federman seems to judge both texts in this way; Beckett merely "agrees" and then goes on to distinguish the English. The conversation, which took place in the mid-1960s, reflects a moment when highly language-centred, non-expressive experiments were a particular concern to Beckett, his own formal austerity being at its extreme point, with texts such as Imagination Morte Imaginez and Bing. Yet it is, as ever, his native language, not French, that makes him feel to some extent mastered rather than exerting mastery, and in fact his giving in to the poetic potential of Anglo-Irish was not a failure but a necessary adjustment of the artistic voice. His intuitive sense of how he could best

1. Federman, "The Impossibility of Saying the Same Old Thing the Same Old Way", p. 28.

use his two languages made him able to adapt both to their verbal environments. Balance remains, the artist standing between his two tongues, two cultures, two sets of aesthetic expectations, in such a way as to challenge the certainties of both.

'Happy Days' and 'Oh les beaux jours': crossing back again

To end this chapter I want to look briefly at the other side of Beckett's balanced equation, the bilingual transformation in the opposite direction, from the English Happy Days to the French Oh les beaux jours. Just as English readers of Beckett's post-war trilogy can be forgiven for forgetting that they are dealing with a translation (so powerful and influential have the novels become in English) so a French theatre-goer can be forgiven for not realising that Oh les beaux jours is a second, not original, version. With the success, especially, of Madeleine Renaud's performances as Winnie, the play has taken up a firm position in French theatrical history. To a large extent, though, the balanced achievement of the English and French versions is a result of both being created in a bilingual-bicultural imagination that predisposes them to their other selves. Both are clearly and consciously aware of their dramatic idiom and of the power of words.

The literary allusions which Winnie weaves into her flow of talk have often been discussed, and Beckett has been unusually forthcoming in identifying them. (1) In context they fit well with Winnie's character and background, the snatches of poetry and drama from a middle-class girl's education, the popular song that recalls her social life as a young woman. They are treasures taken from a sack of half-remembered verbal resources just as Winnie takes her lipstick or mirror from her bag, giving her not only amusement and ways of passing time, but also confirming a precarious identity. "The old style" can be nostalgically recreated in memory of an age when faith and optimism were easier. Beckett's use of what he called later his "bits of pipe", though he does not admit it, (2) ~~shows~~ an intuitive sense of appropriate context so that the literary interweaving enriches the audience's experience of the play as a whole. In doing this, using "old words, back from the dead" (How It Is, p. 104), he is drawing on echoes of literature with which not only Beckett himself but many members of his audience

1. For a full analysis, see James Knowlson (ed.), Happy Days/ Oh les beaux jours: A Bilingual Edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), notes on text.

2. "The 'eye of the mind' in Happy Days does not refer to Yeats any more than the 'revels' in Endgame (refer) to The Tempest. They are just bits of pipe I happen to have with me". (James Knowlson, "Beckett's 'Bits of Pipe", p. 16)

are at least vaguely familiar.

In approaching Oh les beaux jours he had to make the kind of difficult decision translators regularly face, establishing how freely to adopt similar literary and popular quotations from the culture in which the new version had to find its place. Because of his literary background as a scholar of French literature he was able to do this admirably, yet it is undoubtedly true that his French "bits of pipe" trigger off quite different responses or associations from his English ones. (1) The "history of hydraulics" - his phrase to James Knowlson - is, after all, very different in the two languages, and to replace Shakespeare's Cymbeline, for example, with Racine's Athalie is to allow for markedly distinct sequences of connotative meaning. As ever, his decision is entirely in favour of creating a living work, not a slavishly accurate translation, in the new context. The play's success has shown how remarkably he accomplished this.

One element of his success depends on the nature of the original itself. In spite of the strongly Irish flavour of the early manuscripts, Happy Days is, even before translation,

1. Harry Cockerham in his article "Bilingual Playwright" discusses some of these, pp. 151-152.

a work deeply attuned to the language-world in which Beckett had, by the time of its composition, lived for nearly a quarter of a century. Not only the form, the economy and rigour of the text, the debt to Racinian drama, make it predisposed to French; it also contains occasional references and ideas that seem to come from French, or depend on a comparative sense of the two languages. Winnie's puzzled question to Willie about hair, "what would you say, Willie, speaking of your hair, them or it?" (Happy Days, p. 19), is a most peculiar inquiry for a native English speaker to make. Hair (of the head) is, of course, normally singular in English, plural in French. Though this passage suggests a bilingual focus, the French text does not even attempt to produce an equivalent, and a quite different linguistic quibble is substituted for it. More intriguing still, Willie's joke about "Formication", after Winnie has exclaimed that she sees an "emmet" or ant carrying an egg (Happy Days, pp. 23-24), seems feeble in English (one would have to make a connection with "formic acid"). In French it succeeds beautifully, "fourmi" and "fornication" being satisfactorily close. Both texts, as so commonly in Beckett's works, contain hints of the languages' centuries of cultural interchange and verbal borrowings: Winnie in English uses the phrase "on the qui vive" (Happy Days, p. 22) and Winnie in French speaks of Willie's "cold cream" (Oh les beaux

jours, p. 31). To see the play in both languages is to experience to an unusual degree a sense of linguistic balance, the characteristics of a middle-aged, bourgeois woman's world being sensitively adapted in each case to the appropriate linguistic coordinates.

This process can be seen even when Beckett makes changes to his original text that do not seem "compulsory". They are, rather, adjustments to what a Winnie of that culture would actually feel and say. Religious references are subtly different, and a more open acknowledgement of human ruthlessness emerges. For "That is what I find so comforting when I lose heart and envy the brute beast" (Happy Days, p. 16), a statement which leaves the "brute beast"'s fate open, the French has: "'Ça que je trouve si réconfortant quand je perds courage et jalouse les bêtes qu'on égorge" (Oh les beaux jours, p. 24). Beckett's sensitivity to the slaughter of animals, a subject politely concealed in his native culture but more openly accepted in France, returns again and again in his work. Here the French Winnie, but not the English, explains explicitly that it is the beasts' deaths, not lives, that she envies.

Though first written in English, Happy Days allows Beckett to draw on his French cultural resources in many of its

characteristics. Its syntax (Winnie's "bits and scraps" of mostly unanswered conversation) almost certainly owes a great deal to the experience Beckett underwent in writing Comment c'est; Winnie often talks in sentence fragments, and yet the underlying syntactic control of the author, who is deliberately creating this fragmentation, makes all she says accessible to the hearer. In both works human speech (which depends on the capacity to breathe — a capacity both Winnie and the Comment c'est speaker seem in danger of losing) is valued and explored in artistic forms of controlled beauty and balance. Beckett's two languages, his wide-ranging cultural and especially literary inheritance, are constantly at work together in producing a version in any one language. It is perhaps appropriate to describe Happy Days or Oh les beaux jours in the terms of praise Beckett's tutor Rudmose-Brown lavished on Racine:

All is inherent. Nothing is accessory. No single line, hardly a word — (...) — could be removed: nothing could be added without spoiling the whole. A play of Racine is an architectonic masterpiece. (1)

Beckett had spoken of Fin de Partie in terms of the "architectonics" (On 'Endgame', p. 106); he paid meticulous attention to the "architectonic" structure not only of

1. Racine, Andromaque, ed. T.B. Rudmose-Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), p. 12.

Happy Days but also of Comment c'est. It is satisfying to see how both works, and their translations, fulfil a sense of balance across and between languages, and in doing so — paradoxically — draw attention to his determination to say "nothing that compresses experience within a closed pattern". (1) He succeeds in bringing together the medieval sense of the unknown, seen in Chartres or the works of Dante, with the lucidity and sense of clear authority in La Madeleine or the works of Racine. The darkness and the light, the formlessness and the forms, come together to make a twilight zone such as he portrays through sound alone in Embers. His art emerges from a transitional place, understanding both sides, viewing both language-worlds, with disciplined feeling. It "raises questions that it does not attempt to answer". "Perhaps" (2) is his only response to those who prefer to deal in the rational oppositions of "yes" and "no".

1. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 221.

2. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", p. 220 and p. 221.

CHAPTER VII: BEYOND BILINGUALISM

1962-1972

Play, Beckett's boldly named drama of three former lovers goaded into speech by a merciless light, (1) came into existence in English, but was translated into French before the English version was finalised. (2) It received its world première, and was published first, in German. (3) Such juxtapositions have become familiar to critics of Beckett's later drama, but can still surprise a theatre-goer unaware of the internationalism which characterises his normal working practice. Beckett's participation in the German production allowed him to test his inner vision of the play against the practical demands of staging; before he finished Play and Comédie, therefore, he had adopted Spiel, their German cousin, as an outsider able to provide a comparative critical perspective on them both. This shifting across three languages, all of them employed in the development of a single work, marks a further stage in Beckett's artistic

1. Samuel Beckett, Play, in Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 145-160.
2. Samuel Beckett, Comédie, in Comédie et actes divers, pp. 7-35.
3. See Maurice Blackman, "The Shaping of a Beckett Text: Play", Journal of Beckett Studies, 10 (1985), pp. 87-107.

bilingualism; it is the subject which this chapter will address.

Although Beckett continues to use only two new languages for the creation of new drama and prose, he steps beyond bilingualism to an active trilingualism in the late 1950s and 1960s as theatre-director, and self-translator or translator's advisor, in English, French and German. The double translation of Krapp's Last Tape into German and into the medium of opera, a collaboration between Beckett, the composer Marcel Mihalovici, and the German translator Elmar Tophoven, seems particularly emblematic of Beckett's future experiments, and was, moreover, a great success. (1) Beckett's German publishers were pioneers in bringing out useful trilingual editions of his work. (2) Much evidence exists to show the care and interest Beckett has taken in supervising German translations, (3) and his pleasure in

1. See Marcel Mihalovici, "My Collaboration with Samuel Beckett", in Beckett at Sixty, pp. 20-22.

2. Such as the valuable edition by Limes Verlag, Wiesbaden, of all Beckett's poems, under the title Gedichte (1959).

3. See, for example, the exchange of letters between Beckett and Erich Franzen about the translation of Molloy, Babel 3 (1984), pp. 21-35.

working in the German theatre. (1) The interplay of three languages and their imaginative territories in the artistic mind is a subject even less frequently discussed than is artistic bilingualism; yet Beckett's works in the 1960s are, I believe, best understood in this unusual context.

The startling changes in his aesthetic practice during the 1960s are undoubtedly rooted in the verbally fertile "mud" of Comment c'est and How It Is (and in the discovery of their difference); yet the hidden third perspective provided by another language may well have brought a new kind of illumination. Beckett's works bear witness, increasingly, to a sense of universals beyond either of his specific language-communities, universals of human experience expressed in an increasingly language-less form. Babel cannot be ignored, but it can be circumvented -- in the international languages of painting and sculpture, music, mathematics, gesture, sound and silence. Or it can be controlled in words, if words there must be, which seek to approach these non-verbal codes as closely as the constraints of syntax and semantics will allow.

1. Cohn, Just Play, and Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting, are two works that give information about Beckett's involvement in German theatre, radio and television.

Beckett's multilingualism (which includes, as well as German, his knowledge and love of Italian) brings to his art a vision of the essential elements of human life shared by people of many different societies and tongues. That vision finds its way into the formal composition of his works so that they can, increasingly, be "translated" directly into different languages in a way Beckett's earliest works cannot. Breath, to take the extreme example, surmounts the question of language by having no characters, no text, only the birth-cry of a baby which communicates in any human context. Not until later in the baby's existence will it be forced to commit itself to one (or two) specific tongue(s). (1)

I will examine the formal response to the use of a linguistic trinity which seems visible in Beckett's works, the expanding imaginative territory which goes with his much-discussed minimalism, and --most important --the new syntax, a syntax breaking more and more free of centredness within its own language, which Beckett achieves through his detachment from any single speech. Play, like the prose work Le dépeupleur, suggests that the author's imaginative experience is most unusual. Beckett's perspective in this period seems -----

1. Samuel Beckett, Breath, in Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 209-211

at times to be somewhere beyond the planet, in outer space. The "vieille terre", (1) which has carried him so long, is seen with an all-encompassing understanding. Yet Beckett does not simply generalise; he focusses, intently, on the creating, anguished minds of individuals who lack any common citizenship save that of having been born human. This citizenship, unlike any other, can be shared by all readers and every audience; no-one is excluded from Beckett's concerns, his compassionate plays and texts, whether or not they come with the special privilege of a translation prepared by Beckett himself. All language in Beckett's world is "an excess of language" (Molloy, p. 116); by going beyond bilingualism, Beckett transforms even the slightest excess into a highly purified art of "recreation", imaginative play in which the reader, listener or viewer is asked to participate.

Triadic forms and the use of three languages

The sequence of works and alternations of language in this period show a significant complexity and restlessness. After the enormous effort of Comment c'est, Happy Days,

1. Samuel Beckett, vieille terre, in Pour finir encore et autres foirades (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1976), p. 33.

and their translations, Beckett turned increasingly to short works for the theatre and brief prose texts. While some of the choices of language relate to external demands, (1) there seems to be, too, an inner compulsion to test each language against the other, and -- as mentioned above -- even expose both French and English to the further detachment allowed by the use of German. Yet different works show close connections between languages, as well as within each single language.

Each individual script or text has its own characteristics, yet all share this linguistic openness. Words and Music, written in English, and Cascando, written in French, cross rapidly into their "twin" forms, Paroles et Musique and Cascando (E). (2) The experience of writing and then shooting Film with Buster Keaton gives Beckett a new perspective on the uses of silence, and of visual communicative means, in an operation which brings together a long-lasting respect

1. See Chronology.

2. Samuel Beckett, Words and Music and Cascando (E), Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 125-134 and pp. 135-144. Paroles et musique and Cascando (F), Comédie et actes divers, pp. 61-78 and pp. 45-60.

for the silent-film makers and an interest in new technology. (1) A desire to achieve a kind of sculpture in writing, a presentation of the human form as object, minutely and lovingly described, moves from English (All Strange Away) (2) to French (Imagination morte imaginez) (3) in a fascinating advance of a single idea. The much shorter and more syntactically surprising French text seems a kind of alchemical residue of the longer one in English; it is itself then returned to English as Imagination Dead Imagine. (4) Texts for performance including Eh Joe and Come and Go, (5) written in English, bear out Beckett's stated impression of English as a "good theatre language" yet he is said to have considered writing a play in German -- (6)

1. Beckett travelled to New York in the summer of 1964 for the filming, his only visit to North America. See Alan Schneider's essay "On Directing Film", Film, pp. 63-94.

2. All Strange Away may have been written as early as the mid-1950s (in Collected Shorter Prose it is placed between Texts For Nothing and From An Abandoned Work), yet it is usually accepted as dating from the early 1960s. Breon Mitchell, in "A Beckett Bibliography: New Works 1976-1982" (Modern Fiction Studies, 29, No. 1, Spring 1983), puts it "c.1963-64" (p. 133).

3. Samuel Beckett, Imagination morte imaginez, in Têtes-mortes (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1967), pp. 49-57.

4. Samuel Beckett, Imagination Dead Imagine, Collected Shorter Prose, pp. 145-147.

5. Samuel Beckett, Come and Go, Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 191-197.

6. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 592.

a plan finally accomplished in the 1980s with Quadrat I and II, (1) and Nacht und Träume, (2) if "play" is the appropriate term.

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and since, he has also been involved in revising earlier translations he has become dissatisfied with, writing new translations, advising on translations by others, directing and advising directors -- a pattern of linguistic alternation of enormous complexity, and one that for most artists would prove almost too gruelling for any new ideas to survive. Yet after more than a decade of his multilingual activity, he wrote a new work whose originality and power have set it among the best known of his dramas. Not I sums up images and ideas about language and isolation dating back decades, yet perhaps also reflects the horror and fascination of language in action in a life so crammed with increasingly public linguistic exertion. The mouth, isolated on stage from a human body, has as witness a ghostly Auditor; both are in a sense externalisations of a sense of language, of speakers and hearers. So basic a view of communication, all other contextual details gone,

1. Samuel Beckett, Quad (the name in English), Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 289-294.

2. Samuel Beckett, Nacht und Träume, Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 303-306.

seems appropriate as the vision of an author occupying an international realm where language frontiers are constantly being crossed, and yet where problems of language also frequently prevent the cross-over of thought and attitude, shared feeling and knowledge.

The possession and regular use of a language endow its speaker with a structured system of elements which can be brought together into infinite combinations: the power of words is "transformational" and "generative". In the phrase of the narrator of Enough, all we know -- or know in a form we can articulate -- comes from language: "The art of combining is not my fault. It's a curse from above".

(1) To be actively trilingual is to have the resources of three cultures at your disposal (or to be triply cursed) and to be able, in comparing them, to gain a more and more acute sense of what they share, and where they differ. Their presence alongside each other allows a comparative focus on their combinatory possibilities.

Beckett's years of bilingual writing and self-translation up to the 1960s had resulted in a balanced awareness of French and English, although English -- the language learned before

1. Samuel Beckett, Enough, Collected Shorter Prose, p. 140.

the age of reason -- remained dangerously seductive.

Beckett had complained to Rosset in 1957 that something in his English infuriated him (a "lack of brakes"), (1) and had admitted to Federman after translating How It Is that the language made him say more than he wanted to say. (2) French had long been a language in which he could bridge the gap between the territory of the unconscious and the realm of conscious art, while still remaining in control. Yet there was perhaps a danger that French too would, in the long term, begin to feel innate. A powerful challenge to French as well as English could only come from the perspective of yet another language, and it came from one that has long been noted for its philosophical and philological concerns. Mauthner, whom Beckett openly names in Pochade radiophonique (p. 69), is only one of a long series of German-speaking thinkers whose explorations in words have established their language as peculiarly appropriate for the discussion of abstract philosophy. It was in German that

1. Letter from Beckett to Barney Rosset, Dec. 26th, 1957, "There is something in my English writing that infuriates me and I can't get rid of it. A kind of lack of brakes". Quoted in Zilliagus, Beckett and Broadcasting, p. 149.

2. See p. 124 and Chapter VI.

Beckett wrote his extraordinary letter to Axel Kaun in 1937, articulating a desire to tear through the veil of language and get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it. The German he was exposed to in wartime France, that of the Nazi propaganda machine, was so much a travesty or negation of this precise and philosophical language that it must have given him an even clearer sense of its value. In the 1960s, German, having returned to importance through partly fortuitous circumstances (Beckett's close and rewarding contacts with various German directors, actors, and technicians as well as with his translators), offers an imaginative territory from which both English and French can be exposed to new syntactic and semantic scrutiny.

The richly creative period after World War Two had been characterised by an almost obsessive dualism, which, I have argued, seems to bear a direct relation to Beckett's use of a second language. Now, in the period after Comment c'est, Beckett has a new creative surge, in which his active trilingualism is mirrored by an equally concentrated use of threes. Beckett as creator, like his narrators, seems fascinated by calculations "à la troisième puissance des nombres ternaires entiers." (1) Threes appear at every

1. Samuel Beckett, Assez, in Têtes-mortes, p. 38.

level of form and language, and begin to expose the Western world-picture itself as a construct. We think in three dimensions; we use (in English and most European languages) three persons in our pronoun system; we fix time in three periods: past, present, future. The Christian Divinity is also, needless to say, a "three". Some human languages order reality differently, especially those of non-Indo-European stock. Beckett remains within Indo-European, but his comparative focus on the languages he does use gives him an awareness of what is culture-specific and what is shared by all human societies.

The period dominated by the figure three stretches from 1960 to the present. Though smaller in volume and perhaps in creative richness than the earlier period of intense dualism, it produces several manuscripts of originality and importance in a short period. The text of Play, three radio plays, the crucial All Strange Away from which Imagination morte imaginez develops, Se voir (1) (a precursor of Le dépeupleur), and the "Kilcool" manuscript (2) (which fuels new work right through to Not I and That Time), all date from a period when Beckett was increasingly using German as well as English and French

1. Samuel Beckett, Se voir, in Pour finir encore et autres foirades, pp. 39-41.

2. See Gontarski, The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, pp. 134-141.

for discussion and revision of his own art. It is hardly surprising that an imaginative transposition occurs, and sets of "three voices" surface again and again in these years and those that follow.

It is worth looking at some of Beckett's triadic works in a little more detail, to see what sources suggest themselves for his apparent fascination with the number. Comment c'est is, of course, the massive triadic form which looms over the works of the following years. Undoubtedly the triadic patterns and shape of Dante's Divina Commedia are a major influence: the three books of the "Inferno", "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso", the terza rima which Dante employs, the patterns of multiples of threes, seem to have made a profound impression on Beckett as has every aspect of "the divine Florentine"'s (1) masterpiece. Yet Dante's place in Beckett's imagination has been central since the late 1920s; and triadic forms do not spring out at every turn in the works of 1945-53, whereas binaries do. Even the trilogy, it should be remembered, was conceived of as a pair, not a trilogy, of novels until a relatively late stage of the writing.

After Comment c'est, however, with its often stressed "avant",

1. "A"'s phrase for Dante in Rough for Radio II, p. 118.

"avec" et "après" Pim (each standing for a carefully distinguished narration), a remarkable sequence of "threes" follows: three voices in Words and Music (Music, Words and Croak); Lui, Elle and (presumably) a radio in Esquisse radiophonique; (1) Ouvreur, Voix and Musique in Cascando; Man, Woman 1 and Woman 2 in Play; three speaking parts in Pochade radiophonique (Animateur, Dactylo et Fox); the trio of women of Come and Go whose entire world seems patterned by threes; the human "participants" of Joe's drama in Eh Joe (himself, the voice, the girl who killed herself); the patterning of Sans with its multiples of 3, 6 and 12; (2) Not I, which is formally triadic (and of course stems from the struggle with the "third" person); and That Time, which in a way looks back to Comment c'est, finding three "times" of which to speak, in three voices which are all the voices of a single human brain.

It would not be surprising if Beckett's trilingual activities led to a corresponding use of threes in his imaginative explorations. The idea of there being multiple voices in the creative person's brain fits well with his own sense of

1. Samuel Beckett, Esquisse radiophonique, in Pas suivi de quatre esquisses, pp. 87-97.

2. Samuel Beckett, Sans, in Têtes-mortes, pp. 67-77.

the mystery of consciousness. It also has links with the ideas of C.G. Jung, who often pointed out in his lectures and essays that the "individual" is not a single unified entity, but can split up into different personalities, different selves. (1) The mentally ill often insist these different voices are real, whereas creative artists, able to draw on this wealth of the unconscious, can translate them into character and dialogue under a certain degree of rational control. Beckett himself said of Not I, for example, that he "heard" the old woman's stream of words in his head. (2) Beckett has gone further than most artists in seeing the brain as a "place" with different regions, and in providing literally different speech for different elements of the creating self. In the 1960s, his dramatic texts seem to find their voice in English, his prose in French. Yet no over-all pattern can be established, and since the early 1970s his choice of language for an individual work, whatever its genre, has been unpredictable. Still (prose) is written in English, (3) Catastrophe (much more recently) is theatre

1. See p. 179.

2. S.E. Gontarski, The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, p. 132.

3. Samuel Beckett, Still, in Collected Shorter Prose, pp. 183-185.

written in French. (1) Obviously, in the European context, he will not mingle different languages blatantly in a single text. (In Montreal, where many readers of literature are French/English bilinguals, some poets, novelists and dramatists are now experimenting with texts that shift impulsively from French to English and back again.) (2) What he does do, however, is to explore each work in its varying linguistic manifestations, often combining the act of translation with self-critical revisions. The imaginative territory of each tongue offers a new perspective on the other(s).

Clas Zilliacus' fascinating study Beckett and Broadcasting has provided, among many other insights, a detailed analysis of Beckett's use of silence. Especially bold when used on radio (the listener may simply turn off), Beckett's instructions for "Pauses" or "Silences" are more frequent in a single work than are many writers' in their entire output. (3) Radio is undoubtedly a medium peculiarly suited to Beckett's art, and much of his technical experience

1. Samuel Beckett, Catastrophe, in Catastrophe et autres dramacules (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit), pp. 69-81. In this case there is an external reason: the play was written for the Avignon Festival, as part of an evening of works for Vaclav Havel.

2. These include the experimental theatre group, Carbone 14, which has recently toured in Europe. See also Forster, The Poet's Tongues, p. 96 (note 42) for a slightly earlier example which is, in fact, only one of many in an increasingly bilingual city.

3. Zilliacus, Beckett and Broadcasting, pp. 154-168.

has been with German, as well as English, broadcasters rather than with those in his adopted country of France. Yet art demands form in which to encapsulate silence. Silence alone is indeed artistic suicide, unless something else remains for the audience to respond to ("Post-modern" composers such as John Cage have tested the limits of this hypothesis). What becomes evident in the 1960s is that Beckett's languages are all becoming subject to the simple question: are they necessary at all, at least in their "old style"? Instead of going beyond bilingualism, Beckett seems to be striving to go beyond "lingualism" altogether, a repudiation vividly symbolised in the frantically working mouth of Not I. This pair of lips and the tongue flickering between them linger as a visual impression even if the flow of words is barely understood.

To encapsulate silence, then, and reduce the need for culturally-centred idiomatic speech and all the old realism that goes with it, Beckett pushes his art away from the traditional literary text or script in drama. Even in the early 1950s, he had seen mime as a fascinating non-linguistic mode of communication. Now the gestures or stances of the human body reappear in the company of word-combinations that are like paintings and sculpture (especially in the prose, with its capacity to convey a sense of stasis and

observation). Other combinations with the body present or implied are like a musical score (especially in the theatre, and radio drama, in which repetition and variation through time can be used to such good effect).

It is often said that most critics ignore the lifelong influence of visual art on this apparently literary author; the problem is of course that painting and sculpture are essentially non-verbal (as Beckett himself pointed out in his articles on the van Velde brothers). Paintings and sculptures demand an emotional and formal response, which cannot be totally reducible to words. Texts such as Imagination morte imaginez and Bing almost beg for some visual aid, encouraging the reader to pick up a pencil and start to draw, and parts of Le dépeupleur have been published with engravings. (1) The centuries-old tradition of painting the naked human form underlies the description, near the end of Le dépeupleur, of the young woman who is so still that she has become the North, the fixed point in the geographical circle of the cylinder. Simple as the description is, there is the dignity of vast historical

1. For example, The North. (a version of part of the same text), illustrated with three etchings by Avigdor Arikha (London: Enitharmon Press, 1972).

reference behind it:

Elle a la tête entre les genoux et les bras
autour des jambes. La main gauche tient
le tibia droit et la droite l'avant-bras
gauche. Les cheveux roux ternis par
l'éclairage arrivent jusqu'au sol. Ils
lui cachent le visage et tout le devant
du corps y compris l'entre-jambes. Le pied
gauche est croisé sur le droit. Elle est
le nord. (1)

How far this is from the allusive, culture-specific prose
of Beckett's pre-war fiction, and equally from the Dionysian
linguistic richness of Molloy. It may be written in French,
but it has little more relation to French life and culture
than to any other; correspondingly, its verbal precision
and simple view of the human form allow -- are already
prepared for -- translation.

Music too frees the individual from the limitations of
a particular language. There is a wealth of testimony to
Beckett's love of music (especially, one must add, the German
tradition, favorites being Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert) and
to his tendency to "conduct" rather than "direct" his works
in the theatre. Like visual art, music can work directly
from formal patterning to the recipient's emotions, without
having to be "articulated" as words in the head. (2) In

1. Samuel Beckett, Le dépeupleur (Paris: Les Editions de
Minuit, 1970), p. 50.

2. As Vivian Mercier says, "Music has always been synonymous
with emotion for Beckett" (Beckett/Beckett, p. 150).

his script-notes for Film, his one -- and significantly, silent -- adventure in the cinematic tradition, Beckett uses a telling verb, "emotionalize". (1) His crafting of language in ways far removed from its utilitarian purposes in the everyday world and closer to the crafting of a musical composition does precisely that, disarms the intellect, and emotionalizes the listener's response.

Like Philip Glass's music, some of Beckett's texts employ hypnotic, haunting repetitions; Sans (Lessness) (2) is the supreme example. Its desire to "emotionalize", in spite of all the rather off-putting information which Beckett himself has provided to explain its construction, is deliberate and simple. A tell-tale clue is the recurrent use of the word "petit" and "little" in "petit corps" (Sans, p. 69 and ff.) / "little body" (Lessness, p. 153 and ff.) Beckett's use of these words to promote an emotional sympathy close to sentimentality can be traced from his earliest writing in Ireland through the post-war French. (3) Even in

1. See p. 243.

2. Samuel Beckett, Lessness in Collected Shorter Prose, pp. 153-157.

3. e.g., in More Pricks Than Kicks, "a little girl was run down (...) she had plunged out into the roadway, she was in such a childish fever to get back" (More Pricks Than Kicks, p. 43); and in Malone Dies, "a little creature, I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms" (Malone Dies, p. 226).

a supposedly chance-ruled text they are still at work, allowed by the construction method to recur in a way that lulls the reader into sympathy for this frail human creature, and has the same effect as a repeated musical phrase:

"...deux bleu pâle petit corps coeur battant seul debout"

(Sans, p. 69), "Petit corps soudé gris cendre coeur battant face aux lointains" (Sans, p. 70).

Beckett's uses of mathematics, geometry, and precise enumeration have often been noted and are clearly relevant to the process of going "beyond Babel" into "languages" (or codes) of fixed international value. Like the pieces in chess, numbers and algebraic symbols are elements of a combinatorial system far more reliable, less difficult to control, than a living human speech with its unpredictable connotations. Beckett's delight in them as a relief from language is of long standing. Yet what happens in the 1960s, as a direct result of his own work in the theatre and in broadcasting, is that technical knowledge of enumeration and measurement is added to their mock-academic, playful and personal uses. This allows an unusual connection between the drama and prose, counterbalancing their many differences of effect. Waxing and waning light or heat; detailed explanation of distance, distribution of objects, or position

of figures occupy much space in All Strange Away, Imagination morte imaginez, and Le dépeupleur, as they do in the theatre pieces. Looking back at the script of En attendant Godot illustrates the dramatist's increase of technical knowledge very vividly; in that text there are no such details. One of the systems of threes that now fascinates him most is clearly the three dimensions. A three-dimensional art form speaks to every viewer regardless of background and language. In going beyond two languages towards multilingualism, and beyond literature towards the other arts, Beckett has moved far from his earlier dualism towards an open sense of form and a liberation from the purely verbal.

A place beyond languages

In the conversation between Kay Boyle and Beckett, (1) she seemed to see him, even in the 1930s, as a Virgil-figure of great wisdom taking the fearful and unsuspecting listener into realms beyond the material, visible world. The Dante-esque tone is one Beckett would no doubt have been pleased with at the time. Yet in print it took him far longer to explore to the full the possibilities of an artistic vision so out of keeping with the trends of the age. Before the war,

1. See pp. 49-50.

Belacqua's post-mortem experiences were suppressed with the non-appearance of the "Echo's Bones" story, and only the "Murphy's mind" chapter of Murphy drew boldly away from the outer world. After the war Beckett succeeded in exploring his purgatorial vision of life on earth with intense urgency and a large scope, through the stages of the trilogy, through En attendant Godot and Fin de partie. Comment c'est stands as the culmination of this stage of the process.

Yet the differently shaped purgatorial worlds of the 1960s -- different in their economy and spareness, their impartial listener/observer/narrator, their love of stillness and controlled form, and their disembodied voices -- also have deep roots. The impulse that was constantly aware of self and other, self and time, self and eternity goes back in Beckett to his earliest writing, as the story Assumption reveals. The detachment from self and world can be seen in the 1938 poem La mouche, where the fly exists in a realm between, hovering on the invisible glass that separates inner and outer experience, and life and death. Les Arènes de Lutèce shows the same haunting observation of inner and outer experience in an arena, a circle, that comes to stand for the circle of human consciousness. The capacity for detachment reaches its greatest expression, however, in the larger and even more directly symbolic arena of Le dépeupleur, where it

extends to a whole society of individuals operating according to shared laws, conventions, needs and hopes. They are, however, in a world which is not the familiar, material environment but a strange circular space set in eternity. (The time scale, if there is one, seems to be that of centuries.)

Le dépeupleur offers, I believe, Beckett's most fully achieved image, after the chain of speakers and their "sacks" in Comment c'est, of the largest language-circle, the human community, in which an individual lives and moves. It has close links with medieval visions of humanity, but with the essential, ever-present difference that God is absent; a comforting Divine authority is not available to give justification and the hope of reward to these suffering creatures. This is a society enclosed in a cylinder whose walls offer no escape, but only special tunnels and niches for those with the courage to climb the ladders set up at various points. Language, or more particularly the process of reasoning which allows the extension of knowledge, is like the ladders that seem to offer a way up out of the circling mass of common humanity; yet what the "searchers" find at the top of the ladders, many of which are dangerous to climb, is only a further sequence of interconnecting, enclosed spaces,

and dead ends. (1)

In the "Watt" manuscript, Arsène's joke: "Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away" (Watt, 42), which critics took as a reference (in a German accent) to Wittgenstein, (2) was part of a thought in which a circle, not a ladder, was the central image:

What is changed is existence [beyond the circle [xxx] to all. That is of (?) my impression (?)] off the ladder! The Welshman's dream: Do not come down the ladder, Ifor, I haf taken it away! ("Watt" Ms. A4, loose sheets at back, 267)

Whatever the exact thought-processes behind the joke, its context and the nature of Watt suggest that language itself is the focus. At the beginning of the 1960s, according to Beckett, he did finally read Wittgenstein, (3)

1. "Ces échelles sont très demandées. (...) Il faut cependant du courage pour s'en servir. Car il leur manque à toutes la moitié des échelons et celà de façon peu harmonieuse". Also passage following (Le dépeupleur, p. 9).

2. e.g. Jacqueline Hofer, "Watt", in Perspective, Samuel Beckett Issue, XI, 3 (Autumn 1959), pp. 166-182. In fact Beckett had not read Wittgenstein when he wrote Watt. A more satisfactory reference has been found in Mauthner's work; see Barbara Gluck, Beckett and Joyce: Friendship and Fiction (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1979), p. 95. The accent, however, is intended to be Welsh, not German.

3. See Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett, pp. 87-88 n.1.

thus presumably extending his earlier analyses of language, and no doubt grasping the parallels between the philosopher's view of the world and his own artistic approach. Most European philosophy has been written in a bilingual or multilingual context, Latin providing for centuries the common ground beyond the different vernaculars. European literature, however, from the Renaissance and especially since the Romantics, has tended to identify strongly with a particular language and culture. Developments of the twentieth century suggest that that phase may also be giving way to a new internationalism. If so, Beckett's work, with its underlying multilingual consciousness, its almost medieval vision of Babel and its movements in and out of English, is paradoxically a fascinating sign of the coming times. His deep knowledge of the past makes him a strangely powerful prophet of the future.

It would be wrong, however, to limit the possible significance of Le dépeupleur's cylinder to any one interpretation, as indeterminacy is central to Beckett's art at this period. Similarly, in All Strange Away and Imagination morte imaginez, the imperative "imagine" is a direct invitation given to self and reader (or self as reader) to feel at liberty, to allow free play of associations and images, of whatever local relevance seems appropriate. These works are the

very opposite of authoritarian, and yet they carry with them the power of Beckett's vision of a language-less or universalised eternity: he seems very much, as Kay Boyle suggested, a Virgil-figure leading other imaginations into new realms of experience. His shifting between languages, and his ability to stand "outside" any individual language and its authority systems, are crucial to the artistic outlook that allowed him to create such works.

Beckett does, nevertheless, go on using and valuing the two European languages which the chances and choices of his early years determined should be central in his life. What then is left of culture-specific references, and of the literary allusions which once packed Beckett's writing? I would like to look briefly at each of these questions.

As Gontarski has said, Beckett is someone "repelled by mimesis from his earliest years", yet "unwilling to abandon representation wholly." (1) In the 1960s and early 1970s he was also an artist thoroughly scrutinised by critics and the public, someone whose references to any part of the real world would be taken seriously, and whose endlessly-metamorphosing south Dublin landscape had become familiar to his admirers all over the world.

1. S.E. Gontarski, "The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Art", p. 5.

The practice during revision of a process which Gontarski calls, after Beckett, "vaguening", (1) is part of his response. The precisely described setting of Kilcool in the manuscript of that name, with the familiar train, the sea, and Bray Head, disappears almost completely. (2) Nearly ten years later, the Not I speaker has only the reference to Croker's Acres left in the way of local colour. In the French version, Pas moi, even this single place-name disappears. Play achieves its effects through the superb flow of banalities and bourgeois turns of phrase; the "Grand Canary" and "Riviera" (Play, p. 150) allow for a setting (within the characters' words; the setting of the play itself is some kind of after-life where all human geography is irrelevant) in any European city. "Ash and Snodland" (Play, p. 151) and the French version "Sept-Sorts et Signy-Signet" (Comédie, p. 19) are names whose inclusion can hardly been seen as a desire to anchor the text; like the majority of names of people and places in Beckett's later works (and there are, in general, very few) they obviously call for interpretation. They are part of the play of meanings.

1. See p.222 .

2. Gontarski, The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, p.136 .

A more startling, and unappreciated, fact is that the rarity and meaningful (if often comic) nature of such place-names allows the translator a justifiable licence in finding in his target-language a similarly effective reference. The referential difficulties of translating a text such as Murphy were considerable, as I suggested in Chapter III. In the texts of the 1960s and 1970s the need to make decisions either to drop, alter or retain such references (all of which affect the text's character) is much reduced. The translator into other languages is still faced, however, with the enormous challenge of equalling Beckett's economy, precision and beauty of language. Though the old south Dublin landscape is still perceptible, "vaguened," in Assez, Eh Joe (the suicide), and the English Not I, it is, in any case, giving way to the almost totally visionary or purgatorial landscape, or the plain grey or dark room, which seems to bring us closer to the creator "here and now", rather than sending us off after characters invented and placed in a remembered earlier world.

Beckett has provided a farewell, in vieille terre, whose very title suggests the same going beyond, detaching oneself from a particular place on the earth's surface, to gain a view of it as a whole. Yet there is another implication possible in the title; it may be more than "old (planet) earth",

or the "old (garden) earth" of which the human body is made (dust, mud, and ashes in other Beckettian images of mortality). It may be the "old earth", as opposed to the "new earth", of the exile's earlier home, for the text meditates on the "Moments d'une vie, de la mienne, entre autres, mais oui, à la fin", and finishes: "mer d'une enfance, d'autres ciels, un autre corps" (vieille terre, p. 34).

"A childhood sea, other skies, another body" (1) contains a wealth of meaning to anyone who has known exile and a change of language-worlds, or anyone who gains an imaginative awareness of such experiences. It is no accident, in the French original, that Beckett's long-used pun "mer/mère" comes together with the idea of a childhood spent beside a sea; private as the autobiographical reference may be intended to remain, it calls up once again his own break with the mother tongue. But its meaning extends beyond any individual life, into the realm of human experience which Beckett's words and images constantly evoke. He has the gift of universalising the particular, including the particulars of his own existence on the "old earth" that has carried him so long.

1. Samuel Beckett, Old Earth, in Collected Shorter Prose, p. 201.

Going beyond a specific human tongue by making vague both setting and country is one thing; casting off the language's centuries of literary echoes is another. In the works of the 1960s and 1970s the status of literary allusions varies. In general, especially in texts that are to be delivered on stage at speed, it is unlikely that a listener will have time to stop, identify and consider any echo heard. Although to entitle a television play ...but the clouds... is to invite a very specific comparison with Yeats' The Tower from which the line comes, in general Beckett seems right in his insistence that his literary echoes are simply fossils of the language he is using, bits of pipe at hand. He does not want such associations to be in any way essential to the emotional and imaginative experience he offers. Again, one sees the vast distance covered since the days of Sedendo et Quiescendo, a text packed full of self-conscious literary quotations and off-putting to the reader who does not come equipped to interpret them. Deliberate literary allusion, like place-name reference, tends to limit the universalism of the work, to emphasise its inheritance in a particular (and highly educated) language community. Allusions are also difficult for translators, and even Beckett himself, when translating his own work, is sometimes obliged to drop one for want of a satisfactory equivalent. After Comment c'est Beckett seems to have realised that

such links with a particular culture or nation, such relics of the specific and local past, are no longer necessary. What matters is the experience shared by the people of every tongue and race: the vision Belacqua had of "grey angels" (1) in "Dream of Fair to middling Women" is finally, after some thirty-five years, a vision Beckett can present directly.

"Upending" syntax: languages brought together

The completion of Comment c'est and its translation as How It Is, at the period when Beckett was beginning to focus regularly on his third language, German, provided fertile territory for artistic innovations of another kind. In the early 1960s Beckett seems to have taken a new look at the potential of grammar and syntax. German, a far more fully inflected language than English, may well have refocussed his attention on the exceptional "lapidary" quality of English, in which word order often bears the entire weight of precise and coherent meaning. Each word can seem like a stone set in a stream, self-contained and unaffected by grammatical role as subject or object.

Such fruitful comparison between languages would not be

1. See p. 47.

new. In "Dream of Fair to middling Women" Beckett's spokesman had celebrated the restrained impersonal beauties of formal French, and the well-defined syntactic demands of the language had stimulated his own style after the war with results that seemed revolutionary. A writer educated in French from infancy would have had to be brave indeed to equal them. Comment c'est (as I mentioned in Chapter VI) led to many exclamations of admiration, delight or horror among French reviewers at the stylistic audacity of this foreign-born writer.

Beckett experimented, in the English text All Strange Away, with a style in which questions of ellipsis, word order, and hierarchy within the sentence are central; the difficult How It Is translation was no doubt a stimulus for this rare experiment in innovative English prose, if it did indeed follow on from the longer work. (1) Beckett was not, however, satisfied with All Strange Away at the time (connectives and organizing structures, including conjunctions and relative pronouns, constantly strive to take control again) (2) and returned instead to French, his usual

1. See p.342.

2. For example: "Price to pay and highest lying more flesh touching glowing ground. But say not glowing enough to burn and turning over, see how that works" (All Strange Away, p. 119) and "small grey ordinary rubber bulb such as on earth attached to bottle of scent or such like that when squeezed a jet of scent but here alone " (All Strange Away, p. 125).

language for prose experimentation. French has thus been, in general, the cutting edge of his entire enterprise; the prose, to Beckett, is always a more open challenge than the drama because "you are on your own". Not even the stage or the audience are there to limit choices; the verbalising imagination is alone with the "mess".

Imagination morte imaginez emerged out of All Strange Away, from which its title comes (All Strange Away, p. 117). Its English version, Imagination Dead Imagine, thus offers a fascinating example of bilingual stylistics and semantics; it can be compared across languages with its French "original", or directly with its English "ancestor", highlighting the passage of Beckett's revision process across two languages. Bing, Le dépeupleur and Sans, although more independent of All Strange Away, benefit equally from its discoveries about the power of English to reduce connectives and to balance phrases, in sentences where subject (above all, the personal pronouns) and finite verb are often absent. The sense of directed, authority-governed statement is lost; the imperative/infinitive (or base-form) of the verb becomes dominant, aided by the participles in a way that frees the reader from the normal requirement of following and accepting authorial control:

Then look away then back for left hand
 clasping lightly right shoulder ball any
 length till slip and back to clasp and
 right on upper outer knee any length grey
 sprayer bulb or small grey punctured
 rubber ball till squeeze with hiss and
 loose again with pop or not.
 (All Strange Away, p. 127)

How different this would be if phrased as follows:

Then I looked away, then back, at the left
 hand which was lightly clasping the right
 shoulder ball; I looked for a long time, until
 my gaze slipped...

which is, in any case, only one "rationalisation" of
 several possible readings. How much more securely, and
 obediently, the reader can follow prose of this kind, and
 how much less participation is demanded. "Any length"
 for example, becomes impossible in the finite past tense;
 like laboratory instructions or a cooking recipe, it leaves
 the exact time up to the individual carrying out the
 instructions. The text does not exist until it is read;
 the primary instruction, "Imagine", governs all others.

In Bing and Sans Beckett goes much further. Both texts
 have been much discussed, by admirers and by hostile critics
 of what is often seen in the English-speaking world as
 Beckett's sterile or over-theoretical phase. Yet as David
 Lodge pointed out after generating a group discussion of
Ping, the English version, responses based on traditional
 reading techniques (especially, one might add, of poetry,

where unresolved plural meanings have long been acceptable) are still possible; the reader is not obliged to be a theorist or a linguistics specialist in order to respond imaginatively to the work. (1) John Pilling, similarly, asks that Lessness, the English version of Sans, be freed from the much discussed construction methods and read in the usual, linear way as a text full of resonances, which appear gradually through repeated readings; the text's form, images and language are in fact highly coherent on their own terms. (2) French criticism of the time could naturally, and with justification, set such works in the context of Barthes and other celebrators of the freeing of the text, the battle against tradition; yet, as usual, Beckett is in fact following the logic of his own artistic concerns; he is a leader, not a follower, of trends.

Beckett discovered the lengths to which ellipsis could be taken, and understood the implications of the resulting indeterminacy, which would at last bring the literary text close to being an art object, like a piece of sculpture, an abstract painting, or serialist music. He did this, I

1. David Lodge, "Some Ping Understood", Encounter, (February 1968), pp. 85-89.

2. John Pilling, Frescoes of the Skull, pp. 172-176.

suggest, through the bilingual or trilingual perspectives which he had gained in working on his own art as director, translator, creator. The following sentence may be French but it is far from the centre of French syntax and stylistic convention: "Petit vide grande lumière cube tout blancheur faces sans traces aucun souvenir" (Sans, p. 73).

It resembles, if anything, the English which Beckett has developed in How It Is and All Strange Away; French is being used as a "lapidary" language like English, with word order and semantic association carrying the burden of meaning. Some elements of coherence remain in French and can be lost in the English version that follows, notably agreement between noun and adjective. But the language has come closer and closer to a set of words which the reader must take responsibility for combining. "L'art de combiner ou combinatoire", as the Assez narrator said, "n'est pas ma faute." (Assez, p. 36) It is the inheritance every language-speaker receives, in learning the possibility of infinite combination of a set of finite, but rule-governed, words. The concepts of infinity and generative power underlie these texts, and unite with Beckett's multilingual focus and his emphasis on the role of the creating consciousness. What is more, as a writer who knows that every text he publishes will now involve self-translation or

supervised translation into French or English and German, Beckett is once again writing in a way that predisposes the style and images to such a process. Without being in any way easier, the process of translation now offers possibilities for an extraordinary degree of equivalence between versions because each is already, syntactically, at the limits of its own language, questioning the necessity of Babel, allowing the reader participatory space.

It is surely no accident that All Strange Away, written in English and transformed into Imagination morte imaginez for publication, begins with a room where "tattered syntaxes" have German and English-sounding names: "In a corner when the light comes on tattered syntaxes of Jolly and Draeger Praeger Draeger, all right. Light off..." (All Strange Away, p. 117). When seen again the syntaxes are "upended in opposite corners" (All Strange Away, p. 118). What better clue can Beckett give us that he has at least two syntaxes to "upend"? (And a third to provoke new perceptions). He will tatter and upend them further during the course of the next ten years.

As always, Beckett's experiments in prose have^a direct effect on the drama. Through the prose he perceives the role of the subject in determining the sentence; having

already spent years playing with the different pronouns and their implications, he is now able to do away with ^{grammatical} person altogether, or alternatively make it the central focus of the work as in Not I. Assez offers in manuscript a curious reflection on the he/she dichotomy, in a period when Beckett's drama, especially, is full of female speakers and characters. The narrator was originally male, and only in revision did this fact disappear to be replaced by the somewhat ambiguous final reference to breasts. (1) What is important in English, French and German, though not in all languages, is the ability of a narrator to conduct a narration, and use the first-person pronoun, without ever having to define his or her own sex (given, in French, a very careful avoidance of phrases that would require gender agreement). In much of the prose, person is reduced or disappears altogether; "l'oeil qui cherche" (Le dépeupleur, p. 7) can be sexless. The drama seems to require specific sexes, though later, in Quad, Beckett will solve this problem too by using gowned figures who do not speak, and adding the note "Sex indifferent" (Quad, p. 293). Once again his thoughts about language, and more specifically about the constraints of grammar and syntax, interact

1. The manuscripts Ms. 1529/1 - Ms. 1529/9 at Reading University Library reveal the change of sex to be quite a late decision. Although the final words "Assez mes vieux seins sentent sa vieille main." (Assez, p. 47) seem conclusive, earlier parts of the text leave the question open.

fruitfully with his explorations of form, medium, image and idiom. When Gontarski writes of the Kilcool manuscript drifting off "into grammatical matters", (1) he is, unintentionally, belittling an activity which Beckett, as a linguist and translator, has necessarily known as a central concern.

Beckett's massive undertaking as a self-translator was pursuing its course during the 1960s as in the 1950s, with increasing demand from publishers. Quite apart from the challenge of How It is and Oh les beaux jours, in the early 1960s, Beckett had to catch up on earlier works that still existed in only one language. The collaborative translations with the Janviers of D'un ouvrage abandonné (in 1966-1967) and Watt (1967-1969) were preceded by self-translation of the Textes pour rien, the radio plays, The Calmative. As well as almost instant translation of current works, Beckett also undertook, at the start of the 1970s, the English versions of Mercier et Camier and Premier amour (Mercier and Camier, First Love). He was at the same time, needless to say, advising on and participating in German translations. The self-translating cannot have existed in a vacuum. Instead it seems to have involved Beckett in reappraisals of his own earlier styles and

1. S.E. Gontarski, The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, p.141.

preoccupations with an intensity and desire forever greater innovation that carries over into new writing.

Perhaps the most intriguing example of this is the relationship between the painstaking translation of Watt and the writing of Not I. To put Watt into French, Beckett not only had to return to this crucial and disturbing part of his own development towards bilingualism, but also to articulate his sense of Watt in order to discuss the text with the Janviers. He had to focus, for example, on Watt's struggles with the English language and sense of alienation from it, Watt being someone who had failed to receive, with words learned at his mother's knee, the usual instinctive ease of expression or of gesture. This is a peculiar concept to translate into a new language, demanding a true reliving of the material. Watt sees, for example, in a kind of vision in the railway station waiting-room, a woman's mouth, detached from its normal context. The mouth is an emblem for his alienated and puzzled attitude to human communication:

Whispering it told, the mouth, a woman's, the thin lips sticking and unsticking, how when empty they could accommodate a larger public (...) Watt was not displeased to hear her voice again, to watch^{again} the play of the pale bows of mucus. (Watt, p. 233)

The word-order of the first sentence is, incidentally, already influenced by the French which surrounded Beckett when he wrote Watt. But more generally, looking at this inexhaustibly rich novel again after so long may well have been the key Beckett needed to unlock the real implications of the "Kilcool" manuscript, which he had put aside as a failure almost ten years earlier. Not I uses material from "Kilcool", as it no doubt draws on all the other inspirations which have been suggested, the Caravaggio painting, the woman seen in Morocco, and so on.(1) But the central thrust of the text, both visually and in language, shows the artist of the 1970s transforming ideas that germinated in the early 1940s, and that have been revitalised through translation.

The Not I narrator has severe difficulty in admitting to her own identity and experience as a human individual. She has been alone from birth, brought up by **strangers** after both parents had abandoned her; she thus never had the experience of mother-love and the "mother tongue" which would have made her like her neighbours. She is obsessed with speechlessness and yet cannot stop speaking. Visually,

1. See Gontarski, The Intent of 'Undoing' in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts, pp. 131-132.

we know no more of her than that arching and bending mouth which Watt imagined. And she lives, in the English text, in that same south Dublin setting, with Croker's Acres and the larks and cowslips, which Beckett had clearly had in mind when he wrote Watt, and which he had seemed during the 1960s to be abandoning for newer, or more generalised, symbolic landscapes. Watt was the work in which Beckett first went deeply into his unconscious, in a way which total rational control could never have permitted. Translating it, and shortly after it the lighter Mercier et Camier, may well have fuelled the beginnings, in the mid- and late 1970s, of works in which Beckett's Irish memories come once more to centre stage. Ultimately, going beyond bilingualism brings him back to the world from which he began, a world he can now view as a thoroughly "unhoused" observer. Thus the experience of moving rapidly and regularly between English and French, and of going beyond them to German, seems to have offered Beckett's new stimuli in every aspect of his art: forms, imaginative settings, syntax, views of human communication. Going beyond bilingualism may have reinforced his sense of isolation, but in a positive way: his art benefits from the shifting between tongues in which he is constantly engaged.

CHAPTER VIII: COMPANY

1972-1987

Just before reaching the milestone of his seventieth birthday, Beckett told John Calder that in old age work would be his "company". Calder continues, "that became the title of his next novel, in which the narrator looks back movingly at his own childhood, and at other moments in his life, and carries on a dialogue with another voice which is of course his own and emphasises his aloneness." (1) Adapting Calder's phrase to a somewhat different perspective, "the dialogue with another voice that is of course his own and emphasises his aloneness" is a perfect description of the bilingual process in Beckett's work of the 1970s and 1980s. English and French come together with special intensity in what can be seen as a late prose trilogy, composed of Company, Mal vu mal dit and Worstward Ho. Of these three works, closely linked in form and imaginative scope, the first, as I will illustrate, was bilingually created: drafted in English, revised into French and published in both languages almost at the

1. John Calder, "The prophet Samuel", The Guardian (April 12, 1986), p. 13.

same time. Mal vu mal dit was written in French, then translated into English; Worstward Ho, which makes quite extraordinary play with the English language, has so far not been translated into French, and is perhaps "untranslatable". (1) Seen as a group, the three novellas create a bilingual arch (English/French/English) which strikingly contrasts with the major post-war trilogy for which the use of French was essential throughout. It also contrasts with the small trio of Still, Sounds and Still 3, (2) which Beckett wrote experimentally in English in the years leading up to Company. What is evident is a purely balanced bilingualism finally free to function like the unified resources of a special, "Beckettian" language. English and French have indeed become "company", companionable with each other in the artistic imagination.

Many works of the late period, both prose and drama, are centred on a basis of monologue -- monologue which creates multiple perspectives or voices, yet is not comforted by them. The central speaker/

1. Letter from John Calder, quoting Samuel Beckett, in answer to my query about Worstward Ho, September 1985.

2. Sounds and Still 3 are not included in Collected Shorter Prose; they were published with an article by John Pilling, "The Significance of Beckett's Still", Essays in Criticism, 28, ii (April 1978), pp. 143-157. (Texts on pp. 155-156 and 156-157).

creator / explorer — of — memory speaks in an isolation that seems to exist beyond the grave in a place where all words should have ceased. The works emphasise the paradox that being "Alone" turns the human speaker into a kind of dramatist, fabricating a theatrical company in the imagination, like a throng of ghosts in a whitening skull, the actors who should be populating the stage of a disused theatre. The almost mystical intensity of this vision would, theoretically, be possible in a single tongue, but Beckett's multiple-language perspective makes his isolation uniquely defined, his languages constantly relativising, and detaching him from other "company". In the words of George Craig from which I have already quoted:

Even if French-speakers could read him only in French and English-speakers only in English, there would still be one person inescapably aware of his double venture: Samuel Beckett. And it is a double venture, since the primary reality -- that which can subsequently be translated -- may be either English or French. (...) The signs are that he is exploring a verbal no-man's-land where neither French nor English holds sway. (1)

Neither, and the no man's land, are the area of darkness, the void. Present in Beckett's imagination from early adulthood, they have finally found an appropriate correspondence in his bilingual sense of reality. The old

1. George Craig, "The voice of childhood and old age", p. 921.

oppositions, self and other, private and public, inner and outer, body and place, cause disgust, till in Worstward Ho the speaker wants to reject all alternation: "Somehow on. Till sick of both. Throw up and go. Where neither. Till sick of there. (...) Till sick for good. (...) Where neither for good. Good and all." (Worstward Ho, p. 8)

The first part of the chapter examines the relationship between Company, Mal vu mal dit and Worstward Ho, to show how Beckett ranges across the gap between his languages with complete freedom, transferring perceptions about form, images, linguistic structures, and even idioms from one to the other. Company, as the most truly bilingual of the three, is seen as central to this process. In the second part, examining the symbolism and language of Mal vu mal dit leads to a larger discussion of Beckett's use of French in his late work; what the language has come to mean to him, and correspondingly, what he does to, and with it. The third part, focussing centrally on Worstward Ho, returns to Beckett's English, an English which in this text moves into new realms of consciousness, putting pressure on some of its most basic structural characteristics -- compounding, affixes, negation -- as well as recalling, and making strange, familiar idioms and clichés.

In all three sections, as is true in these three texts, the interplay between the resources of two languages and the solitary imagination is crucial. French and English have become the loyal friends of an artist haunted by the need to go beyond them and be alone; in his late works for the stage and television as well as the printed page, he fuses the generic conventions of drama, prose and poetry, as if seeking a way out of literature, and increasingly detaches voices from mouths, from bodies, from books. Stillness becomes a major concern, a stillness full of the potential for words, unwillingly spoken. Often it is the sense of the cycle of life passing, the poignant reminder of sunrise or sunset, the passage of seasons, or simply some repeated daily task, that reawakens a little energy, just as the statue of Memnon, in Greek mythology, produced beautiful music with the sun's first rays falling upon its cold stone. (1) The austere beautiful music of Beckett's style crosses between his languages in these late works as a kind of final comfort. "Un homme seul est toujours en mauvaise compagnie", Paul Valéry concluded in L'idée fixe; (2)

1. In keeping with his lifelong use of the idea of "animation" of stone and petrification" of the living, Beckett has mentioned Memnon repeatedly: in Malone meurt, p. 98; in Still, p. 183; and in Mal vu mal dit, p. 44: "La revoilà assise à la Memnon et tout aussi rigide."

2. Paul Valéry, Oeuvres II (Paris: Gallimard, Pléiade, 1960), p. 275.

yet Beckett's "company", composed of the "worst words" yet, as he prepares to go "west", still gives a paradoxical hope. "No future in this. Alas yes." (Worstward Ho, p. 10)

Bilingual thinking, bilingual writing

Beckett has not himself referred to Company, Mal vu mal dit and Worstward Ho as a trilogy, yet their close relationship, developed across the language barrier, is beyond question. In each a voice/observer/creator "imagines" -- a crucial concept in all three texts whether the word is used explicitly or not -- that is, makes pictures, images, scenes or perhaps memories, which can also be unmade. Their survival depends entirely on the imaginer's whim. In Company vivid and poignant scenes of the past are surrounded by a context of darkness, like variant "takes" of a film flashed on a screen in a darkened cinema. In Mal vu mal dit the scene is a single sustained one, gradually given more and more detail, of the old woman in her hut, surrounded by bleaching, bone-like stones and retreating nature; each detail seems heavily weighted with symbolic levels of meaning. Yet here too the scene can be redrawn, as if the imaginer is an artist making different sketches of the picture he is trying to conceive.

In Worstward Ho , two dominant scenes -- of memory or imagination -- gradually come to focus, though seen through a screen of language so dense as to render them almost beyond reach, the words a kind of lattice through which a once clear world can be dimly viewed. These two dominant scenes recall Company and Mal vu mal dit. In the first, an old man and child are walking side by side on an invisible landscape; they evoke the father and son walking together in the fields in Company, until the father dies and the younger man walks with his father's "shade" (Company, p. 31). Yet the parallel is richer than an exact equivalence; the age range is now much greater, and it is also possible to see the old man and child of Worstward Ho as two externalisations of the speaker himself, his own boyhood and old age. (1) The other scene is of a black figure, almost dehumanised, but who gradually emerges as an old woman, kneeling in prayer among gravestones. (2) The central figure

1. "Bit by bit an old man and child. (...) Hand in hand with equal plod they go. (...) Backs turned. Both bowed. Joined by held holding hands. Plod on as one. One shade. Another shade." (Worstward Ho, pp. 12-13)

2. "Nothing and yet a woman. Old and yet old. On unseen knees. Stooped as loving memory some old gravestones stoop. In that old graveyard. Names gone and when to when. Stoop mute over the graves of none." (Worstward Ho, p. 45)

of Mal vu mal dit is apparently being revisited, yet the speaker's relation with her is greatly changed, now that she is only one of three figures for contemplation. A kind of family -- the child's first "company" -- has been remade, the artist-speaker's compulsive yet unwilling efforts at imagination having brought out, finally, a sense of paradoxical completion. There may be "Three pins" for "One pinhole" (Worstward Ho, p. 46) but because of the imaginative realm, far from mimetic convention, that the speaker has now established, they can all, somehow, fit into the pinhole at once. How many angels, comes the faint echo, can dance on the head of a pin? So close to the void, to an almost theological investigation of Logos and silence, the words that remain make their own logic.

Formally, too, the three works show clear similarities. Each is of novella length, and brief even so, arranged in paragraphs or sections which, in spite of a distant connection with the "versets" of How It Is, firmly establish themselves as prose; they bear capital letters and full-stops, occasional dashes, exclamation and question marks. (Commas, however, are almost completely absent.) The sentences so created are in fact often grammatically incomplete, sometimes just a phrase or a single word. The effect of this punctuation and formal patterning is to make each group of words measured

and powerful, sequences to hear as well as to read, to savour with the alertness one gives to poetry, though they bear every visual resemblance to prose. What is extraordinary is the degree to which Beckett's bilingual activity, his development of a Beckettian "voice" unmistakable in either language, has allowed him to achieve, as George Craig said, a positioning of his texts in "a verbal no-man's-land where neither French nor English holds sway." Obviously each text remains within its own frame of basic lexical and grammatical laws, but when one thinks of the differences between typical French and English prose styles, the extent to which Beckett has brought the two together, pushing the limits of each, is remarkable: "larmes. Dernier exemple devant sa porte la dalle qu'à force à force son petit poids a creusée. Larmes" (Mal vu mal dit, p. 21). "Tears. Last example the flagstone before her door that by dint by dint her little weight has grooved. Tears" (Ill Seen Ill Said, pp. 17-18).

The two languages hover in each other's shadow so closely that it would be impossible to say which has precedence. With the single exception that "before her door" is displaced, the word-order and equivalence are as exact as they can be, phrase by phrase. This resemblance stems largely from syntactic decisions that work to make strange both languages:

the loss of a main verb, the bold unpunctuated use of "à force à force", "by dint by dint" and the repetition. Beckett's English and French here (in marked contrast to Comment c'est and How It Is) hover closely together in his personal bilingual realm, far from the centre of the language-circles they both technically inhabit.

Company and Mal vu mal dit have especially close links through the number of sections, and through the related, highly-developed symbolism of clock (or watch) and compass-faces. Since time and the points of the compass are identically measured, in seconds and minutes, in Beckett's two language-worlds, the imagery and formal patterning cross between the languages serenely. In Company (which has fifty-nine sections), a startling departure from the Hearer and Voice in the dark, and the scenes in the light they participate in imagining, occurs just before the close (Company, pp. 80-84). The writer himself, someone in a modern world of electric lights and wrist-watches, becomes fascinated with the second hand (in French "la trotteuse") (1) which, like a tiny human, valiantly ticks its way round the circle of numbers, the cycle of time, casting shadows before and behind as its position changes relative to the light. Just so did the walker count his steps, and cast a shadow

1. Samuel Beckett, Compagnie (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980), p. 80.

on the snow; and after the computations about the second-hand, the speaker here bows his head again until dawn: "The low sun shines on you through the eastern window and flings all along the floor your shadow" (Company, pp. 83-84). He is a time-piece too, measured by the daily return of shadows cast from east or west.

In Mal vu mal dit the number of sections veers to the other side of sixty minutes (or seconds); there are sixty-one. And here it is not the observer/speaker but the old woman herself who, during the course of the text, becomes a black needle, a "Fine flechette noire" as the compass-pointer in her circle of encroaching stones where twelve silent witnesses stand round the perimeter. The compass is described directly:

Gros plan d'un cadran. Rien d'autre.
Disque blanc divisé en minutes. A moins
que ce ne soit en secondes. Soixante
points noirs. Aucun chiffre. Une seule
aiguille. Fine fléchette noire.
(Mal vu mal dit, p. 57)

The "flechette" (helpfully, in French, feminine in gender) merges with the old woman herself: "elle se précipite d'un point à l'autre" (Mal vu mal dit, p. 58). And the aimlessness of this mourning creature who wanders within the strange symbolic environment, motivated only

by an attention to the cycles of day and night, planets, sun and moon, and by her age-long regularity in visiting the tomb, is aptly transferred to the compass-needle: "C'est à douter certaines -- à désespérer certaines nuits qu'elle parvienne jamais jusqu'au dernier. Retrouve jamais le nord" (Mal vu mal dit, p. 58).

Writing in his two languages, and yet with an undoubted sense of the other language's version imminent in each case, Beckett achieves with such symbolism a freedom from the problems of translation as great as can be conceived. The mimetic conventions, the details of context, culture and place in more traditional narratives (including Beckett's own Murphy) are far away, so that between English and French, at least, many levels of necessary difference of specific allusion have been rendered irrelevant. The creation itself is predisposed to further versions.

In Worstward Ho the conditions are somewhat different; just as real landscape no longer enters the text, and time and place have been left behind, so the neat 59/61 pattern of the previous two works is forgotten. The void is present now, and all measuring, all locating, impossible. Yet if Worstward Ho is less translatable, it is not because of any specificity to

one language-circle in terms of cultural reference or detail; on the contrary, what is provided in images (the figures, the human brain, with its capacity to "ooze", the cyclopean single black hole) is universally transferable. No; in Worstward Ho it is the language itself that, almost deliberately, comes to challenge the possibility of translation. Recreation or "adaptation" would be necessary, as in A Piece of Monologue (1) which in French Beckett called Solo, adding "adapté" (instead of the usual "traduit") "de l'anglais". Certainly in Company and Mal vu mal dit there are also many levels of language (especially the use of age-old puns, literary allusions, and certain idioms) that demand some degree of re-creation rather than simply translation. Yet, in both, the visual and emotional force of what is described is so great that translatability seems more possible. This is true, above all, because of the extremely close presence of both languages in Beckett's mind as he wrote either one. Company/Compagnie is the supreme illustration of this, as I now wish to show.

1. Samuel Beckett, A Piece of Monologue, in Collected Shorter Plays, pp. 263-269; Solo, in Catastrophe et autres dramaticules, pp. 27-37.

Company and Compagnie were drafted between May 1977 and August 1979 in a single exercise book. (1) The first version of the English text, highly experimental and as yet unfinished, is followed immediately by the first version of the French. Beckett translated into French as part of the process of developing his text; the shaping and ordering of the final sections of the French are considerably closer to what was published than the English. After further revisions and finalised translations of both, the French version was, oddly enough, published first, in the spring of 1980, to be followed in July by the "original".

Working bilingually in this way seems to have allowed Beckett to do two things: to combine a direct use of powerful memories of an English-speaking childhood with a detached awareness of language and of the fiction-making process. Company is notable for the emotional openness, even sentimental nostalgia, of many of its scenes in the light, which as many commentators have said have an autobiographical basis. (2)

1. Reading University Library, Ms. 1822. Beckett provided the dates beneath the title.
2. For example, Enoch Brater, "The Company Beckett Keeps: The Shape of Memory and One Fablist's Decay of Lying" in Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives, pp. 157-171. Brater points out, though, that as in other Beckett works "'Autobiography' is itself a fiction", for "'saying' is inevitably 'inventing'" (p. 167).

By writing the original in English, Beckett seemed able to release a flood of memories, reshaped and refined as always into fiction, without the censoring or excluding of personal emotion so evident in prose works of the 1970s such as Le dépeupleur and Imagination morte imaginez (both written in French). Yet the revision into French at a remarkably early stage, even before all the scenes in the light were finalised, added to this wealth of powerful and poignant reminiscence an intellectual rigour, a distancing, which may have helped to achieve the formal beauty of the work and to distance and control its language. Translation from French into his once-repudiated mother tongue has for decades been Beckett's private path back to an Irish English of great strength and beauty. Here French and English work intimately together, to ensure that "heart" and "mind" are balanced. In Enoch Brater's words (though he is speaking only of the English text), "the personal flavor imparted in these very moving scenes does not escape their role in the structured and highly self-conscious work of art." (1) "Highly self-conscious" indeed, when the act of translation, which demands an increased awareness of aesthetic and linguistic priorities, is brought into the process of writing.

1. Brater, "The Company Beckett Keeps: The Shape of Memory and One Fablist's Decay of Lying", p. 166.

The second advantage of the bilingual method, allowing Beckett an especially intense level of linguistic detachment and awareness, is that he can often put the resources of one language at the service of the other in order to improve the effectiveness of a phrase or scene. Even before the translation, early as it was in the text's development, there are perceptions of language itself as a maker of drama, creating company through its own laws; the transfer into French gives an opportunity to test these laws and confirm the formal details. The most obvious example of this in Company and Compagnie is the way pronouns, first, second and third, take on life, becoming characters Beckett names as "the hearer" (who would use the first person if he could speak), the voice (who uses the second) and "that cankerous other", later identified as the "crawling creator", whose role is to refer to the hearer and speaker in the third person. It is fortunate that English and French share the same basic distribution of pronoun forms and functions, with the exception of tu/vous in French, which both texts avoid as a major source of distinction, "tu" being used almost throughout.

Use of the second person marks the voice.
That of the third that cankerous other. Could
he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there
would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not.
You cannot. You shall not. (Company, p. 9)

This may seem closer to the concerns of the linguistic theorist than to those of the literary artist, yet for an artist as language-conscious as Beckett, such passages are part of the "drama" of speech. John Lyons, in his two-volume work Semantics, speaks of the pronouns thus:

The grammatical category of person depends upon the notion of participant-roles and upon their grammaticalization in particular languages. The origin of the traditional terms 'first person', 'second person' and 'third person' is illuminating in this connexion. The Latin word 'persona' (meaning "mask") was used to translate the Greek word for "dramatic character" or "role", and the use of this term by grammarians derives from their metaphorical conception of a language-event as a drama in which the principal role is played by the first person, the role subsidiary to his by the second person, and all other roles by the third person. (1)

"The metaphorical conception of a language-event as a drama" beautifully describes the relation between language and imagination, language and memory, in Company; it is a conception greatly enhanced by the text's bilingual genesis. Beckett, as linguist and translator over half a century, has seen and experienced language-structures with an extraordinary degree of direct attention to their own meaning. Beckett as artist can then bring these perceptions into a text of strangely memorable and dramatic power. Its dramatic qualities

1. John Lyons, Semantics, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), II, p. 638.

were clear when it was performed on stage, (1) and spoken -- by Patrick Magee -- on radio. (2) The drama is the drama of language itself, of the awe-inspiring event of speech brought to the forefront of consciousness in a style far more widely accessible than the grammarian's. Beckett allows his audience in both speech-groups to share in the miracle at work, to see how language creates human figures in our minds even with a minimum of lexical resources:

And whose voice asking this? Who asks,
Whose voice asking this? And answers, His
soever who 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
to himself, Unless another still. Nowhere
to be found. Nowhere to be sought. The
unthinkable last of all. Unnamable. Last
person. I. Quick leave him. (Company, p. 32)

The French, having its own distinctive features,
is nevertheless a superb equivalent, equally well-
adapted to the grammar with which it interacts:

Et qui le demande? Et qui demande, Qui le
demande? Et répond, Celui qui qu'il soit
qui imagine le tout. Dans le même noir que
sa créature ou dans un autre, pour se tenir
compagnie. Qui demande en fin de compte,
Qui demande? Et en fin de compte répond
comme ci-dessus. En ajoutant tout bas
longtemps après, A moins que ce ne soit

1. At the Cottesloe Theatre, London, 18th February 1981.
2. BBC Radio 3, August 1980.

un autre encore. Nulle part à trouver.
 Nulle part à chercher. L'impensable
 ultime. Innommable. Toute dernière
 personne. Je. Vite motus. (Compagnie, p. 31)

Yet the bilingualism deeply inherent in the vision and language of Company does not only result in a self-reflecting animation of the "personae" of language. It also allows every dream or image, every (re)created scene, to exist in a prose of unforgettable, simple strength, richly yet precisely used, with beauty of sound and rhythm that give, now, unashamed evidence of their author's delight in language. Sometimes the translation itself gives him an alternative, a fascinating by-product of the closeness between English and French, lexically and grammatically, that results from their historical interconnections, as I will illustrate below. Looking closely at some of Beckett's vocabulary, and how he sets it in context, allows the bilingual treatment of Company/Compagnie to emerge.

Reading Company in English, one becomes aware of an "otherness", the presence of French, in certain lines and idioms. French maintains a discreet presence at many points: "nascent hope" (Company, p. 20), "trait" (Company, p. 20), "vis-à-vis" (Company, p. 53), "eyes in each other's eyes" (Company, p. 67) and "in lieu of" (Company, p. 30). All of these exist in the first

English version and show the extent to which Beckett's English is subtly flavoured, even before the bilingual revision process, by his language of adoption. "Eyes in each other's eyes", "les yeux dans les yeux" is especially clearly a direct transposition. "In lieu of", although a perfectly acceptable term in English, has special value where it occurs because it is the French word for "place" replacing its English equivalent in a line about a place -- indeed one of very few place-names mentioned in the whole text: "Somewhere on the Ballyogan road in lieu of nowhere in particular." (Company, p. 30)

Yet the flavouring of the English text gains much of its final nature through the intermediary of French. Some examples of this show with startling clarity Beckett's ability to seize on a detail discovered through translation and to reapply it to the first language for greater artistic effect. One of these concerns the tree under which the young lovers in Company lie, in one of the nostalgic recreations in the dark of a part-joyful, part-painful memory:

You are on your back at the foot of an aspen. In its trembling shade. She at right angles propped on her elbows head between her hands (...) Eyes in each other's eyes you listen to the leaves. In their trembling shade. (Company, pp. 66-67)

Originally, in the manuscript, this tree was "a great beech" ("Company" Ms. p. 25). Yet while translating the early draft into "Compagnie" Beckett had a sudden perception, possibly aroused by the French word itself, of a tree particularly apt to be evoked for the fragility and delicate movement of its leaves. In French, this is "un tremble" ("Compagnie" Ms. section 48): "au pied d'un tremble. Dans son ombre tremblante" (Compagnie, p. 65). He then returned to the English original and added, in a different ink in the margin, "Aspen". The "trembling" of the name is not present in English yet the image of the tree itself adds to the scene's effect, an aspen being more obviously associated with quickly fluttering, delicate leaves than a beech. The trembling which is so effective in adding to the emotional atmosphere of Still, of Mal vu mal dit, and also of Ohio Impromptu, (1) thus gains visual strength in English, and both visual and verbal support in French:

1. "not still at all but trembling all over" (Still, p. 183). "Le tire-bouton tremble à son clou comme si de rien n'était" (Mal vu mal dit, p. 42). "One night as he sat trembling head in hands" (Ohio Impromptu, in Collected Shorter Plays, p. 287).

Tu es sur le dos au pied d'un tremble.
 Dans son ombre tremblante. Elle couchée
 à angle droit appuyée sur les coudes. (...)
 Elle murmure, Ecoute les feuilles. Les
 yeux dans les yeux vous écoutez les
 feuilles. Dans leur ombre tremblante.
 (Compagnie, p. 65-66)

Another example of the process, equally deft in increasing associative effect, is the passage which in English finally exists as "Is there anything to add to this esquisse?" (Company, p. 63) In context, the French word jumps out of the prose, evoking quite comically an arty, almost precious tone in the surrounding English, as if the creator-figure has suddenly turned into a sort of aesthetic dandy. Originally in manuscript, the text read: "Is there anything to add to these picture(s)?" ("Company" Ms. p. 24). In the French draft this became "cette esquisse" ("Compagnie" Ms. section 42) which was then ~~erased~~, and "ce croquis" written in instead. "Esquisse" was, presumably in a later draft, transferred to the English. What may have delighted Beckett in comparing these two different language versions of a text concerned with language as the Creator's medium, was that the English text would now speak not of a picture (as if complete) but of a sketch. The French text, produced later, speaks of an even less finished sketch, a sketch's first draft, as it were. Both suggest an undermining of the text as bearing authority or the stamp of finality.

The change evokes the kind of relativism achieved by a writer known and admired by Beckett, and an admirer of Beckett, Maurice Blanchot. Thomas L'Obscur, existing in two published versions, drew the following comment from Geoffrey Hartman:

in a note prefacing the second version [Blanchot] says that a work has an infinity of possible variants. This multiplication (by the modern painter also) of sketches and states, though perhaps linked to Balzac's retake of characters, to the roman fleuve and devices of perspective, may also have an opposite intent. The difference turns on whether the mimetic power of the artist is strengthened or questioned. Balzac's novels add up, they increase the depth and "realness" of his world, but Blanchot's novels stand in an abstractive relation to one another. (1)

Beckett's cross-language discovery of "esquisse" as the word he needed in English is a perfect example of his own special method of achieving an "abstractive relation" -- or a relativising effect -- between the two versions of his text. It is noticeable also that his terminology comes from art, the art which, in Hartmann's words, has turned to a production of "sketches and states". Yet the questioning of mimetic power does not mean a negation of artistic expression; it places all the sketches and states, the "esquisses" and "croquis" in a larger finished picture -- a picture in which

1. Geoffrey Hartman, "Maurice Blanchot", in The Novelist as Philosopher: Studies in French Fiction 1935-1960, ed. John Cruickshank (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 155.

mystery and the unpredictable are constantly present and in which process, not product, dominates. Beckett's Company and Compagnie stand side by side in a statement of the relativity of languages, a question about the realm of "neither" that lies between them.

'Mal vu mal dit': French needed once again

If Company could draw so successfully on English memories, transformed in fiction, and then achieve its final form and tone through an early translation into French, why did Beckett write its companion-piece, Mal vu mal dit, in French, translating it only when the original version was well-established? The French, this time, has definite "imaginative priority" (in George Craig's phrase) (1) and indeed the text itself, though linked with Company, shows several fundamental differences of vision and approach. Beckett has said that he never knows "in advance which language (he) will write in" (2). In this case, the unconscious motivation seems to have been two-fold: first, French allowed him to come to terms with what Company had called "the reason-ridden" imagination (Company, p. 45) in the language Beckett has seen as the medium of classicism,

1. George Craig, "The voice of childhood and great age", p. 921.
2. Bair, Samuel Beckett, pp. 622-623.

of lucid and analytical thought; secondly, French released, finally, a specific body of material from Beckett's own fund of memories that is so intense, so central to his identity that English simply could not contain it without the risk of sentimental excess or a mental block. The sense of grief, anguished love and intense personal responsibility in the work seems to come from a surprising, and finally successful, transmutation of life into art: memories of the artist's widowed mother, in the last years of her life, are turned, via the intermediary of French, into an archetypal picture of mourning and loneliness. The mortality of private memory is translated into the immortality of the printed word.

An old woman, grieving, aged and alone, tends the grave of someone she loves, perhaps a husband. She inhabits a rough shed or cabin encircled by a zone of stones; beyond it thin vegetation struggles to survive, while at its perimeter stands a circle of silent and mysterious figures. She is watched by another being, characterised as "the eye", who can, like a suffering soul released from the Underworld, (1) contemplate her

1. "L'oeil reviendra sur les lieux de ses trahisons.
En congé séculaire de là où gèlent les larmes."
(Mal vu mal dit, p. 32)

directly after many years. In some sense he belongs to her, or with her; although his descriptions seem at times to strive for a quality of impersonality, a scientific attention to factual detail, they rarely succeed, and sometimes dissolve quite frankly into tears, blurring a scene whose realism is in any case highly doubtful. Indeed, it seems at times to be a mere attempt at description and narration in circumstances where neither facts nor opinions can be relied on.

The text's combination of classical and romantic, if not frankly symbolist, (1) elements allows Beckett to locate his imagination in different aspects of French literary tradition that have been of enormous importance to him. They come into tension through the bold combination of a fantastic, symbolically-charged

1. Although Beckett does not want to be seen as influenced by Maeterlinck, the symbolist whose work was of such importance for the Irish drama, there are surprising and revealing links between his work and Beckett's --perhaps more through a similarity of imaginative concerns and use of archetypal imagery than through direct inheritance. Katharine Worth --writing before Mal vu mal dit was published --speaks of Maeterlinck's play Les Aveugles (The Sightless) as follows: "To whose stage, for instance, does this dark place belong, where the twelve blind figures sit in awesome immobility as if they have no further need for the commonplace gestures of ordinary life, (...) straining to hear the footsteps that mysteriously approach and stop among them? Not Beckett's, and yet, in a way, how well it might be." Katharine Worth, The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Inc., 1978), p. 72.

landscape, in which nothing can be pinned down to a single meaning, and a language that seems constantly and unsuccessfully striving for logical coherence and factual accuracy. The foundation of a classical tradition, the strong, central authority on which it rests (whether of national identity, religion or science), has been lost, leaving the observer/creator to do what he can with the ruins of that classicism in a lost world for which only a poetic sense of mystery, a mythic grasp of eternal forces, will be adequate.

The landscape haltingly sketched out during the work strangely blends clarity and vagueness. In keeping with the unity of place in French classical drama, there is no attempt here to go beyond the limits set for the vision (the text resembles in this, as in some other respects, Le dépeupleur, also written in French). The observing/remembering or creating eye keeps strictly to the confines of the circle, except for two brief references to the sea which lies just within view. At the centre, the hut is carefully described, though only stage by stage, as if growing in the eye of the mind rather than pre-existent; the zone of stones and chalky earth gradually becomes visible, along with lambs chosen "for their whiteness" (Ill Seen III Said, p. 11). The

territory itself is like an eye, or a globe, and is obviously a microcosm standing for an entropic, yet still painfully meaningful world. The twelve figures can be taken on one level as signs of time and place, hours and compass directions, numbered by science; yet they give no scientific reliability to the vision, and indeed one of them slips away, breaking the pattern (Mal vu mal dit, p. 53).

The observing eye seems acutely aware of the tension set up when reason tries to analyse a "reality" and imagination sets up its counter-claim to invent, to synthesise and reshape that reality into an artistically satisfying form. The old woman is both dead and not dead. The eye sees her when it is closed rather than open. All this is happening in the present, but it resembles Molloy's "mythological present" (Molloy, p. 37); in fact it all happened long ago. As in Company, fictionality itself is under examination.

The only names given in the text, part of its nostalgia for classicism, lead back to the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, directly or through the Renaissance rediscovery of them: Venus comes to stand not only for the planet observed at dawn and dusk, but also for the goddess of love whose embittered votary

the old woman seems to be. In the manuscript of Mal vu mal dit her hands are seen at one moment folded on "le mont de Vénus"; (1) references in the printed text retain hints of her earlier sexual and emotional life as a lover. Perhaps, like Racine's Phèdre, she is a victim of Venus:

Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée:
C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée. (2)

Certainly Racine's genius in evoking a sense of psychological isolation and an implacable destiny can be felt beyond Beckett's own imaginative exploration; like him Beckett seeks to extend the implications of a particular woman's situation to a universal scale; the avoidance of all trivial, contemporary allusion helps to make this possible. The dignity and seriousness of the tone seem easier for him to achieve in French than in his naturally more allusive, comic and nostalgic English.

The figure of Memnon, another classical reference, has already been mentioned. (3) A mysterious voice may

1. Manuscript of "Mal vu mal dit", in Reading University Library, Ms. 2205, p. 2.

2. Racine, Phèdre, Act I, scene iii (p. 777).

3. See p. 383.

be one kind of power stone can possess, at least mythologically. In the remaining use of material gained from his knowledge of the ancient world and its revival in the Renaissance (material that seems to come to Beckett more naturally through French), he hints at the artist's powerlessness before the endurance and immobility of stone, a powerlessness brought on by old age and infirmity. The speaker in Mal vu mal dit can only sketch out the old woman, because of "Une main trop humaine contrainte à renoncer. Comme celle de Michel-Ange au buste du regicide" (Mal vu mal dit, pp. 54-55). The regicide is Brutus, and Michelangelo had to abandon the sculpture because he was too old and too frail. (1) Beckett, as the twentieth-century artist, brings together the Roman world and Renaissance culture, yet typically through a moment of failure, not success.

Equally significant are references to the classical tradition in French prose. Beckett uses a phrase of great evocative power, "la folle du logis s'en donne à coeur chagrin." (Mal vu mal dit, p. 21). Malebranche reputedly coined this expression: the imagination is the

1. Beckett may have seen the unfinished bust of Brutus in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The story of its abandonment is mentioned in Vasari's Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, 5 vols., trans. Mrs. Jonathan Foster (London: Henry Bohn, 1852), V, pp. 328-329.

"madwoman" of the house -- the brain -- instead of "la fée du logis", the perfect and sensible home-maker, which is rational thought. Malebranche also, in De la recherche de la vérité, talks of the errors of the imagination, warning of the need to control it, as was typical of the Age of Reason. (1) The phrase is clearly untranslatable into English, yet Beckett finds a suitable alternative: "imagination at wit's end spreads its sad wings" (Ill Seen Ill Said, p. 17). This reincorporates, through the use of the word "wit" in its English neo-classical sense, the contrast and the paradox: reason seeks to contain the imagination, yet imagination actually takes flight where reason stops. It may do so sadly, but its capacity to fly further is unquestioned.

It is in the flight of the imagination, its "madness", that Mal vu mal dit challenges rationalism most profoundly. The text is full of religious symbolism, yet it is God's absence that makes the greatest impression; the old woman, regularly on her knees, seems to gain no comfort from her prayers. Though she is followed by a lamb "reared for slaughter" (Ill Seen Ill Said, p. 36), in a curiously darkened reworking of the English nursery-rhyme, there is no hint that either she or the lambs are to

1. Nicolas Malebranche, De la recherche de la vérité (1674-5), in Oeuvres, eds. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis and Germain Malbreil (Paris: n.r.f. - Gallimard, 1979), pp. 3-1126.

be redeemed by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The Golgotha-like hill in which the cabin lies, the nail "Bon pour le resservice" that crucified Christ (Mal vu mal dit, p. 72), the twelve disciples (one, like Judas, disappears) all represent ruins of a system of authority and security once thought unshakable. The eye of this creator does not provide a clear system of reward and retribution, unlike the eye of God (the eye of inner conscience)^{which} follows Cain in Hugo's La Légende des Siècles, a work to which Mal vu mal dit also seems to owe something. Even in the Romantic world which Hugo describes there is a sense of right and wrong, a witness to Cain's terrible act: "un oeil, tout grand ouvert dans les ténèbres,/Et qui le regardait dans l'ombre fixement." This eye continues to follow Cain, even when he has the idea of burying himself underground "Comme dans son sépulcre un homme solitaire":

Puis il descendit seul sous cette voûte sombre;
Quand il se fut assis sur sa chaise dans l'ombre
Et qu'on eut sur son front fermé le souterrain,
L'oeil était dans la tombe et regardait Cain. (1)

In Mal vu mal dit the eye itself is racked by a kind of guilt, and yet there is no clear moral structure behind this; it seems to suffer from a frustration and disgust

1. Victor Hugo, La Légende des Siècles, ed. Paul Berret, (Paris: Hachette, 1921), p. 47.

at its own helplessness to finish the job, to present the old woman in her world and then be free of both. What is interesting is how Beckett's use of symbolist techniques has allowed him to undermine classical clarity and instead create a world of mystery that is, at root, fundamentally Romantic, though a Romanticism of a doubting kind. Ultimately Mal vu mal dit does insist on the imagination's freedom from the forces of order and intellect, and of any moral or aesthetic certainty in art. Yet it succeeds in doing so through a profound respect for, and use of, the classical tradition and a sad sense of the "mess" that results when enlightenment is no longer possible. Its language can take a nostalgic delight in the economical, restrained and "witty" ideas visible in Beckett's Chamfort adaptations, (1) and his own "mirlitonnades", among which the "mal vu" phrase finds an earlier expression:

ce qu'ont les yeux
mal vu de bien
les doigts laissé
de bien filer
serre-les bien
les doigts les yeux
le bien revient
en mieux

ce qu'a de pis
le coeur connu
la tête pu
de pis se dire
fais-les
ressusciter
le pis revient
en pire (2)

1. Samuel Beckett, Long After Chamfort, in Collected Poems, pp. 122-137.

2. Samuel Beckett, mirlitonnades, p. 41.

While the classical/romantic poles of French literary history help to explain the aesthetic motivation for the use of French in Mal vu mal dit, the need for psychological distancing provides a personal one. I want to look briefly at the ways in which Mal vu mal dit draws on Beckett's past attempts, in both languages, to come to terms with "the mother", and how and why it succeeds, even in its final dedication to failure.

The word "mère" is never applied to the woman herself. It is used only once, of the ewes that should be caring for their lambs in the sickly pasture round her zone of stones: these mothers (and they are named so only in the French text) are "indifférentes" (Mal vu mal dit, p. 13). Yet Beckett does not seem to care, after the extraordinary use of autobiography in Company (perhaps his personal riposte to the biography then in preparation), whether the reader locates an autobiographical level of meaning or not; it is, of course, not his "responsibility." (1) After his father's death his own mother went to live at a place called Greystones, between the cemetery where her husband was buried and the sea. (2) The similarities between this

1. "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (...) and I accept responsibility for nothing else."
(On 'Endgame', p. 109).
2. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 293.

setting and that of Mal vu mal dit are obvious; even the name of the district, Greystones, is entirely apt in terms of the text's elaborate stone imagery, the use of monochrome colours and the word's phonetic similarity to "gravestones". The cemetery, still being in use at that time, must have encroached on the land around it like the stones of the fictional text. And the nearby sea is mentioned twice in Mal vu mal dit. In a letter Beckett described the place as "this côte de misere"; "what does not face north faces east. She is the worse for it. But from the window she can see the cemetery where my father is 'at rest'." (1) The compass directions, and the sense of the grieving woman gazing from her window, both have direct parallels in Mal vu mal dit. Moreover, May Beckett, like the woman recreated in Beckett's imagination, wore black throughout her widowhood.

By using French, Beckett was free from the apparently very painful associations with his mother in his "mother tongue". Even if her death in 1950 had freed him to write, in English, in a boldly confessional way previously impossible, her influence still maintained a barrier against any use of her own image in art in the language

1. Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 297.

he had learned from her. Once again, as in the post-war trilogy, it is as if an entirely different verbal realm was necessary to escape the psychological weight of the language in which he had lived with, and finally left, his mother. As Patrick Casement suggests, (1) French was a language free from all such associations, a language chosen by Beckett and intimately involved with the progressive moments in his art; he could to a large extent control emotional intensity in it, rather than be controlled by early and unconscious emotional forces, because it had no parental authority over him.

Throughout his career, he had made other attempts to explore this central relationship; what is revealing is how many of these attempts are either extremely small in scale, or indeed unsatisfactory. The poem Malacoda, "written after the death of the poet's father from a heart attack in 1933", (2) was one that required a large outlay of effort. (3). It does succeed in

1. Casement, "Samuel Beckett's Relationship to his Mother-Tongue": Beckett "uses his writing, and in particular his writing in French, as a 'transitional space' (...) in which he is able to play out something of his own unresolved internal relationship to his mother alongside the new phenomenon of the 're-created' mother of his literary art." (p. 35)
2. Editor's note, Collected Poems, p. 142.
3. See Bair, Samuel Beckett, p. 187.

conveying a kind of compassion for the widowed woman -- but only by dehumanising her in a curious use of metonymy. Instead of being a woman she is "the weeds" (of mourning); her widowhood has become her entire identity. (1) Murphy, in keeping with the general tone of the novel he inhabits, quips defensively about not being able to remember his mother's face (Murphy, p. 172). Molloy, in the quest for his mother, apparently fails to find her, though he takes up residence in her room (Molloy, p. 7). In a brief poem of 1948, Je voudrais que mon amour meure, (2) Beckett adapts Yeats' love poem He wishes his beloved were dead to a "love" which suggests a rather different kind of relationship. Although the French can be taken as simply referring to the one woman who loved him, with no clue as to who she is, the English translation significantly went through three different versions: "mourning the first and last to love me"/"mourning her who sought to love me"/"mourning her who thought she loved me". (3) Of these, the first seems to suggest most clearly that this is mother-love, not a relationship of adulthood;

1. Samuel Beckett, Malacoda, in Collected Poems, p. 26.
2. Samuel Beckett, je voudrais que mon amour meure, in Collected Poems, p. 60; English version p. 61.
3. See notes on poem in Collected Poems, p. 144.

the second and third versions obscure that possibility in a poignant way, as if, even now, the poet cannot decide the truth of her feelings for him or, perhaps, how he wants to interpret them. In Mal vu mal dit the old woman is, in any case, oblivious to the presence of the watching and grieving "eye"; all the emotion is his.

The relationship in the prose text seems uniquely difficult to describe, with its mixture of love, misunderstanding, frustration and grief; though she is appallingly alone, the woman seems finally less vulnerable than the eye which is drawn to her. In the 1948 poem, where the woman is accepted as a woman, not reduced to a set of garments or an external shape, the use of French for the first version seems crucial. Attempts in the 1950s to pursue the same subject in English yielded only several failures (see Chapter V) and the scene in From An Abandoned Work, in which the mother's "helpless love" both angers and moves the speaker, as he sees her weeping and waving from the window in response to his departure (From An Abandoned Work, pp. 129-130). It is a memorable vignette, but as the title suggests, could not be sustained. Whatever the interconnections of the various texts, it seems beyond doubt that this was the central and formative relationship of Beckett's life; fittingly, it is in his old age, when he has reached

her years, as the Michelangelo reference subtly reminds us, that he can finally, in his adopted language, make peace with this, the most powerful of his ghosts.

Obviously Mal vu mal dit cannot in any way be reduced to a single, biographical interpretation; what is stunning in Beckett's finally successful treatment of the material is how thoroughly he integrates imagery and tone, thematic and symbolic patterning, freeing them from the "mother tongue" origins of the memories here transformed into art. Using French allows him to do this, and to complete the "autography" (1) of Company, composed in English and formally tightened up in French, with the different kind of "self-writing" of a text firmly rooted in the adopted language. With the deliberate exploding of fictional integrity possible in the culture which had long since assimilated (at least in principle) the subversions of le nouveau roman, the narrator/creator of the text can then boldly reveal that this old woman is both real and its contrary, both presence and ghost: "Morte (...)
Elle l'est bien sûr" (Mal vu mal dit, p. 51).

1. A term coined by H. Porter Abbott in his lecture on Company at the Stirling Beckett conference, August 1986. The lecture was entitled: "A Story of Me. Somehow: Beckett's Art as Autography".

"Dead. As of course she is" (Ill Seen Ill Said, p. 41). Only art has given her life, art and the transformative ability of the one who remembers her. Mal vu mal dit, when set beside Company, reveals the artistic power-source bilingualism has become for Beckett, his "old tandem" (Ill Seen Ill Said, p. 40) of tongues able to both control and give energy to his imagination and memories.

'Worstward Ho': back to the beginning

After four decades of detachment, Beckett's use of the Anglo-Irish variety of English has mellowed into a unique personal idiom which owes a considerable part of its power to his absence from the country in which it is spoken, together with his constant reassessment of it through self-translation and an all-encompassing bilingual consciousness. His experience of, and his writing for, the theatre in English have been crucial, allowing him to "hear" -- for the purposes of aesthetic awareness -- a language which, although his mother tongue, does not surround him in his daily existence. Worstward Ho, the most surprising experimental prose in English since All Strange Away, bears witness to his fascination with the language as something visible and external, something he can reduce to its simplest elements. He can now employ

it as a purely artistic medium, something "plastique" like paint or like the wood, stone or bronze of the sculptor; his English, through a strange paradox, has been made appropriate for art by ceasing to be a language of humdrum life.

With Worstward Ho, Beckett brings Company and Mal vu mal dit together in a startling relationship, completes a bilingual arch in which prose (French or English) has moved closer and closer to performance script, and at the same time, to a most meaningful silence. The figures of Worstward Ho are part of a drama of the mind, dimly focussed in a surrounding void or darkness. The language has a quality of freedom, combining the boldest modernity in the experimental use of *words* with the aura of some ancient world common to Beckett's late works. It is fitting that old man and child walk through the text together; the English so strangely used is the aging, but still forward-looking, artist's response to the original structures of language learned by a child, and it is a response that contains a child's playfulness. The child's tongue, preserved, is still living in the old man's brains, and this is the miracle of the oozing "soft" which Worstward Ho finally brings to focus.

In the remaining pages of this chapter I want to look briefly at Worstward Ho's use of English, and how that English reveals itself subject to time and to mortality; the discussion relates on a wider level to the way English is used in many of the late works, and how its use differs from Beckett's French. What is fascinating to observe is how Beckett now masters the maternal tongue that once mastered him. At first sight the opposite may seem true, the text to an unsympathetic eye appearing to be a linguistic extravagance that has moved too far from the contexts and constraints of English, even the notoriously unruly Dublin variety. But Beckett's links with the now externalised language are far too deep, and too immediate, for there to be a simple failure of concentration or misjudging of context. On the contrary, Worstward Ho is a fitting final celebration of a language intimately known and loved, a lifelong, if sometimes estranged, companion. Almost all traditional content having disappeared from this work (Company and Mal vu mal dit are rich in detail by comparison), the language becomes quite openly the speaker's one security. (1)

1. This direct relationship with language, almost a love-relationship, which the reader is invited to share, is the subject of Susan D. Brienza's recent book Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in Metafiction (Norman, Oklahoma, and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987). The work unfortunately became available too late to be used extensively in this thesis.

Words still hold him up over the gulf, the void, and even if they are doomed like their users, their animation in art grants a kind of immortality.

The English of Worstward Ho is a dizzying experience; negations multiply to become a Hall of Mirrors, or a philosophical puzzle; new words spring into being through a use of prefixes and suffixes which resembles the logic of the child who says "gooder" and "goodest". Idioms reappear with odd twists: "For worst and all" (Worstward Ho, p. 25), "from bad to worsen" (Worstward Ho, p. 23). Verbs have their functions replaced or are newly coined, and overall, the syntax is a kind of telegraphese or pidgⁱⁿ, or perhaps a representation of the child's first attempts at the mystery of combining words to make meaning, in the artist's amused and poignant reformulation: "Say a body. Where none. No mind. Where none." (Worstward Ho, p. 7), "Dim go. Void go. Longing go" (Worstward Ho, p. 36).

"L'art de combiner ou combinatoire n'est pas ma faute", the speaker of Assez protested; "c'est une tuile du ciel" (Assez, p. 36). Combining, thinking and plotting are only too easy, when words are given their freedom to fit together into syntactic structures. So here the rules are changed. Even a fund of familiar English monosyllables, of which this text is largely composed, can offer the strangest surprises. And it is noticeable that Worstward Ho, the third of this late prose trilogy, is the most language-conscious of the three, just as L'innommable was in the more massive trilogy of 1947-1950.

One of the most remarkable techniques Beckett uses to play his game of decomposing the few images offered through the text's screen of words is that of affixation. He takes a stock of familiar particles, prefixes including "mis-", "no-", "ill-", "un-", and suffixes: "-less", "-least", "-able", "-soever", many of which convey either negation, loss, or a vagueness of detail; and through

perfectly acceptable laws of analogy within the language he creates words such as "Beyondless" (Worstward Ho, p. 11), "unnullable", "ununsaid" (p. 32), "unlessenable" (p. 36), "onceless" (p. 38), and "unutter leastmost all" (p. 33). Usually, such oddities are well-grounded in a surrounding passage of more familiar words, though even these may have their ordinary meanings sorely taxed: "Unlessenable least of longing. Unstillable vain least of longing still." (Worstward Ho, p. 36) Meaning can still be constructed, but not without a conscious effort on the reader's part. Any desire to read the language rapidly and intuitively, as a mother tongue or primary language is normally read, comes up against a barrier: instead the language asks for conscious attention, a willingness to think and listen, and to understand its structures -- a willingness, in fact, to treat it as "foreign" and yet enjoy it.

Such characteristics of the text, especially as seen in comparatives and superlatives, and the compounding of words, such as "For want of worser worst", "dimmost dim", "unworsenable worst" (Worstward Ho, pp. 32-33) are perfect illustrations of the sense of linguistic contrast Beckett brings over from his French, which of course does not share the Germanic elements of English that allow many such constructions to occur. Indeed the

English of Worstward Ho is as "Germanic" linguistically, as far from its Romance or Latin sources as possible: it seems to strive deliberately for untranslatability into French -- although no doubt, with sufficient linguistic and creative energy Beckett himself could finally produce a translation of a kind.

As Evelyne Pieller says, translation is a good way to allow a language to be made visible, and Beckett has been familiar with this kind of visibility for fifty years:

Pour prendre la parole, pour entendre la langue et son travail, la traduction est un bon exercice. Elle rend à la langue son opacité, elle la "fait jouer" (...) à devoir être transposée dans une autre, chaque langue dresse sa singularité, ce qu'elle a précisément d'intraduisible. (1)

Translation has given Beckett so profound a knowledge of the two, and in recent decades the three, languages he regularly uses that his experimental treatment of English in Worstward Ho can be seen as a kind of part-amused, part-nostalgic reflection on all the linguistic activities of his life: coinages produced through compounding were, long before, a feature of his pseudo-Joycean experiment Text and other parts of "Dream of

1. Evelyne Pieller, "Les mots des autres", p. 28.

Fair to Middling Women". Similarly, puns make an infrequent but blatantly obvious appearance, not only in the title, but in the contextually important "Scene and seer of all" (Worstward Ho, p. 23), which insists on the head or brain's central role as both object (seen) and subject (seer), and the equally powerful "preying since last worse said on foresaid remains" (Worstward Ho, p. 30) which combines the idea of "praying" (all poetry, Beckett once said, is prayer), (1) an animal "preying" on others (images of feeding are also present in Worstward Ho) and the idiom "there's something preying on his mind", an anxiety or need for which "prayer" offers no relief. But these are not "dreadful" puns as one reviewer called them; (2) they are a final acknowledgement of an ancient and important tradition, one in which linguistic accidents are seen as part of a greater design. There is a certain rightness in the two different semantic units brought together, though it is a rightness reason cannot explain.

Finally, this quirky and affectionate celebration of a mother tongue long seen from the outside as well as from within takes advantage of the flexibility and capacity for elliptical compression in English. Word-

1. Samuel Beckett, Humanistic Quietism, in Disjecta, p. 68.
2. Hermione Lee, "Death rattle", The Observer (22 May, 1983), p. 30.

order does a great deal to advance meaning; verbs, far now from the declarative sequences of finite forms with which Beckett's own earlier prose is stocked, turn into odd infinitives: "dimmen", "worsen", or disappear altogether: "What words for what then? None for what then" (Worstward Ho, p. 28) which might be reconstituted as "What words (can there be) for what (will happen) then? None (are left) for what (will happen) then." Somehow the text trains the reader not only to do without but to supply freely what may fit; it refuses to dictate, to demand acquiescence. Indeterminacy is at its core.

If, in his seventy-sixth year, when he wrote this work, (1) Beckett was indeed looking back to his very earliest language-use, it is fitting that the text dimly follows an old man and a child "in the dim void" (Worstward Ho, p. 10). Though the speaker claims "Any others would do as ill" (Worstward Ho, p. 13) ("ill" equalling "well" in this upside-down world, where failure is success), the two figures are far from random. Gradually they come to seem, not simply the emblematic extremes of a human existence, plodding hand in hand into eternity, but two avatars or ghost-presences of a single being, "two once so one" (Worstward Ho, p. 41).

1. The manuscript, now in Reading University Library, (Ms. 2602), is dated 9/8/81.

They provide a perfect illustration of the meeting of worlds in Beckett's Irish English in the most recent works, a characteristic that is one of the most important differences from his French. This is the bringing together of the language of his childhood, its idioms and vocabulary relevant to the 1900s and 1910s, and the language as spoken in the 1970s and 1980s. Obviously, except through his reading, Beckett does not have the same two-layer inheritance in his French, the combination, for example, of the speech-style of a bourgeois provincial childhood to offset the contemporary language of a largely artistic and Bohemian group in Paris. His French, instead, tends to be more contemporary, less quaintly archaic, except when a specific antique object must be mentioned. In both tongues, it should be said, the post-1960s world of technology, science and aggressive commercialism has no place, thus excluding vast areas of contemporary usage and vocabulary; Beckett stays with the basic usage of each tongue and the words of a central literary inheritance.

In Worstward Ho, though the majority of the words are so simple that they seem timeless, there are many that appear to be dredged up from an antique literary past, at least by the judgement of the 1980s: "whither",

"whence", "thence", "thither", are favorites ; "would do as ill", "a grot", "foresaid remains", "alas", "a pox on bad", "twain", "dint", and the Chaucerian-sounding verbs "dimmen" and "worsen" all contribute to the *sense of* antiquity. This language, often openly poetic, is also rich in Company (more so than in its French equivalent Compagnie) with its memories of the time when a "de Dion Bouton" car sat in the family garage (Company, p. 17). Words such as "solace", "with child", "haven", "akin", "afrolic", "tarried" occur throughout that text. When Mal vu mal dit switches to English, the archaic objects, such as the button-hook, transfer; but the "manteau" becomes a great-coat, and phrases such as "elle ne se parle plus" (Mal vu mal dit, p. 14) which are fairly plain in the original can take on a strongly antique flavour in the English: "with herself she has no more converse" (Ill Seen Ill Said, p. 12).

Beckett's fascination with the process of aging - a fascination strong long before he himself could qualify as old -- has led him in his later years to consider directly the different worlds of childhood and old age, developing a new and intimate relationship with his Irish inheritance in order to do so. In the Company manuscript, he carefully worked out scenes for "Y(outh)" "A(dulthood)" and "O(ldage)" ("Company" Ms, inside cover),

fitting the language and details to them. That Time also has a pattern of an old man reliving an earlier world, experiencing its changed state. "No once in pastless now" says the speaker of Worstward Ho at one moment, but only after he has already announced "Back is on" (Worstward Ho, p. 38 and p. 37). In terms of the language he is bringing to the forefront of consciousness, both are true; to reawaken earlier words, or the ancient structures that allow their combination, and to declare that all is present or "pastless", is to make all the stages of a language-obsessed life contemporaneous. The kneeling figure in Worstward Ho which at first seems masculine, then turns into the black-clothed widow familiar from Mal vu mal dit, is the provider of the maternal tongue, but seen in her old age; her androgyny suggests that language is made by both sexes, their differences in the end irrelevant, as the pressure of years bows them towards the earth. Yet there are hints in various late texts of intense memories of early childhood: the vivid stories of the birth and cradle-scene in Company, the veiled reference to nursery-rhymes in the title Rockaby (the very old, like the very young, needing to be rocked to find comfort), the "Mary had a little lamb" sequence of Mal vu mal dit. The mother's tongue is well-learned, and it is only after a long

pilgrimage through other tongues that the learner has returned to it, in Worstward Ho, with an undisguised and childlike affection, to speak of it with "Joy" (Worstward Ho, p. 29).

Thus Beckett has come full circle, from the childhood and youth spent in English, the estranged English of an Ireland at that time racked by political, social and linguistic pressures, to the prime of life, and art, spent in French; then to years of maturity spent shifting with increasing equilibrium between the two, and so to old age, where an affection for the Irish English he had once so painfully rejected grows and gains new warmth. It is fitting that in one of his recent works, the beautiful Quad, there is no language at all, and yet the title and the scene presented bring together childhood and old age. The cloaked figures passing swiftly and silently within a pre-ordained pattern are like the ghosts of those whose lives are over; yet Beckett mentions that adolescents may perform the roles, and the movements are as graceful and rapid as those of young, healthy bodies, not decrepit and ancient ones. "Quad" has many possible meanings, quite apart from the Latin root that frees it from any specific modern European language. It contains the sense of a sacred "four", or the quadrivium of medieval education, but also hints at a scene familiar

from Beckett's own student years: the students rushing to and fro in the "quad" of that august institution, Trinity College. At the same time, the figures recall Giacometti's sculpture La Place (1948), a most European reference combining with the Irish. Quad is a silent dance of ghosts, a ballet of pure motion, and as a work for television, astonishingly avant-garde in its use of a medium that, in spite of its potential, is usually far more aurally than visually communicative. Moreover, television is a world-wide phenomenon; by using it, and using it in silence, Beckett finally solves the dilemma of conflicting tongues.

Beckett's love of silence has come to him through an even more intense love of two languages, English and French, "two parting dreams" (Texts For Nothing, p. 110). Neither of them can be taken to the place beyond the grave for which his artistic imagination seems to yearn. Yet they have been, in spite of all, good company, as the gentle request of one of the mirlitonnades seemed to ask of them:

mots survivants
de la vie
encore un moment
tenez-lui compagnie (mirlitonnades, p. 44)

They have kept him company, allowing him to maintain an extraordinary bilingual detachment, a marginality,

without slipping irrecoverably into a private darkness, or the irrational "place between" which his work has located. Above all they have allowed a quite exceptional exploration of the self, each language in turn being a medium for artistic expression, not a utilitarian and instinctive everyday speech, so that he can illuminate the darkness, bring light to the issueless predicament of existence, as he said Jack Yeats had done. (1) In this he fulfils Proust's words, achieving what that other great writer saw as the artist's central task:

quand lui, le chercheur, est tout ensemble
le pays obscur où il doit chercher. (...)
Chercher? pas seulement: créer. Il est en
face de quelque chose qui n'est pas encore
et que seul il peut réaliser, puis faire
entrer dans sa lumière. (2)

Company, Mal vu mal dit, and Worstward Ho are a suitable bilingual coda to a life of artistic exploration, bringing "des pays obscurs" to light, and pursued, with unique results, through the medium of two languages.

1. In MacGreevy on Yeats, p. 97.
2. Marcel Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu, I, p. 45.

CHRONOLOGY

This chronology is concerned only with the details of Beckett's career that are relevant to his bilingualism. It includes the dates of writing and translation of his own major works, and the linguistic context (if known) in which those works were produced. It also specifies the language used (if this is not clear from the title) and gives any external reason, such as a request or commission, for his choice of language. It is not concerned with publication dates or personal events in Beckett's life, except insofar as such details have a direct bearing on his bilingual activity.

The chronology is based on information from the following works: Admussen, The Samuel Beckett Manuscripts; Bair, Samuel Beckett: A Biography; Federman and Fletcher, Samuel Beckett: His Works and His Critics; Harvey, Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic; Janvier, Beckett; and the chronologies in L'Herne: Samuel Beckett and the special Beckett issue of Revue d'Esthétique. I have also used my own manuscript research, as Beckett often dates early drafts of his work. Useful information on the dating of drafts can be found in The Samuel Beckett Collection catalogue (and supplements) published by Reading University Library, and in the earlier Samuel Beckett: an exhibition (catalogue by James Knowlson).

The name of a work is given in its language of creation. A translation is given with the new title after the original, joined by an arrow: e.g. Imagination morte imaginez ---> Imagination Dead Imagine, 1965. A question mark in parentheses means that an item of information is speculative.

1906 Born in Foxrock, Dublin.

1923-7 Living in Dublin, at home and then in rooms near Trinity College, studying French and Italian.

1926 First visit to France, cycling in Loire.

1927 First visit to Italy. Early version of poem Alba (E) (?)

- 1928 Spring-summer, teaching French at Campbell College, Belfast. Visit to Kassel, Germany (September), then to Paris to begin a two-year appointment as "lecteur" at l'Ecole Normale Supérieure. Visit to Germany, December-January 1929.
- 1929 In Paris. Writes Dante ... Bruno .Vico ..Joyce, completed by May, and Assumption, completed by June. To Dublin and Kassel during the summer. Che Sciagura (E) written in autumn. To Germany, Christmas 1929.
- 1930 Begins translation of Rimbaud's Le bateau ivre (?). Participates in Anna Livia Plurabelle translation, and writes For Future Reference and Whoroscope. Stays in Paris over the summer to prepare monograph Proust. From the Italian, translates Montale, Franchi, Comisso. Returns to Dublin in September, taking up appointment as assistant lecturer in French. Visits Paris and Kassel in December. Writes Le Concentrisme, September - December.
- 1931 Dublin. Writes "Le Kid" with Georges Pelorson in February, and The Possessed. Spring break in Paris. Writes (or rewrites) poems including Alba, Enueg I and II. To Kassel in December; resigns from his position at Trinity College while in Germany.
- 1932 Completes Rimbaud translation. In Germany and Paris until May, then makes brief visit to London. Translates surrealist poetry by Breton, Eluard and Crevel. Writes Home Olga for James Joyce. Begins "Dream of Fair to middling Women". Returns to Dublin in early summer. Works on story Dante and the Lobster, which is published in This Quarter in December.
- 1933 Dublin. Learning Spanish. Writes Malacoda after his father's death in June. Writing and revising the More Pricks Than Kicks stories. Preliminary trip to London, returns for Christmas.
- 1934 To London in January. Begins psychoanalysis with Wilfred Bion. Begins Murphy. Writes Da Tagte Es, the story "Echo's Bones", Gnome, Serena I and Serena III. Reviews McGreevy poems, Rilke translations, Feuillerat's study of Proust, and recent Irish poetry. Begins reading on Samuel Johnson. Summer visit to Ireland; writes Serena II. Writes A Case in a Thousand. Reviews O'Casey's Windfalls. Censorship in the Saorstat commissioned by The Bookman. Returns to Ireland for Christmas.

- 1935 Returns to London in January. Continues Murphy. Writes (or completes) Censorship in the Saorstat. English tour in July with his mother, and visits Lichfield alone to see Samuel Johnson's birthplace. Hears Jung lecture in London in September. Returns to Ireland in December.
- 1936 Tutors French students. Works on material about Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale. Completes Murphy. Reviews Jack B. Yeats' The Amaranthers. Reads widely in English, French, German and Italian. Writes to Eisenstein and Pudovkin, wanting to revive silent film. Leaves for Germany in September; visits art galleries.
- 1937 In Germany until late spring. Writes Ooftish. Draft of play about Dr. Johnson, Human Wishes. Reviews Devlin's Intercessions. Writes letter in German to Axel Kaun. Decides to move to Paris. Writes Dieppe (F) then (E), and elles viennent (E) then (F). Translates Zone (?) Murphy accepted after rejection by forty-two publishers.
- 1938 January, stabbed in a Paris street. While in hospital, Alfred Péron suggests translation of Murphy. Writes à elle l'acte calme, être là, La mouche, musique de l'indifférence, Arènes de Lutece and other poems in French (or early 1939). Attends Geer van Velde exhibition in London. Summer visits to Ireland and Brittany; writes Les deux besoins with Péron's encouragement. To Ireland for Christmas.
- 1939 Returns to Paris. Continues translation of Murphy. Summer visit to Ireland, but returns to France when war breaks out.
- 1940 In June, goes south with "L'Exode" from Paris to Vichy, Toulouse, Cahors, spending several nights sleeping rough. Returns to Paris in October. Joins Résistance, doing counter-propaganda and translation.
- 1941 Begins Watt in Paris.
- 1942 Writing Watt. Résistance cell is broken. Spends two months in hiding, then escapes to unoccupied zone, arriving in Roussillon in early November.

- 1943 Writing Watt. Friends in Roussillon include the fluently bilingual and eccentric Miss Beamish, the Polish-Jewish painter Henri Hayden, "Toni Clerkx" (Jacoba van Velde), and Jewish refugees. First sustained contact with rural France.
- 1944 Writing Watt.
- 1945 Trying to arrange return to Paris. Leaves Roussillon and returns to Ireland. Returns to France in August with Irish Red Cross unit, working at Saint-Lô. Surrounded by local patients and German prisoners. Visits Paris in October. Writes la peinture des van Velde and (possibly) first versions of nouvelles and of the poems Saint-Lô and Mort de A.D.
- 1946 Resigns from Red Cross unit. To Ireland, spending fortieth birthday with his mother. Returns to Paris in May. Suite (La fin) written; also Mercier et Camier (May-Sept.), L'expulsé (Oct.), Premier amour (Oct.-Nov.), Le calmant (Dec.-1st Jan. 1947).
- 1947 Writes "Eleuthéria" (Jan.-Feb.) and Peintres de l'Empechement (March). Murphy published in French. Writes Molloy (May-Nov.) and begins Malone meurt (Nov.) Revises Mort de A.D. Writes vive mort ma seule saison and bon bon il est un pays (or 1948).
- 1948 Translating commercially. Writes je suis ce cours de sable, que ferais-je sans ce monde, and je voudrais que mon amour meure. Completes Malone meurt in May. Visits Ireland, July-August. Writes En attendant Godot (Oct.-Jan. 1949).
- 1949 Translating for Duthuit's Transition. Three Dialogues (with Georges Duthuit) written. Begins L'innommable in March.
- 1950 Completes L'innommable in January. Translates into English final chapter of Bove's Armand. Returns to Ireland in June; mother dies, 25 August. While in Ireland, translates fragments of Molloy and Malone meurt. Jérôme Lindon accepts Molloy, Malone meurt and L'innommable for publication. In Paris, begins Textes pour rien in December.
- 1951 Molloy published in March, Malone meurt in October; both well received by critics. Continues Textes pour rien. Possibly begins story of Emmanuel, Matt and Popol.

- 1952 Writes Henri Hayden, homme-peintre in January. "Emmanuel" story abandoned on 1st February. Other abandoned stories: "Ici personne ne vient jamais" and (in French?) story of "how I killed my mother". Buys land at Ussy with share of mother's estate.
- 1953 January 5th, première of En attendant Godot. Sudden fame. Watt accepted and published jointly by Richard Seaver (Merlin group) and Maurice Girodias (Olympia Press). Advises directors and actors on German production of En attendant Godot. En attendant Godot ---> Waiting for Godot in summer. Begins translating La fin ---> The End with Seaver (until summer 1954) and Molloy (F)---> Molloy (E) with Patrick Bowles. Early version of Fin de partie begun.
- 1954 Completes translation of L'expulsé ---> The Expelled with Seaver. Begins full translation of Malone meurt ---> Malone Dies. Writes and abandons prose piece "aussi il faut ... cette poussière-là". Writes Mime de Reveur and early version of Fin de partie. From An Abandoned Work possibly written. In Ireland, April to September because of his brother Frank's death. Revises Bowles' translation of Molloy. Writes Hommage à Jack B. Yeats.
- 1955 Often works alone at Ussy, a common practice ever since. Writes further version of Fin de partie (summer). Visits Zurich. Writes Acte sans paroles I for dancer Deryk Mendel. Continues translation of Malone meurt ---> Malone Dies. Sees London production of Waiting for Godot in December.
- 1956 Completes Malone Dies translation early in year. Revises Acte sans paroles I. Writes two-act, then final one-act version of Fin de partie. Writes All That Fall, first radio play, after suggestion by John Gielgud. Writes Acte sans paroles II and "The Gloaming". Reluctant to translate L'innommable.
- 1957 Enjoys working with BBC on All That Fall, and becomes interested in future radio works and use of music. Early in year, begins translation of L'innommable. Translates Fin de partie ---> Endgame (May-August); finds translation difficult. Revises German translations of his work.

- 1958 Completes translation of L'innommable ---> The Unnamable, 23rd February. Begins to write Krapp's Last Tape, 20th February. To London in February-March, fighting censorship of Endgame production. Writes Fragment de théâtre II in August. Krapp's Last Tape ---> La dernière bande. Revises The End. Late in year, begins "Pim" manuscript (which will become Comment c'est). Possibly begins to write "Foirades".
- 1959 Continues "Pim". Writes Embers, and translates Embers ---> Cendres with Robert Pinget. Finishes La dernière bande (Feb.) Translates some of Textes pour rien into English. Translates start of the "Pim" manuscript.
- 1960 Writes "foirades" this year or following year. "Pim" becomes Comment c'est and is completed in August. Begins Happy Days. Begins translation of Comment c'est ---> How It Is. Unsuccessful attempt to translate Watt. Translates Pinget's La Manivelle as The Old Tune.
- 1961 Completes Happy Days. Translates and revises translations of various texts, including The Expelled and some of the Texts for Nothing. Continues translation of Comment c'est ---> How It Is, and begins translation of Happy Days ---> Oh les beaux jours. Writes Esquisse radiophonique; writes Words and Music (Nov.) and Cascando (F) (Dec.), the latter in response to request by Mihalovici and ORTF. Gives interviews to d'Aubarède and Driver. Writes Pochade radiophonique (or 1962-3?)
- 1962 Revises Words and Music and Cascando. In July, begins Play. Completes Happy Days ---> Oh les beaux jours. Translates Words and Music ---> Paroles et musique. Continues How It Is.
- 1963 Idea for a film from Barney Rosset. Writes Film (April-May). Completes Play; completes How It Is. Participates in German production of Play (Spiel). Translates Play ---> Comédie. Translates Cascando (F) ---> (E), and more of the Texts for Nothing. Writes "J.M. Mime", begins "Kilcool" manuscript. Possibly writes All Strange Away.
- 1964 Continues "Kilcool". Increasing participation in the rehearsals of his plays as an advisor. Possibly translates Le calmant ---> The Calmative. Shoots Film in New York (summer).

- 1965 Writes Eh Joe (April-May), Imagination morte imaginez, Come and Go. Translates Eh Joe ---> Dis Joe, Imagination morte imaginez ---> Imagination Dead Imagine, Come and Go ---> Va et vient. Writes Assez (Sept.-Oct.) Visits Germany and Italy. Begins Le dépeupleur (Oct.)
- 1966 Increasing involvement in theatre and television. Visits England and Portugal. Abandons Le dépeupleur (May) and writes Breath (May). Writes Bing (July-August). Translates Assez ---> Enough and Bing ---> Ping. Translations or revisions of Textes pour rien ---> Texts for Nothing finished by December. Directs Va et vient in Paris. With Agnès and Ludovic Janvier, undertakes Watt translation after collaborating with them on From an Abandoned Work ---> D'un ouvrage abandonné.
- 1967 Writes and abandons play(s) with medical theme (Feb. 1967 - April 1968). Frequent illnesses. Visits Germany and Spain. Continues Watt translation.
- 1968 Directs Endspiel at Schiller Theater, Berlin. Rewrites earlier text as Se voir and translates it as Closed Space. Completes Watt translation.
- 1969 Writes Sans and translates it as Lessness. Writes section 15 of Le dépeupleur. Awarded Nobel Prize. Visits Portugal and Germany; directs Das letzte Band at Schiller Theater.
- 1970 With some reluctance, allows publication of Mercier et Camier and Premier amour. Unwilling to translate them.
- 1971 Directs Glückliche Tage in Germany; also visits Italy. Begins translation of Mercier et Camier ---> Mercier and Camier. Begins translation of Le dépeupleur ---> The Lost Ones (Sept.)
- 1972 Visits North Africa, February. Writes Not I (March-April). Begins to translate Premier amour ---> First Love (April-May). Begins Still (June-July).
- 1973 In London for Not I production (Jan.) Finishes translation of First Love. Translates Not I ---> Pas moi (Jan.-March). Finishes Still; writes or revises Sounds (May-June) and Still 3 (June). Finishes translation of Mercier and Camier (August). Translates foirades ---> Fizzles. Writes As the Story was Told (August). "Doggerelizing" Chamfort.

- 1974 Fragment de Théâtre I (adapted and translated from "The Gloaming") finished by March. Revises Pas moi (May). Writes poems: hors crane, something there, dread nay. Translates Still ---> Immobile. Writes That Time (until August 1975).
- 1975 Writes La falaise (pour Bram van Velde) (Jan.-March). Translates Pochade radiophonique ---> Rough for Radio II (or earlier?) Directs Warten auf Godot in Germany (March), also La dernière bande and Pas moi in Paris (April). Writes Ghost trio. Writes Footfalls (March-November). Translates Fragment de Théâtre I ---> Rough for Theatre I (Sept.)
- 1976 Assists in London production of That Time, and directs Footfalls. Translating Pour finir encore ---> For to End Yet Again and Footfalls ---> Pas (?) Continues Chamfort adaptations. Writes neither (Sept.), ...but the clouds ... (Oct.-Nov.), Roundelay, thither. Directs Damals and Tritte in Germany (October). Begins mirlitonades.
- 1977 Begins Company. Continues mirlitonades. Directs Krapp's Last Tape in Germany (in English, with San Quentin Theater Workshop).
- 1978 Writing Company. Completes mirlitonades. Directs Pas and Pas moi in Paris. Directs Spiel and Kommen und Gehen in Germany.
- 1979 Company ---> Compagnie (translation and revision). Directs Happy Days in London.
- 1980 A Piece of Monologue, material from the "Company" manuscript, rewritten as a play; then "adapted" into French as Solo. Writing Mal vu mal dit. Directs San Quentin Theater Workshop in Endgame and Krapp's Last Tape.
- 1981 Writes Rockaby and translates it as Berceuse. Writes Ohio Impromptu and translates it as Impromptu d'Ohio. Begins Quadrat I and II (Quad). Begins writing Worstward Ho (August).
- 1982 Writes Catastrophe (F) and translates it into English. Writes Nacht und Traùme. Continues Worstward Ho.

1983 Writes What where.

1984 Supervises San Quentin productions of Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and Krapp's Last Tape. Participates in theatre adaptation of Compagnie, directed by Pierre Chabert.

1986 Adapts What where for German television.

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