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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
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AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO SAMUEL BECKETT

Klaus Jochem

A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
of the University of Ottawa  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts.

Halifax, March 1980

## Abstract

This essay is a discussion of certain prevalent methods employed in modern criticism and their value as approaches to literature in general and in particular to the works of Samuel Beckett. The commentary on Beckett shows how far critics have moved away from what used to be the primary question of "tradition and individual talent" towards a heavy reliance on psychology and linguistics. At the same time, there is a common disregard for the limitations of these approaches which is due, as I will try to show, to mistaken assumptions concerning the validity of psychological and linguistic theories in the interpretation of literature.

The discussion is confined to only one aspect of this large question, namely the fact that in both psychology and linguistics theory has developed from being based on dualistic principles to finding its surest philosophical underpinning in phenomenology. This development can be summarized as follows. Fifty years ago it was still generally thought that the products of psychic activity—using this unsatisfactory phrase to encompass the subject matter of both psychology and linguistics—could be entirely explained along causal

lines. In psychology, as is well-known, a psychic entity labelled the Unconscious was theorized to be the determinative factor in human behaviour; in linguistics, a substantial unity of languages was variously sought in some fundamental psychological, physiological or logical principle. However, as psychology and linguistics evolved, it became apparent that these reductive approaches were equally inadequate and detracted from an understanding, on the one hand, of the nature of human consciousness and, on the other, of the real human significance of language. Today, it is generally accepted that an ontology of consciousness as it has been undertaken by phenomenologists is the most promising step towards providing the first principles for both psychology and linguistics.

Criticism seems to be a generation or two behind this realization, for it follows that any critical approach which is not in the final analysis to be regarded as an appendix to empirical psychology or descriptive linguistics must accept (at the very least as a methodological axiom) that ultimately the imagination is irreducible to psycho-biological or logical determinants, and must directly address the nature of creative activity. The extraordinary achievement of Beckett lies in what he has found the means to say on this question. It is in this sense that his works have inspired this essay.

### Acknowledgment

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I

The danger is in the neatness of identifications.  
-Beckett

No student of modern criticism can fail to be aware of the impact which psychology and linguistics have had on the formal study of literature. Psychoanalysis and analytical psychology, for instance, have not only introduced new methods with their own vocabulary but, more importantly, have promoted a shift from traditional moral and aesthetic questions towards categories of subjective experience. Linguistics has likewise forced the retreat of idealistic aesthetics by demonstrating the extent to which the poetic message can be defined by close textual analysis. Loosely speaking, psychology has broadened the field of inquiry on the side of content, linguistics on the side of style.

The last sixty or seventy years, however, have not been enough to settle the theoretical questions raised for literary criticism by the methods and findings of the new sciences. The extremes of linguistic and psychological analysis have provoked a reaction, and simplistic

reductions of literature to psychoneurotic determinants or to crude linguistic models is an error of the past. It is noteworthy that departments of literature at the universities have generally refused to alter the basic organization of literary studies according to historical periods, implying that the chronological development of literature is still the central fact deserving systematic investigation. Nonetheless, if the format of the curriculum still shows its philological antecedents, the actual work being done clearly attests the influence of the two sciences, and no volume of criticism can hope for a sympathetic reception if it completely ignores the new intellectual trends in scholarship.

One is particularly conscious of the theoretical ambivalence created by the new sciences in what has been written on modern authors, and understandably so. When current analytic techniques are applied to works that predate the twentieth century, the results take their place within the historical continuity of experience and judgement of these works and are valued in that context. Though the numerous linguistic and psychological studies on Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>, to take a clear example, have succeeded in making him a "modern" and have had some influence on the theatrical presentation of his plays, they have not

disturbed the fundamental estimation of his works. In this instance, it is their nature as a kind of inviolable cultural monument that raises the plays to the position of judge and touchstone of the new methods, as much as the reverse. But when we turn to modern writers, criticism all too plainly shares the irresolution of modern thinking.

It is no secret that, apart from their artistic merit, the prose and dramatic writings of Samuel Beckett constitute an exceptionally fertile document for both psychological and linguistic investigators. Both sciences long ago turned their attention to literature as a legitimate part of their field of study, and a writer as disciplined in elaborating new linguistic forms as he is undisguised in following the lead of his psyche will not escape their interest. Beckett's life more or less spans the development of psychology and linguistics as separate sciences, a coincidence perhaps unimportant outside the principal fact that his writings have addressed some of the same questions of experience and language that have preoccupied theoreticians in these disciplines. Thus it is not surprising to find an article on Beckett in the Journal of Analytical Psychology as early as 1960,<sup>2</sup> or a study such as the one published in 1976 by

Waltraud Gölder under the title Entfremdung als Konstituens bürgerlicher Literatur, dargestellt am Beispiel Samuel Becketts. Versuch einer Vermittlung von Soziologie und Psychoanalyse als Interpretationsmodell? And there is every reason to expect more treatments of this kind, in which the author's work will be examined under its non-literary aspects.

On the other hand, critical studies which borrow from the new sciences for the purpose of literary appreciation pose a problem. In 1970, G.C. Bernard brought out a book entitled Samuel Beckett: A New Approach,<sup>4</sup> in which he undertakes to demonstrate that:

the fundamental feature of Beckett's characters is that they are schizophrenic, in the accepted clinical sense of the word, or at least are definitely schizoid types. And the important fact about his presentation of the characters is that, unlike the traditional novelist, he does not merely report their behaviour from the point of view of an outside observer, but imaginatively describes their subjective experience of psychosis as it appears to their disturbed minds. [my emphasis]

Applying the theories of psychopathology to fictional works is in itself not a "new approach", and Bernard can only mean that no one before him has called attention to what is generally accepted as the symptomatology of schizophrenia. And yet, the critical question which one might suppose prompted this study — namely what

place in a work of literature have those elements resembling the characteristics of a certain psychic disorder— is never broached. It cannot be, because the author has accepted the categories of medical psychology and thereby transferred the problematic from the realm of art to that of science.

A similar difficulty is encountered in a good deal of recent French and North-American criticism on Beckett influenced by modern linguistic theories. Some of these studies are inaccessible without a prior grounding in the terms and methodologies employed. While Dina Sherzér's analysis of Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable according to the functions of language described by Roman Jakobson (Structure de la Trilogie de Beckett, The Hague: Mouton, 1976) can be understood by the general reader, a study of the same works by B.T. Fitch (Dimension, Structure, et Textualité, Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1977) is probably unreadable without a background in structuralist theory. One recent doctoral dissertation on Beckett and Giacometti by U.M. Rehn Wolfman, taking its inspiration from the abstruse linguistic and psychological synthesis of the French writer Jacques Derrida, employs a conceptual schema which defies integration — and intentionally so — with the other two studies mentioned. An excerpt from the abstract will illustrate this:

Literature and the Fine Arts have often been linked by comparison, that is, by their similarities or differences. A common denominator would be postulated, upon which a given theory would then be based. This type of approach considers the two fields as "objects of knowledge", having a "central signified" (signifié central) which, although absent, can be recovered. An alternative approach, taken here, places the work of art "outside", in the "margin" of the theory of the sign (théorie du signe), where the central signified is absent, has always been and will always be absent. The subject (seen traditionally as "one" [unifié]), the writer, his life and influences upon him do not exist. There is no "object" in the traditional sense upon which a theory can be founded... The notion of the sign as the "One", as the "Same" is to be replaced by a "structure" of the sign now based on difference, obstacle, where there is no presence, no absolute origin, no transcendental signified, where the signified is in turn a signifier (signifiant). This difference writes, creates, therefore demand investigation of the notion of writing and reading, itself, motivating that which is unmotivated.

A reader who has understood this will also admit that he has taken special pains to keep informed on the current theories in French speculative criticism. Without impugning the merits of this dissertation, one is nevertheless justified in asking what is at stake here— a study of Giacometti and Beckett, or a controversial epistemology?

In a general way, the modern trends to psychological and linguistic criticism can be seen to support one another. By dividing the field for analytical purposes into the broad categories of content and style they map

out their respective territories. Largely unconcerned with questions of genre and diction, the psychological critic carries on the work of professional psychologists and anthropologists in exposing the symbolic content of a work, too often at a level far below what a thorough grounding in the sciences would warrant. The linguistic critic, for his part, maintains an artificial distance from this content, confident that the essential meaning can be extracted from structures of expression; in the worst cases, the partiality of the latter approach remains concealed behind a barrage of terminology and the manifest difficulty of the method. It is regrettable that critics, who have set out important cultural functions for themselves, should in so many instances have pursued a course calculated only to minimize their relevance.

This situation finds a partial source in the following state of affairs. Whereas the distinction is everywhere acknowledged between studying art as a creative activity and studying it for the parallels it contains to what we regard as non-creative forms of human activity, the distinction is poorly understood and seldom upheld. One can point, in this respect to the ready acceptance accorded by the critical community to the provisional theories and analytic schemas devised by

empirical psychologists. As I will try to show in this essay, empirical psychology can only succeed in explaining those elements in a literary work that do not bear directly upon the creative activity itself. This limitation, it should be stressed at the outset, does not inhere in the facts that psychology has brought to light, but in the causal-deterministic framework that informs them. As the trend towards "scientific" criticism continues, the question becomes increasingly urgent whether its success is entirely worth its failure. By viewing the work of art solely as a datum with a definable content, such criticism deflates whatever imperatives might emerge from the realization of its tenuous status as a created object. A similar limitation, also to be discussed, holds true for descriptive linguistic methods. However valuable these have proven in furthering our understanding of linguistic phenomenon in general, their direct application to literature obscures the real significance of the artistic use of language.

When Beckett began writing in the late twenties, the theories of Freud and the critical attitude to language that spawned modern linguistics were among the most conspicuous features of contemporary thought.

The surrealists adopted the so-called unconscious processes uncovered by psychoanalysis as the virtual basis of an artistic creed. The revaluation of language was, of course, being forced by the same factors that declared the bankruptcy of academic psychology. To separate these developments is a descriptive convenience, and especially to a writer they would have appeared as two aspects of a basic epistemological question that still stands behind the sciences of psychology and linguistics. Accordingly, in an article published in the August 1934 issue of Bookman, entitled "Recent Irish Poetry", Beckett divided his contemporaries into two groups: antiquarians and others, those who disguised and those who faced the relativity of previous systems of thought. The latter, he wrote, "evinced awareness of the new thing that has happened, namely the breakdown of the object... [the] rupture of the lines of communication"<sup>6</sup>, a statement that could also have served to characterize the theories in psychology and linguistics gaining currency at the time. Early on, Beckett concluded that art could not be strengthened by conceptualizing experience in accordance with the provisional theories of empirical psychology, and that the capacity of language to express was not an assumption but the very question

mark that must precede creation.

These considerations go a long way to explain the significance of Beckett's first novel for its author. Murphy was written intermittently between the fall of 1934 and the summer of 1936 during a very unhappy period in Beckett's life. Half a year earlier he had begun 20 months of psychoanalytic sessions in the hope of alleviating psychosomatic symptoms that had in late years become severe to the point of incapacitation. Part of Murphy is set in a psychiatric institution modelled on an actual one Beckett was able to visit at the time, and the novel bears witness to his preoccupation with the treatment and theory of psychogenic illnesses. (Anyone familiar with Beckett's early short stories or his later works would expect a conscious concern with language to be an equally important aspect of the novel.) For these reasons, and the fact that Murphy is cast in a more traditional and therefore more accessible form, it seemed appropriate to relate the theoretical portion of the essay to this early novel and the period during which it was written. Among Beckett's later works, Imagination Dead Imagine stands as one of the most profound reflections on the subject of consciousness and the artistic imagination. I felt compelled to say something concerning

this piece in a final section, though it will be of little interest to anyone who has not previously devoted some time to the work.

Before examining the application of psychological dualisms to literature in greater detail in Section III, it would be helpful to make some comments on their historical context, and underline, in this respect, their relation to the language theories of classical linguistics.

## II

Yet to concentrate solely on the literal sense or even the psychological content of any document to the sore neglect of the enveloping facts themselves circumstantiating it is just as harmful; etc.

-Joyce

Jean-Paul Sartre begins L'être et le néant with a review of what has come to be understood by the philosophical concept of phenomenon: "Modern thought has realized considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it"<sup>1</sup>. Substituting "literature" for "existent", Sartre's opening statement can be translated into the terms of our subject to read: modern criticism has made considerable progress by reducing the work of literature to its various aspects as a written text. One of the themes in this essay stems from the historical coincidence implied by this analogy: "Its aim was to overcome a certain number of dualisms which have embarrassed philosophy and to replace them by the monism of the phenomenon". In a parallel development, a number of dualisms in criticism have been replaced, or are currently being replaced, by what could awkwardly be termed the monism

of the text.

The most important of these dualisms, from the point of view of its influence on criticism, is the one preserved by psychoanalytic investigations into the symbolism of art. In its approach psychoanalysis begins by considering the artist and the work as two terms of a causal relation constituted by the creative act. The work, in other words, no longer has an independent status but is seen as an extension of the artist. This is a relatively new bias, historically speaking. Not until the nineteenth century did the personality of the artist hold much relevance for criticism, and only since the advent of psychoanalysis has that relevance been confirmed and the question of aesthetic value become bound up with psychological considerations.

That artistic creativity derives from psychic motives is a truism only as long as the mental processes involved remain undefined. The moment, however, any particular causal theory of the imagination is used to interpret a creative work, it is then liable to involve unfounded suppositions concerning the nature of art. Freud and his co-workers, applying their discoveries in psychopathology to literature

and the other arts, endeavoured to show that a psychic model explaining the neuroses could also encompass creative activity. According to the model, a psychoanalytic profile of the personality and experience of the artist was expected to translate into an understanding of the work and, conversely, the work was seen as a symbolic index to the artist's character. Though more recent psychoanalytic formulations of the creative process enlarge upon the Freudian thesis that the content of artistic productions partially derive from various aspects of a primitive oedipal situation, they do not abandon the central principle of psychic determinism. Paradoxically, the very insufficiency of each successive version of the artistic process enriches general psychoanalytic theory by forcing through even more complex formulations able to admit previously extraneous facts. The no less controversial efforts on the part of Melanie Klein (and others) to demonstrate that creative activity is either depressive or schizoid — as opposed to neurotic — represent such a conceptual sophistication within what remains, from the perspective of criticism, the same causal-deterministic framework.

Certainly, as an approach to some aspects of the psychology of creation, a psychic model that opposes

the creative occasion to the created work has an undisputed heuristic value. The general cultural impact of psychoanalysis amply confirms this. Moreover, and quite apart from the debate over theory, psychiatrists and psychologists from diverse educational backgrounds have come to rely on "creative" productions as a practical method to gain additional insight into the less evident facts of mental life. But as an adequate answer to the very large question of the nature of art, causal explanations which refer to unsublimated psychic processes of biological origin have fundamental limitations.

From the point of view of psychology it has proved difficult to maintain that the practise of art is on the same level as uncreative mental activity. The simple reason is that no model of the artistic imagination based on the same psychic processes put forward to account for neuroses or psychoses can explain why some persons find a creative solution to what are taken to be problems of adaptation, while others do not. Secondly, and of more importance from the point of view of criticism, one becomes involved in a methodological error by interpreting works of art according to a causal theory of the imagination. Why this is the case is not obvious and the question will be taken up in the next section. This much should be evident, however, that no theory concerning

the supposed mental processes that result in a work of literature, in a painting, sculpture, or in a piece of music can anticipate the findings of a systematic study of these art forms. Neither can phylogeny, to take but one example, supply answers to anthropology. The responsibility for the second theoretical shortcoming cannot be laid at the doorstep of psychoanalysis which, in this case, only lent scientific rigour to a way of thinking about art that had been gaining momentum for some time.

To draw a general chronological parallel between the suppression of certain dualisms in criticism and the revolution in philosophical thought that has taken place largely under the aegis of phenomenology, is to underline a fundamental change in our approach to art and not merely one of those temporary shifts of loyalty that critics, like artists, are apt to make to a new intellectual discipline. It is true that phenomenologists have themselves challenged the reductionist theories based on inadequate psychological and linguistic models, and ultimately they have been the intellectual force behind the new orientation to the fine arts. But it is probably the application of their theories in the practical work of linguistics and psychology which has provided the primary impetus.

Both sciences proceeding empirically have found it necessary to order certain facts outside a dualism, and these new conceptual frameworks applied to artistic works avoid the reduction inherent in dualistic formulas.

In what way can psychoanalysis, despite the tremendous advance it represented in the field of psychology, be viewed as philosophically in keeping with the heritage of previous centuries? And why does its approach to art, while unquestionably opening an area of investigation, fail to provide the basis for criticism?


There is no need to enumerate the various aesthetic theories that appeared at the turn of the nineteenth century in order to make the point that during this period there developed a strong interest in the subjective component of artistic creation. By the time psychoanalytic theory came to be applied to the fine arts, as we have said, it had long become habitual to consider the work in relation to the artist as a personality. On the other hand, one generally thinks of the Romantic rebellion as a reaction to the mechanistic worldview which had reigned in intellectual circles for more than two centuries; its inflated claims for the spiritual in man and nature opposed the progressive development of a dualistic cosmology. To this extent it would certainly be wrong to identify in Romanticism antecedents to

Freud's deterministic psychology. For one has no difficulty in seeing behind psychoanalysis the same mode of thought, distinguished by a passionate effort to establish physical causes, which inspired an intellectual revolution in the late middle ages and set the direction for the course of science during subsequent centuries. However, Romanticism did not succeed in undermining the prevailing scientific attitude nor in altering the positivistic course of physics, biology and psychology. Its short-term consequence was to deepen the rift between science and art. And in this rift it is perhaps not wrong to see a late aspect of the general polarization of Spirit and World which shows itself at every turn of European thought since the sixteenth century. There is a short step from a climate of thinking that separates the world of physical facts from the realm of mental activities to a theory of creativity which refers the products of the artistic imagination to basic instinctual demands. In essence they belong to the same scientific cosmology, the mechanistic model of cause and effect which informs the physical sciences having been translated into a model of psychic determinism.

There is a convenient point of reference for summarizing this chain of developments in the rationalism of Descartes. By eliminating the deity as Providence —

by denying, in other words, any mediation between Spirit and World — Descartes provided a succinct synopsis of the general trend towards the dual attitudes of Romanticism and Scientism. Divine inspiration and its metaphoric equivalent, the Muses, were replaced by the notion of subjective intuition which finally found its scientific rationalization in a deterministic model of the psyche. No longer an autonomous creation of the Spirit, the work of art became the crime and scandal of its creator.

This is no doubt an incautious summary of a complex movement of ideas whose cross-currents of influence are impossible to disentangle. But it does not obscure the main point, that the impact of psychoanalytic theory on aesthetics must be assessed in the context of an impoverished appreciation of the arts at the end of the nineteenth century, an attitude which tended to restrict their prerogative to very narrow limits of the personal.



## III

Thus I would wish to emphasize that our "normal", "adjusted" state is too often the abdication of ecstasy, the betrayal of our true potentialities, that many of us are only too successful in acquiring a false self to adapt to false realities.

-Laing

The broadening of the field of investigation in scientific psychology to include the fine arts, like the systematic study of poetry and fiction by linguists, presented a novel situation that was bound to be disruptive to the relative insularity of literary aesthetics. Until the twentieth century, there were no empirical sciences which dealt directly with mental experience or with language as a linguistic phenomenon. Facts can be ignored or swallowed, and it has been the work of assimilating relevant material from the two sciences that, on the one hand, has inflated criticism as a social activity and, on the other, supplied it with a base upon which to establish itself as an independent discipline.

What were the particular circumstances surrounding the first excursion of psychoanalysis into litera-

ture? Unfortunately, the facts are now generally forgotten, for they verify how closely bound are the early history and cultural influence of modern psychotherapy with the biographies of its principals, Freud and Jung. Not by chance they are both on stage when the curtain rises on this problem play of aesthetics. If throughout most of this section the form of a duodrama is maintained, it is not to suggest that Freud and Jung have had the last words on the subject of psychology's contribution to the understanding of art, but only to reflect the fact that their writings and personalities have made the greatest impression.

In a lecture on "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" delivered in the rooms of the Viennese publisher and book-seller Hugo Heller on 6 December 1907<sup>1</sup> Freud set out his early view on the creative process:

A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which there now proceeds a wish which finds its fulfillment in the creative work. The work itself exhibits elements of the recent provoking occasion as well as of the old memory.

The private audience of ninety which heard these words was probably the only lay public to which Freud ever expressed his views directly,<sup>2</sup> and the occasion can be

taken as one of the earliest at which the principle of wish-fulfilment, as this applies to creative works, was introduced outside psychoanalytic circles. The quoted statement was meant to refer specifically to those writers who apparently invent their own stories, as opposed to those who, like the classical authors, use already familiar material. However, the distinction was one of degree only; for Freud ventured the opinion that traditional myths were quite probably "distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the secular dreams of youthful humanity"<sup>3</sup>

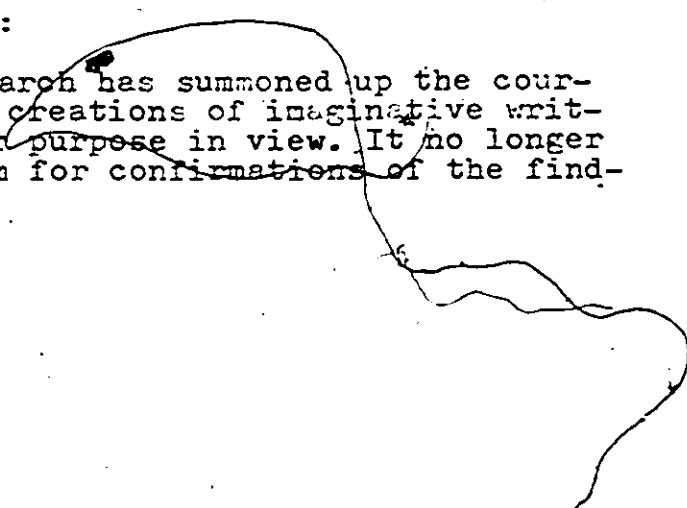
In May of the same year, Heller, himself a member of the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society, had published Freud's Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva,<sup>4</sup> generally considered the prototype, if no longer the exemplar, of a psychoanalytic reading of a literary work. Jensen's novella takes as its subject a young archaeologist who finds himself deeply affected by an ancient bas-relief of a beautiful young woman. She is pictured in mid-stride, her generous garment lightly gathered up to expose her sandalled feet. Norbert Hanold's phantasies and dreams concerning his Gradiva — so christened because of her appealing gait — eventually persuade him that she was buried in the volcanic eruption that

destroyed Pompey in A.D. 79. Quite against his declared intentions, Norbert visits Pompey one spring, when these unlikely attempts to uncover the origins of the relief prove to have been nothing less than a self-excavation leading inexorably to the forgotten love of his childhood.

Though he had never met the author and was entirely ignorant of any personal information concerning him, Freud was able to reconstruct the "latent content" which lay disguised behind the "manifest content" of Norbert's dreams and delusions. (When questioned, Jensen himself denied any previous familiarity with psychoanalysis, a testimony he repeated later in answer to a letter from Freud requesting information on the sources of his stories.) The study became popular among analysts and at the time it was fashionable to hang a copy of the relief that inspired the story in consulting rooms. Over the years it found a wider readership and by 1931 had been translated into five languages.<sup>5</sup>

In a postscript to the second German edition, Freud referred to the rapid progress psychoanalysis had made in the five-year interim:

psychoanalytic research has summoned up the courage to approach the creations of imaginative writers with yet another purpose in view. It no longer merely seeks in them for confirmations of the find-



ings it has made from unpoetic, neurotic human beings; it also demands to know the material of impressions and memories from which the author has built the work, and the methods and processes by which he has converted this material into a work of art.<sup>6</sup>

The analysis of Gradiva had restricted itself to unconscious elements within the work and their significance for the protagonist, as if Norbert Hanold had actually experienced the phantasies and dreams. The next step, sketched out in the short lecture quoted above, was to consider the creative work in its entirety as a manifest content referring to a latent content in the author's own personal experience. It is upon this principle that all psychoanalytic investigations of literary works have come to be based.

Ernest Jones, Freud's biographer, recounts that Carl Jung had been responsible for drawing Freud's attention to Jensen's story at a time before their friendship, and that Freud had written his analysis especially to please Jung for whom he had high hopes as a collaborator. Moreover, it was Jung who visited Jensen and reported the author's denial of any familiarity with psychoanalytic theory.<sup>7</sup> It is one of the ironies characteristic of their relationship that Jung, who was later to evolve one of the most influential alternatives to just such an approach, supplied his early mentor with the material for the first extended

application of psychoanalytic theory to a literary work.

Jung's critique, in his first paper devoted to the subject ("On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry") rests upon the elementary epistemological distinction between genetic and structural approaches to mental activities. Psychoanalysis, he says, has accepted as axiomatic that psychic functions can be referred to more elementary states, an assumption that is therapeutically confirmed in the neuroses but invalid for artistic, religious and scientific propensities in the mature adult:

For if we go so far back into the history of the mind that the distinctions between its various fields of activity become altogether invisible, we do not reach an underlying principle of their unity, but merely an earlier, undifferentiated state in which no separate activities yet exist. But the elementary state is not an explanatory principle that would allow us to draw conclusions as to the nature of later, more highly developed states, even though they must necessarily derive from it. A scientific attitude will always tend to overlook the peculiar nature of these more differentiated states in favour of their causal derivation, and will endeavour to subordinate them to a general but more elementary principle.

This line of reasoning in effect contradicts the central psychoanalytic principle of manifest versus latent content, a point which becomes clearer a few paragraphs further, where Jung challenges Freud's misappropriation of the term "symbol":

Those conscious contents which give us a clue to the unconscious background are incorrectly called symbols by Freud. They are not true symbols, however, since according to his theory they have merely the role of signs or symptoms of the subliminal processes. The true symbol differs essentially from this, and should be understood as an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way.

In Jung's view, the products of unconscious symbol formation do not necessarily translate into an object or activity of biological interest.

It is worthwhile to briefly review the classical psychoanalytic theory of symbolism in order to better appreciate what exactly Jung is opposing. During the early days of psychoanalysis the theory was far from being distinctly defined. When Ernest Jones published the first thorough statement on the subject from a psychoanalytic perspective in 1916, he was, according to Hanna Segal, "partly pressed by the necessity to differentiate the psychoanalytic view of symbolism from that of Jung".<sup>9</sup> The quote is from a paper presented in a colloquium on symbol formation at the 30th International Psycho-Analytical Congress held in Jerusalem in August 1977. Segal summarized Jones's main points as follows:

- (i) A symbol represents what has been repressed from consciousness, and the whole process of symbolization is carried on unconsciously.
- (ii) All symbols represent ideas of "the self and of immediate blood relations and of the phenomena of birth, life and death".

(iii) A symbol has a constant meaning. Many symbols can be used to represent the same repressed idea, but a given symbol has a constant meaning which is universal.

(iv) Symbolism arises as the result of intrapsychic conflict between the "repressing tendencies and the repressed". Further: "Only what is repressed is symbolized; only what is repressed needs to be symbolized".

He [Jones] further distinguishes between sublimation and symbolization. "Symbols," he says, "arise when the affect investing the symbolized idea has not, as far as the symbol is concerned, proved capable of that modification in quality which is denoted by the term sublimation".

Jones recognized as well a group of universal symbols found in mythology and folklore which he attributed to "the uniformity of the fundamental and perennial interests of mankind" and its capacity for seeing resemblances between objects. It is upon the evidence of these universal symbols that Jung based his theory of the collective unconscious. The following explanation is taken from the paper already cited:

In contrast to the personal unconscious, which is a relatively thin layer immediately below the threshold of consciousness, the collective unconscious shows no tendency to become conscious under normal conditions, nor can it be brought back to recollection by any analytical technique, since it was never repressed or forgotten. The collective unconscious is not to be thought of as a self-subsistent entity; it is no more than a potentiality handed down to us from primordial times in the specific form of mnemonic images or inherited in the anatomical structure of the brain. There are no inborn ideas, but there are inborn possibilities of ideas that set bounds to even the boldest fantasy and keep our fantasy activity within certain categories: a priori ideas, as it were,

the existence of which cannot be ascertained except from their effects. They appear only in the shaped material of art as the regulative principles that shape it, that is to say, only by inferences drawn from the finished work can we reconstruct the age-old original of the primordial image.

Setting aside the question of its empirical justification, we can see that Jung's theory succeeds in removing the question of symbols from the sphere of the personal, and is thus able to dispense with the dyad of art and artist when applied to creative works. Neither does it require a distinction between sublimation and symbolization on the grounds that the latter is a regressive while the former is a progressive activity, a controversial point even among psychoanalysts; in contradistinction to Jones, Melanie Klein maintained that sublimation depends on symbolization. Thirdly, and this is the determining factor, it apparently evades the epistemological contradiction of describing an effect by a theory of its cause, which is the inevitable shortcoming when meaning in a work of art is referred to the theoretical functions of a personal unconscious.

It should be noted, however, that in replacing the personal unconscious with the collective unconscious as the final source of the propensity for religious and artistic symbolization, Jung has not altered the prin-

ciple of psychic determinism as such but only the psychoanalytic version. In an essay published in 1930 entitled "Psychology and Literature" and covering in greater detail the same material as the earlier paper, Jung repeats his theory of the inborn nature of the collective unconscious: "According to phylogenetic law the psychic structure must, like the anatomical, show traces of the earlier stages of evolution it has passed through".<sup>11</sup> In effect, whereas psychoanalysis refers the contents of the unconscious to elementary instinctual activities and as having been individually determined in childhood, analytical psychology holds that unconscious symbolic processes are inherited from the childhood of man as a species. With this additional distinction: psychoanalysis considers its version of psychic determinism as verifiable while analytical psychology posits its version as an inferred truth not directly provable. "The psychologist can do little to elucidate this variegated spectacle," Jung says in reference to art, "except provide comparative material and a terminology for its discussion".<sup>12</sup>

It can readily be appreciated that the theoretical differences between psychoanalysis and analytical psychology which govern their respective approaches to art are centred on this question of symbolization. In fact, a considerable area of psychological investigation into

this subject is still the one staked out by Freud and Jung. At least one is left with this impression in reading the papers presented on the topic at the aforementioned Psycho-Analytic Congress. Consider the following statement by Guy Rosolato, author of the book Essais sur le symbolique:

One of the great difficulties in the understanding of the symbolic function is to give weight to the two currents, the metonymic coherence and the metaphoric expansion of the symbol. Most often the first takes the step towards a rationalist and didactic aim: the symbolization is then considered solely in its defensive significance; such was Jones's perspective. It is true too, that the other side, the slide towards a degeneration into the ineffable and the asexual in Jung's footsteps does not stand up to actual demands.<sup>13</sup>

While psychoanalysis remains intact as an effective therapeutic method, as a doctrine it has undergone constant reevaluation. Specifically, psychoanalysts have been forced to acknowledge that certain facts of mental experience and in particular those having to do with the creative process are incompatible with a causal psychic structure analogous to kinetic models from a long superceded phase of the physical sciences. Today it is generally accepted that the discovery of the so-called unconscious processes by no means confirms psychic determinism in the psychoanalytic sense. It might seem that Jung took a step in the direction of this realization by maintaining that the unconscious, because it is known

only in its manifestations, can never be the object of direct study and that therefore the question of cause is hypothetical. But as we have seen, Jung only modified the principle of psychic determinism without seeing any inherent limitations. By locating cause phylogenetically in the primitive psyche, analytical psychology downplayed (some would say obscured) the important role of infantile sexuality in human motivation, which was Freud's major discovery. Furthermore, and here it reinforced the influence of psychoanalysis, Jungian theory deflected attention from the necessity of undertaking a phenomenological analysis of consciousness itself.

The beginnings of such an analysis has been the special achievement of existential psychology. In the critique of empirical psychoanalysis contained in L'être et le néant Sartre presents reasons for omitting altogether the term "unconscious". A model of the psyche, he argues, that proposes the causal determination of conscious attitudes by unconscious impulses contradicts therapeutic experience whereby the freedom from these impulses is attained precisely by making them conscious. Psychoanalysts themselves are insistent on this point, that the recovery of the unconscious is not in the nature of a rational acceptance that certain unflattering truths may also be applicable to one's own case, but takes the



form of a direct confrontation with hitherto unknown aspects of one's real self, an experience that for most people is unavailable — or goes unrecognized — outside the psychoanalytic setting. But if the recovery of the unconscious is apprehended as a revelation, then it must always have been in some sense known. There is no ontological justification in attributing to the psyche an economy of separate but causally related spheres of mental activity because an individual chooses to disguise to himself his deepest desires and the true significance of his actions. Since it is easy to underestimate the importance of this conception of consciousness, it is worthwhile to cite an excerpt from the passage in L'être et le néant which we have just summarized:

Empirical psychoanalysis, to the extent that its method is better than its principles, is often in sight of an existential discovery, but always stops partway. When it thus approaches the fundamental choice, the resistance of the subject collapses suddenly and he recognizes the image of himself which is presented to him as if he were seeing himself in a mirror. This involuntary testimony of the subject is precious for the psychoanalyst; he sees there the sign that he has reached his goal; he can pass on from the investigation proper to the cure. But nothing in his principles or in his initial postulates permits him to understand or to utilize this testimony. Where could he get any such right? If the complex is really unconscious — that is, if there is a barrier separating the sign from the thing signified — how could the

subject recognize it? Does the unconscious complex recognize itself? But haven't we been told that it lacks understanding? And if of necessity we granted to it the faculty of understanding the signs, would this not be to make of it by the same token a conscious unconscious? What is understanding if not to be conscious of what is understood? Shall we say on the other hand that it is the subject as conscious who recognizes the image presented? But how could he compare it with his true state since that is out of reach and since he has never had any knowledge of it? At most he will be able to judge that the psychoanalytic explanation of his case is a probable hypothesis, which derives its probability from the number of behaviour patterns which it explains. His relation to this interpretation is that of a third party, that of the psychoanalyst himself; he has no privileged position. And if he believes in the probability of the psychoanalytic hypothesis, is this simple belief, which lives in the limits of his consciousness, able to effect the breakdown of the barriers which dam up the unconscious tendencies? The psychoanalyst doubtless has some obscure picture of an abrupt coincidence of conscious and unconscious. But he has removed all methods of conceiving of this coincidence in any positive sense.

Still, the enlightenment of the subject is a fact. There is an intuition here which is accompanied with evidence. The subject guided by the psychoanalyst does more and better than to give his agreement to an hypothesis; he touches, he sees what he is. This is truly understandable only if the subject has never ceased being conscious of his deep tendencies; better yet, only if these drives are not distinguished from his conscious self. In this case, as we have seen, the traditional psychoanalytic interpretation does not cause him to assume consciousness of what he is; it causes him to assume knowledge of what he is.<sup>14</sup>

One of the most important contributions of phenomenological psychology has been to the understanding and treatment of functional psychoses, particularly severe forms of psychogenic illness that are inaccessible to classical psychoanalytic therapy. R. D. Laing's study of madness published in 1960 as The Divided Self (Middlesex: Penguin Books) makes a powerful statement on the fundamental difference between dualistic and phenomenological approaches to psychic activities. I wish to quote at some length a passage from this book that not only expresses the importance of this difference in therapy but relates it to the subject of literary interpretation. Laing cites Bultmann's essay "The Problem of Hermeneutics",<sup>15</sup> in particular Bultmann's references to Dilthey:

The clinical psychiatrist, wishing to be more "scientific" or "objective", may propose to confine himself to the "objectively" observable behaviour of the patient before him. The simplest reply to this is that it is impossible. To see "signs" of "disease" is not to see neutrally. Nor is it neutral to see a smile as contractions of the circumoral muscles (Merleau-Ponty, 1953). We cannot help but see the person in one way or other and place our constructions or interpretations on "his" behaviour, as soon as we are in a relationship with him. This is so, even in the negative instance where we are baffled by an absence of reciprocity on the part of the patient, where we feel there is no one there who is responding to our approaches. This is very near the heart of our problem.

The difficulties facing us here are somewhat analogous to the difficulties facing the expositor of hieroglyphics, an analogy Freud was fond of drawing; they are, if anything, greater. The theory

of the interpretation or deciphering of hieroglyphics and other ancient texts has been carried further forward and made more explicit by Dilthey in the last century than the theory of the interpretation of psychotic "hieroglyphic" speech and actions. It may help to clarify our position if we compare our problem with that of the historian as expounded by Dilthey. In both cases, the essential task is one of interpretation.

Ancient documents can be subjected to a formal analysis in terms of structure and style, linguistic traits, and characteristic idiosyncrasies of syntax, etc. Clinical psychiatry attempts an analogous formal analysis of the patient's speech and behaviour. This formalism, historical or clinical, is clearly very limited in scope. Beyond this formal analysis, it may be possible to shed light on the text through a knowledge of the nexus of socio-historical conditions from which it arose. Similarly, we usually wish to extend as far as we can our formal and static analysis of isolated clinical "signs" to an understanding of their place in the person's life history. This involves the introduction of dynamic-genetic hypotheses. However, historical information, per se, about ancient texts or about patients, will help us to understand them better only if we can bring to bear what is often called sympathy, or, more intensively, empathy.

When Dilthey, therefore, "characterizes the relationship between the author and the expositor as the conditioning factor for the possibility of the comprehension of the text, he has, in fact, laid bare the presuppositions of all interpretation which has comprehension as its basis" (Bultmann).

We explain [writes Dilthey] by means of purely intellectual processes, but we understand by means of the cooperation of all the powers of the mind in comprehension. In understanding we start from the connection of the given, living whole, in order to make the past comprehensible in terms of it.

Now, our view of the other depends on our willingness to enlist all the powers of every aspect of ourselves in the act of comprehension. It seems also that we require to orientate ourselves to this person in such a way as to leave open the possibility of understanding him. The art of understanding those aspects

of an individual's being which we can observe, as expressive of his mode of being-in-the-world, requires us to relate his actions to his way of experiencing the situation he is in with us. Similarly it is in terms of his present that we have to understand his past, and not exclusively the other way round. This again is true even in the negative instances when it may be apparent through his behaviour that he is denying the existence of any situation he may be in with us, for instance, when we feel ourselves treated as though we did not exist, or as existing only in terms of the patient's own wishes or anxieties. It is not a question here of affixing predetermined meanings to this behaviour in a rigid way. If we look at his actions as "signs" of a "disease", we are already imposing our categories of thought on to the patient, in a manner analogous to the way we may regard him as treating us; and we shall be doing the same if we imagine that we can "explain" his present as a mechanical resultant of an immutable "past".<sup>16</sup>

In response to these considerations, many analysts today consider psychoanalysis a theory of meaning as opposed to a theory of causes, though this view is far from prevailing. Accordingly, signs and symptoms are interpreted as a communication and as expressing the subjective choices each individual makes regarding his relation to the world and others. We can see this view implied in Rosolato's paper from the 1977 Psycho-Analytic Congress, where symbolization is presented in terms appropriate to language. In the excerpt quoted, the theories of Jones and Jung are distinguished according to semantic value rather than according to differing views on causation.

No more convincing argument for the necessity of an ontological basis to psychology can be offered than the discussion of schizophrenia in The Divided Self. No other approach has succeeded in making madness comprehensible on grounds other than organic lesion. Previous approaches founded on dualistic principles have only been able to delineate more or less successfully the outward manifestations of the psychosis without understanding it from the perspective of the patient, in front of a world whose terms he no longer finds himself able to accept.

## IV

My memories begin under the table, on the eve of my birth, when my father gave a dinner party and my mother presided.

-Beckett

At this point we might consider the matter of Beckett's personal acquaintance with the theory and practice of psychiatry before and during the time he wrote Murphy. Most of the information concerning this and other periods in Beckett's life was not generally known before the publication of Deirdre Bair's biography in 1978.<sup>1</sup> The biography confirms what a reading of Murphy would lead one to assume, that the clinical and theoretical aspects of modern psychotherapy were for Beckett the subject of intense preoccupation. It is probably fair to say that one important component of Beckett's struggle as an artist was an intellectual effort to distinguish his own attitude to the psyche from those current at the time.

The biography states that Beckett read the translation of Jung's paper on "Psychology and Literature"

cited above<sup>2</sup>, published by Eugene Jolas in the June issue of transition. The same issue contained a poem by Beckett entitled "For Future Reference". Jung's editors think it probable that the original paper had been delivered earlier in the year as a lecture. One of those present on that occasion was Dr. Daniel Brody, formerly head of the Rhein-Verlag, the publishers of the 1927 German edition of Ulysses. Dr. Brody, it is reported, approached Jung after the lecture and asked him to contribute an article on Joyce for the first issue of a new literary review the Rhein-Verlag was preparing. The article was never used, but a revised version ("Ulysses: A Monologue") was published in 1932 and a copy sent to Joyce by the author<sup>3</sup>. Alone Beckett's connection with Joyce would have insured his familiarity with Jung's ideas. Joyce had known about Jung through Ottocavo Weiss as early as 1915; four years later he had refused the pressures of Mrs. Edith Rockefeller McCormick to enter analysis under Jung at her expense.<sup>4</sup>

When Beckett began to frequent the Joyce household upon taking up his position as lecturer at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the fall of 1928, Joyce's daughter Lucia was twenty-one, a year younger than

Beckett. Even then she was emotionally unstable, a condition which worsened and ended in hospitalization for the greater part of her adult life. At the time, Joyce insisted that there was nothing unusual in his daughter's behaviour which could not be attributed to the eccentricities of an artistic temperament that had not yet found its equilibrium. Beckett, according to Kay Boyle, saw clear signs of a desperation which he felt might end in suicide:

He thought Lucia was becoming insane, and watching the process of disintegration from so close a distance made him feel like someone watching a charmed snake: he was mesmerized by her behaviour but powerless to intervene. He speculated excitedly whether her madness would lead to suicide. He thought Lucia's reckless intelligence might veer too far one day and self-destruction become the only possible resolution of the conflict within her tortured mind. The possible manifestations of her behaviour fascinated him.

Lucia experienced a serious breakdown less than two years later when Beckett's term as lecturer was coming to a close and he would be returning to Ireland. In her mind, and for a time in the opinion of her parents, Beckett was the cause. Not until two years later did he re-establish contact with Joyce, during the brief period he was in Paris between his departure in 1930 and his permanent settlement in the fall of 1937. In the interim Lucia's health had worsened

and in the fall of 1934 Joyce arranged for her to stay at a private sanatorium in Küsnacht where Jung was on the staff.<sup>6</sup>

Thus there is good reason to assume that when Beckett attended the third in a series of lectures Jung delivered at the Tavistock Clinic in 1935,<sup>7</sup> he had a fair notion of what to expect. The lecture opened with a discussion of association tests continued from the previous evening and then entered upon the principal subject of dreams. Jung talked about the autonomous nature of unconscious complexes and their tendency to form fragmentary personalities, but it was a particular comment on the mythological dreams of a ten-year-old girl that made a lasting impression on Beckett. It would be helpful before quoting Jung's remark to supply the background to that occasion.

When Beckett returned to Ireland in the spring of 1930 to assume the duties of assistant lecturer in French at Trinity College, he renewed his friendship with Dr. A.G. Thompson,<sup>8</sup> a medical graduate of the College. At the time Thompson was physician on the staff of Bagot Street Hospital in Dublin, though he was later to move to London and train in psychoanalysis.

Many of the pages in the biography are taken up with details of Beckett's periodic spells of illness and their correspondence to the vagaries of his unhappy relation with his mother. Beckett apparently turned to Thompson as a friend whose training as a physician and whose interest in psychosomatic conditions could provide a direction for his own speculations. Beckett's health deteriorated steadily during the three years following his return to Ireland, and he finally came to accept Thompson's view that the reasons were psychogenic and that he would probably benefit from psychoanalysis. By the winter of 1933 his incapacitation was so severe that Thompson had to insist on some kind of therapeutic measure. 3

In reading Bair's biography it is difficult to escape the impression that Beckett seemed determined to allow the situation to disintegrate into the intolerable, as if the prospect of psychoanalysis offered a final escape hatch and by its very possibility precluded an alternate adjustment. One must take into consideration the fact that psychoanalysis meant something very different in 1933 than it does today. For Beckett to have undergone treatment in Dublin

would have been an extreme embarrassment to his family. The biography records that Mrs. Beckett felt caught in a dilemma between the humiliation of this alternative and the loss of authority in allowing her son to go to London. Another aspect of its social importance at the time should also be explained. We have mentioned how psychoanalytic theory was taken up by writers and artists especially in Paris. Beckett personally knew several of the Surrealists, was familiar with and had translated some of their writings. Freud's ideas were in fact so much a preoccupation of the period that every thinking person had more or less to declare his opinion. Bair also makes this point and concludes that "the familiarity with the literary aspect of psychoanalysis was probably the primary moving force in the ease with which Beckett accepted the idea that he should enter analysis"?

With letters of introduction from Thompson, Beckett began analysis at the Tavistock Clinic under Dr. Ruprecht Bion in 1934 and continued with him for almost two years. From a therapeutic standpoint the sessions were a failure. When they ended in

December 1935 the symptoms that had made them necessary did not cease to make their frequent appearances; in the opinion of Bion they should have been continued. How many sessions actually took place is not indicated in the biography, though in a letter written to Thomas McGreevy in February 1935 (one year after) Beckett refers to the 133rd visit.

By this time Beckett had completed some 1600 words of Murphy. The novel had been started during the previous fall after his return from a month-long stay in Cooldrinagh, the family estate. Beckett had taken a room in the World's End district of the city, the location chosen for Murphy's first residence as well. Now the book was stalled. At the end of April, against Bion's recommendation, Beckett returned to Cooldrinagh in order to test the feasibility of settling permanently in Dublin, a visit that apparently followed the familiar pattern and confirmed Bion's opinion on the present impossibility of mother and son sharing the same premises. Beckett's depression was so severe he was giving up hope of ever becoming a writer.

Upon his return to London "something happened", in Bair's words, "to release whatever had been in-

hibiting his creative process".<sup>10</sup> Thompson had come to Beckenham to begin a psychiatric residency at the Bethlehem Royal Hospital and the occasion to visit the institution provided Beckett with no less than the next segment of the novel. He moved Murphy out of the city and into the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. By October 1935 the book had grown to 20,000 words. Beckett had already decided to situate the ending at Hyde Park's Round Pond where he had seen the old men flying their kites:

My next old man, or old young man, not of the big world, but of the little world, must be a kite flyer. So absolutely disinterested, like a poem, or useful in the depths where demand and supply coincide, and the prayer is the god. Yes, prayer rather than poem, in order to be quite clear.<sup>11</sup>

On 3 October 1935 Bion invited Beckett to join him for the third of five lectures Jung was giving at the Tavistock Clinic. Bion had attended on the two previous evenings and must have felt that Beckett could profit from the talk. As already outlined, the lecture centred on what Jung termed "unconscious complexes" and their tendency to crystallize and form independent personalities. Jung suggested that this idea went a long way in explaining artistic creation. The writer is able to dramatize these complexes and

one could "read a writer's mind by studying the characters that he creates". These ideas were nothing new. They are included in the essay cited earlier and coincide with psychoanalytic formulations with which Beckett must have been thoroughly familiar. It was the following remarks, however, which refused to be erased from memory and found their way into the radio play All That Fall, written twenty-one years later:

The idea of former existence is a projection of the psychological condition of early childhood. Very young children still have an awareness of mythological contents, and if these contents remain conscious too long, the individual is threatened by an incapacity for adaptation; he is haunted by a constant yearning to remain with or return to the original vision. There are very beautiful descriptions of these experiences by mystics and poets.

Usually at the age of four to six the veil of forgetfulness is drawn upon these experiences. However I have seen cases, of ethereal children, so to speak, who had an extraordinary awareness of these psychic facts and were living their life in archetypal dreams and could not adapt. Recently I saw a case of a little girl of ten who had some most amazing mythological dreams. Her father consulted me about these dreams. I could not tell him what I thought because they contained an uncanny prognosis. The little girl died a year later of an infectious disease. She had never been born entirely.<sup>12</sup>

Deirdre Bair writes the following:

Beckett seized upon this remark as the keystone of his entire analysis. It was just the statement he needed to hear. He was able to furnish detailed examples of his own womb fixation, arguing forcefully that all his behaviour, from the simple inclination to stay in bed to his deep-seated need to pay frequent visits to his mother, were all aspects of an

improper birth...If he had not been entirely born, if he did indeed have prenatal memories and remembered birth as "painful", it seemed only logical to him that the aborted, flawed process had resulted in the improper and incomplete development of his own personality. It was an explanation that satisfied him and gave an enormous feeling of satisfaction.<sup>13</sup>

Five days after the lecture Beckett wrote McGreevy that he felt strong enough to end the analysis after Christmas and would return to Cooldrinagh and to his mother because, as he put it, he "owed" so much to her. He left for Ireland in December. For a number of weeks he was ill and unable to write. But by late spring 1936 he had completed Murphy and began to circulate the manuscript among publishers.

This summary indicates how closely the composition of the novel was intercalated with Beckett's personal life. His analysis, the Bethlehem Royal Hospital, the lecture by Jung, not only entered his personal struggle but translated themselves into the ongoing work on Murphy. Begun more than half a year after the sessions had started, the novel was only completed when Beckett had decided on the unnecessary of continuing with them; the terms of his rejection made them superfluous. Henceforth, whatever modus vivendi could be reached would have to be reached through writing.

How does the story of Murphy end? In the last week

of September 1936 Beckett left Ireland for a half-year of desultory wandering over Germany, writing almost nothing, often ill, and waiting for news from the publishers. The physical deterioration continued upon his homecoming. Then in October 1937 Beckett determined to leave Ireland for good. Arriving in Paris at the end of the month, he returned almost immediately to Dublin as witness to a libel action; on this occasion he did not stay with his mother. By December he was back in Paris and there received an almost unbelievable telegram from his literary agent George Reavey announcing that Murphy, after 42 rejections, had finally been accepted for publication.

## V

The only kind of linguistic typology that seems realizable on an objective basis is, paradoxically enough, the one that classical linguistics never suspected to be possible: the typology of linguistic structure.

-Hjelmslev

One cannot discuss language theory today without reference to the term semeiology. Its contemporary usage, like the science it names, is an innovation of our century. Before Saussure, the term was synonymous with symptomatology, that part of medicine which deals with the signs and symptoms of disease. Saussure appropriated the term for his own purposes when he defined it as "the science that studies the life of signs within society"<sup>1</sup>. He understood linguistics to be a part of semeiology, which itself formed a part of social psychology, and that "to determine the exact place of semeiology is the task of the psychologist". Contemporary semeiology has reversed the hierarchy and considers psychology, social or individual, to be a subdivision of a general science of signs.

The changing fortunes of the term summarize a number of the developments reviewed in section III. Rediscovered

in the nineteenth century in order to underline the importance which diagnostics had assumed in the medical sciences, "semeiology" remained applicable to the medical psychologies which matured towards the end of the century. Psychoanalysis, we have seen, considered itself as extending the province of biological medicine and based its semeiology of mental illness on the same causal principle as the symptomatology of physical disorders. In one place, Jung calls alchemical language, which he analysed as the spontaneous product of the collective unconscious, a symbolic rather than a semeiotic<sup>2</sup> in order to distinguish his approach from Freud's. When Saussure made his far-reaching observation that language was only one among numerous social sign systems, psychology still seemed assured as a deterministic science, and he could therefore appeal to it for the first principles of semeiology. That confidence has been eroded to the point that psychologists are agreeing with contemporary semeiologists in considering medical psychologies theories of meaning, and symptoms, like verbal symbols, signs for which a genetic analysis is only partly valid: Thus symptomatology and linguistics have been subsumed under semeiology, which may now be defined, in a slight variation upon Saussure, as the phenome-

nology of signs within society.

In the opening paragraphs of the Cours Linguistique Générale, assembled by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye from lecture material and student notebooks to the courses Saussure gave at the University of Geneva between 1906 and 1911, are distinguished three preliminary stages in the science of language before it found its proper object. In the first stage, initiated by the Greeks and taken up primarily by the French, something called "grammar" was studied, based on logic and detached from language itself. The second stage, "philology", is associated with the scientific movement initiated by Friedrich August Wolf in 1777. It studied the written text and laid the foundation for both historical linguistics and the formal study of literature. The third stage, according to Saussure, began with the discovery that the comparative analysis of languages could be the subject of an independent science. Saussure credits Franz Bopp, whose "Über das Konjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache" was published in 1816, with this realization. The comparative school, however, "failed to seek out the nature of its object of study",<sup>3</sup> and linguistics proper had to wait until scholars had systemized the history of Romance and Germanic languages. Because they could trace their development through several centuries, not then possible in the case of Sanskrit, the late nine-


teenth century neogrammarians were able to place the results of comparative studies in their proper historical perspective. No longer was language viewed as "an organism that develops independently" — as if by some self-evident process — "but as the product of the collective mind of linguistic groups",<sup>4</sup> intimately related to the other aspects of culture.

We can pick up the thread of these developments in the chapter devoted to language in Ernst Cassirer's An Essay on Man.<sup>5</sup> It was the neogrammarians who first made phonetic change an object of study; until then, only half the phenomenon of speech — syntax and morphology — had been considered. Much of the phonetic research, however, proceeded out of a strong positivistic bias borrowed from the natural sciences and promoted the idea that speech evolved according to invariable phonetic laws which could be described and accounted for by physics and physiology. This conviction, that phonetic change occurred independently of semantic considerations, perpetuated the false separation of language into formal and material aspects which had been implicit in the attitude of the old grammarians and philologists. In time, the contradiction in this view became evident. Cassirer, writing in 1944, could point to the considerable progress language theory had made since Saussure:

This dualism has disappeared from recent linguistics. Phonetics is no longer a separate field but has now become part and parcel of semantics itself. For the phoneme is not a physical unit but a unit of meaning.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, the structural order of language appears in both the so-called content (meaning) and expression (sounds), and cannot therefore be adequately described solely in terms either of semantics or physiology. It followed from this study of "significant sounds" known as phonology (the term displays the dualism it resolves) that any general theory could presuppose neither a material or formal identity of languages. "The true unity of languages," concludes Cassirer, "if there is such a unity, cannot be a substantial one; it must rather be defined as a functional unity".<sup>7</sup>

Of course, it is not self-evident what such a functional definition might be. Clearly, it would not address the genetic question as to the psychological origin of language. Neither would it attempt to discover a universal teleological principle in languages — whether logical, aesthetic or ethical — or an invariable pattern of phonic evolution. (Individual languages, however, could display any number of specific principles of development.) Thirdly, it would deny the precedence — whether historical, psychological or structural — of speech over writing. This final point was the last to be understood, primarily because the bulk of linguistic research since the neogrammarians had



dealt with spoken languages. (That some linguistic groups have no writing system would seem to confirm the primacy of speech, an idea further reinforced by the fact that Romance and Germanic writing systems are basically phonetic. Yet there is no means of determining whether in fact speech or writing appeared first in human culture,<sup>8</sup> and even were there an answer it would not have any bearing on the definition of language as function.)

A language theory that placed writing in a secondary relation to speech had certain implications for criticism. One consequence can be seen in the fact that the first intensive applications of quantitative linguistics to literature dealt primarily with lyric and epic forms. This dualism involved in opposing speech to script was exposed by the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen who were the first to treat the specifics of writing in a thorough way. In retrospect, the Copenhagen group was working with the clearest conception of what their science required at the time, and the remainder of this section is devoted to the schema developed by one of their principal researchers, Louis Hjelmslev. My aim in presenting this schema falls far short of assessing Hjelmslev's contribution to contemporary linguistics. His theoretical argument is

followed only as far as is necessary to confirm our contention that empirical linguistics is not equipped to reveal an essential truth "behind" literature and has in fact abandoned the dualisms according to which such an operation might be conceivable.

This was far from being generally understood when the Prolegomena to a Theory of Language was published in 1943.<sup>9</sup> Hjelmslev named Saussure as the obvious pioneer, citing the latter's definition of the linguistic sign as a functional entity generated by an expression (signifiant) and a content (signifié) as a fundamental advance over substantial definitions based on content or on expression alone. Saussure's innovation is not easily grasped. An uncritical view of language considers the linguistic sign, usually taken to be the spoken word, to be a sign for an abstract logical content; this content is seen as the essential language, the actual word having no significance outside its historical usage. The evidence of phonetic change uncovered by the neogrammarians actually made this view untenable, but Saussure was among the first to draw the consequences of these discoveries. As functions of a purely linguistic entity, expression and content are no longer polar terms of a substantial dualism: the value of the signified (relative to other signifieds) is distinguished from signification, the value of the signifier from sound:

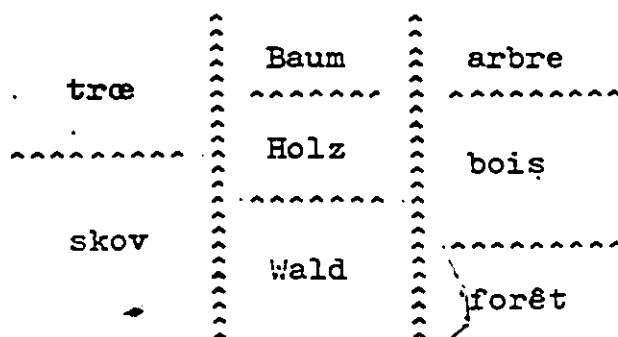
Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system.<sup>10</sup>

However, Saussure's definition has proven inadequate because incomplete. While the terms "content" and "expression" find their proper relation, "form" and "substance" are vaguely situated. The entity of signifier-signified is too easily misrepresented as a form-substance dualism and returns us to the uncritical view of language as logos. Saussure himself was somewhat ambivalent towards his definition. In numerous places he states that the linguistic system is a form and not a substance, but he unwittingly contradicts himself with the equally firm assertion that language is essentially the spoken. How was he able to consider phonic substance as an irreducible element of the sign, unless he had confused the full implications of a functional approach? It is true of course that most languages have evolved through speech; naturally a historical linguist like Saussure would tend to see linguistic questions in terms of phonetics. But these considerations are irrelevant to a definition whose aim is not to describe but to conceptualize linguistic phenomenon, and the only self-consistent definition, as Saussure realized imperfectly, is

a functional one. By its very nature such a definition excludes the essentiality of either phonic or semantic substance.

Hjelmslev's schema prevents this confusion at the expense of a less succinct formulation. He begins by identifying the common factor between languages as purport, a technical term carrying more weight than "meaning". On the side of content, the purport is what can be translated from one language to another, "meaning" in the literal sense, the "objective correlative" of languages, to use Eliot's phrase. On the side of expression (in moving stepwise beyond Saussure we restrict ourselves for the moment to speech) purport is the phonic range of the human voice. By virtue of the sign-function, content- and expression-purport are arbitrarily ordered in each language.

The following example (on the next page) is taken from the Prolegomena<sup>11</sup> and illustrates these ideas. As a group, the eight terms from the Danish, the French and the German denote the same content-purport, namely that set of objects described in English by the words "tree", "wood" and "forest". However, content-form is arbitrary and so content-substance is not entirely congruent even from one European language to another:



Like the content-purport, or "amorphous 'thought-mass'" (which Hjelmslev adopts from Saussure's "le plan indéfini des idées confuses")<sup>12</sup> the expression-purport (or "phonetico-physiological sphere of movement," from Saussure's "celui non moins indéterminé des sons")<sup>13</sup> is arbitrarily articulated or ordered into an expression-substance by the expression-form. This abstract mouthful has a simple illustration in the various ways the identical sequence of sounds represented by "Berlin" is pronounced by speakers of different nationalities. It is evident that this is a far more precise approach to the phenomenon of linguistic sound than what has usually been understood by phonetics.

By clarifying that form and substance are located on both the planes of expression and content, Hjelmslev preserves Saussure's definition of language as a form and avoids the mistake of confusing content-substance for content and expression-substance for expression:

The two entities that contract the sign function — expression and content — behave in the same way in relation to it. By virtue of the sign function and only by virtue of it, exist the two functives, which can now be precisely designated as the content-form and the expression-form. And by virtue of the content-form and the expression-form, and only by virtue of them, exist respectively the content-substance and the expression-substance, which appear by the form's being projected onto the purport, just as an open net casts its shadow on an undivided surface.<sup>14</sup>

One additional term will highlight Hjelmslev's schema and bring us to the point from which we can draw conclusions. Early in Prolegomena, the author corrects the mistaken view of language as a system of pure arbitrary signs. It is evident that on the plane of expression words may be analysed into parts (roots, derivational and inflectional elements) that are also signs insofar as they are expressions bearing a content. This subdivision, however, cannot continue indefinitely, but must end with a restricted set of non-signs which enter into the linguistic system as parts of signs. These syllables and phonemes which do not in themselves bear content Hjelmslev calls figurae. Thus on the expression side languages are systems of figurae used to construct signs. So far the idea is not original. But it follows that the analysis into figurae must hold true for the content plane as well:

Till now, such an analysis into content-figurae has never been made or even attempted in linguistics, although a corresponding analysis into expression-figurae is as old as the very invention of alphabetic

writing (if not to say older: after all, the invention of alphabetic writing presupposes an attempt at such an analysis of the expression). This inconsistency has had the most catastrophic consequences: confronted by an unrestricted number of signs, the analysis of the content has appeared to be an insoluble problem, a labour of Sisyphus, an impassable mountain.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of content-figurae radically alters the notion of meaning. Treated as an internal structural element, linguistic content (from the point of view of a science of language) is no longer seen as a derivation from either the real outer world or the inner world of mental processes. On the other hand, linguistics finally establishes a field of investigation independent of metaphysics and psychology: independent of metaphysics because the analysis of content is not based on an assumed correspondence between signs in the linguistic system and the real world; independent of psychology because no psychic process is assumed to be antecedent to the linguistic function. Hjelmslev and his colleagues called their science glossematics (from the Greek word for language):

Since language is a form and not a substance (Saussure) the glossemes are by definition independent of substance, immaterial (semantic, psychological and logical) and material (phonic, graphic, etc.).<sup>16</sup>

An untechnical prescription for the type of semantic analysis which linguistic science must undertake is

contained in Hjelmslev's Language, An Introduction:

In the study of meaning (semantics) we should expect to be able to arrive at a typology of linguistic usage for the content plane of language. This is for many reasons a more difficult task than phonetic typology, partly because semantics has been much less cultivated and partly because it embraces a far greater domain. The content of language is nothing less than the world surrounding us, and the minimal particular meanings of a word...are the things of the world: the lamp that stands here on my desk is a particular meaning of the word lamp; I myself, am a particular meaning of the word man. But these things naturally organize themselves into many kinds of categories, and another difficulty is that one hardly knows what sort of science is concerned with the establishment of these categories. With a certain justice one could say that it is all the sciences taken together. All sciences other than linguistics are actually theories of the linguistic content studied independently of the linguistic structure, just as physiological phonetics and physical acoustics are the study of the linguistic expression independently of the linguistic structure. In particular, we might think of psychology as being the science, if there is one, that could furnish such a categorization of experienced things as would be suitable for mapping on the system of categories furnished by the linguistic structure. It is hoped that recent attempts of psychologists at a "phenomenological" description of the outside world as it is immediately experienced may lead to a fruitful collaboration with linguistics. It behooves us to maintain a more skeptical attitude toward the attempts—especially favoured in former times—to found a linguistic semantics on the logic of ideas. For one thing, such an attempt runs in a vicious circle: conceptual logic is based on language (Aristotle's logic, for example, would never have come to have the shape it has if it had not been thought in Greek); conceptual logic is always a language in disguise, and transforming or refining it seems to make no difference.<sup>17</sup>

It follows from these considerations that scientific linguistics is presently in no privileged position to deal

with meaning in a work of literature. On the contrary, it will be a long time before linguistics, so recently established on new principles, can be expected to achieve the empirical systemization of semantic categories that will demand a corresponding reorientation in other fields of knowledge.

An interesting analogy to the fundamental distinction between a schema such as Hjelmslev's and the uncritical view of language before Saussure can be seen in the two distinctive attitudes to language implied by a dictionary and a thesaurus. One could start by saying that the dictionary is the appropriate expression of a philologist's confidence in the accessibility of meaning. Arranged on the arbitrary principle of a phonetic alphabet, words in a dictionary are counters for objects, processes and states that exist in the real world. The lexicographer sacrifices the sensuous aspect of words, their sounds and rhythms; in favour of the abstractions they denote; a word is distinguished from another not on the basis of any concrete values but along the fine lines that demarcate its logical content. The thesaurus, on the other hand, considerably weakens the conceptual integrity of the individual word. The idea, thing or action it signifies is subsumed under larger categories that confuse logical distinctions.

Consulting a thesaurus, one is interested primarily in the manner of expression and in the interrelation of words, less in their aspect as signs of a non-linguistic universe. The thesaurus is evidence of the fact that language "has neither ideas nor sounds before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system"(see p. 56 ). Perhaps it is not forcing a point to say that if the dictionary in Europe was a product of an age that based science on a metaphysical dualism, then the thesaurus anticipated the critical interest in language that developed into modern linguistics.



## VI

This is precisely the notorious quackery of language, that the ground and figure of its lamentable poverty are considered infinite riches. . . . the critique of language has the difficult and ordinarily insoluble task to instruct the proprietor of nice words that he in fact possesses nothing.

-Mauthner

One of the singular developments in twentieth century thought has been a philosophical nihilism that has justified its position with the highly probable fact that the conceptual aspect of language is a purely formal element. If language, the vehicle for truth, is itself an alienation, then man's access to knowledge is a hopeless adventure. In other words, the transcendental viewpoints that scientific linguistics perforce eliminates as methodology are questioned metaphysically: language itself begs the questions.

An early response to this dilemma is contained in a three-volume tract by the Austrian poet and critic Fritz Mauthner entitled Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache, first published in 1906. Beckett read passages from the Kritik to Joyce during the time of his first residence in Paris,<sup>1</sup> and some of Mauthner's ideas are echoed in

Beckett's early article on Joyce collected in Our Exag-  
mination round his Factification<sup>2</sup>. A brief look at  
 Mauthner can therefore serve as a preliminary to an  
 equally brief look at some of the ideas on language  
 expressed in this early piece of criticism. Anyone  
 who wishes to pursue the subject further can find a  
 thorough exposition and critique of Mauthner's ideas  
 in a study published by Gershon Weiler in 1970.<sup>3</sup>

As a stylist Mauthner can hardly be called philo-  
 sophical. His attitude is moral as much as scientific:  
 he reacted to the turmoil in scientific and philosophical  
 thought in the last decades of the nineteenth century  
 and predicted its consequences from the perspective of  
 language:

Our time has often been compared, and rightly so,  
 with the decline of the ancient world. . . . It has  
 only rarely been remarked, however, that the decayed  
 state of our ideologies is most clearly proclaimed  
 by our languages. Under the empire, Latin was a mori-  
 bund language before it became a dead one, and the  
 languages of our own civilization have likewise been  
 gnawed to the bone. One can still find a healthy,  
 muscular speech among the uneducated, but the meta-  
 phoric language of cultured persons has become child-  
 ish now that the original meaning of the metaphors  
 has been lost. The Roman lady who assembled in her  
 budoir the fetishes and icons of all ages and peoples  
 did not know to which to pray in time of need. In our  
 time, the poet and thinker has assembled in his head  
 the word-fetishes of two thousand years and is incap-  
 able of passing a judgement or expressing a feeling  
 without the words, like some phantom quick-change  
 artist on a tightrope, laughing at him, unveiling one  
 disguise after another, rattling their half-wasted  
 skeleton under all that finery.

Our languages shimmer richly with bright colours:  
 it is the false metallic glimmer of decay. Like the

bones of martyrs they have come down to us, and we have turned them into dice for our games. Children, writers, salon-ladies, philosophy professors — all play with our languages which, like aged whores, are past passion or resistance. They have become old and childish and their words are like a game at marbles.<sup>4</sup>

Whether or not his arguments are always pertinent, Mauthner was right in maintaining that each of the human sciences must rethink its foundations because their past theories are outgrowths of a language no longer acceptable as a vehicle of science. Central to Mauthner's argument is his contention that the operations of the human intellect are coextensive with the operations of language; the linguistic question, in other words, is the ultimate formulation of the epistemological question, "What can I know?". Mauthner leaves no avenue of approach to this question unexplored; in the following passages he attacks the confidence that has hitherto been placed in the unity of individual consciousness:

Modern man no longer bases his consciousness of being on the pedantic Cartesian formula "I think", but rather, in a more modest and childlike manner, on feeling. I am, I am conscious, I sense, I am the centre of so many perceptions of sight and sound that stream past my attention at any given moment.<sup>5</sup>

Mauthner appeals to the common experience every individual has of himself as a consciousness that feels:

Yet, on the pinpoint of a moment only a single impression can be impaled; the "I" would be lost, were it not for the recollection that, in the flow of becoming, being remains, that I was. Thus, in order to find itself, the self tumbles out of the full life of the present into the blank nothing of the past. Try to explain this universal phenomenon and you are speechless and confused, or else set up a philosopher's bogeyman of words.<sup>6</sup>

If consciousness is founded on consciousness of the past, then the idea of a central unified self dissolves:

Now, if we disengage the term self-consciousness from the neighbouring concepts that have attached themselves during the course of history (sometimes in highly interesting ways), then we are left with no other content than the so-called sense-of-self [Ichsgefühl]. When we say that a man has come to his senses from a faint we mean that this feeling of self has returned. But this abstract self, leaving aside the sham of the Absolute Self, is nothing more than a collective expression for the human individual, and a poor one at that, insofar as each self is a separate empirical entity possessing a continuous memory of its own particular experiences.

In fact, this empirical self is only a word, signifying no more or less than the unity of individual memory. If we are right in one of the main points of this study — namely that there is no human intellect apart from speaking — then we have arrived at an astonishing fact: this unity of individual memory — that is, the reference of all sense impression to our body — precedes its expression in speech; children feel their self before they can say it or, what amounts to the same thing, before they can speak about themselves using their own name. The self is finally only the self-evident, a superfluous expression for individual interest.<sup>7</sup> .....

But is the sense-of-self, if individuality is an illusion, then the very ground we stand upon begins to heave and the last hope for a trace of knowledge collapses. What we thought we knew about the world was the sum of the inherited and acquired experiences of individuals; our knowledge of the objective universe was the subjective picture of sense probabilities. Now the subject vanishes, he sinks behind the object, and we no longer see any difference between the philosophical striving of thousands of human years and the dream-being of an amoeba. The concept of individuality has become a linguistic abstraction of no conceivable purport.<sup>8</sup>

The question of indebtedness need not concern us.

Joyce in 1929, six years into the composition of Finnegan's Lake was not interested in Nauthner for instruction, but as a writer whose ideas coincided in significant measure with his own. Joyce's works are as forceful an argument

for nominalism as any Mauthner puts forward, and Beckett's respect for Joyce as an artist is more conclusive of his own attitude than any resemblances to Mauthner. Nevertheless, these resemblances are not entirely fortuitous, for they represent at the very least a historical coincidence concerning certain ideas on language.

In "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce" Beckett draws the same parallel between the state of the English language and the state of English culture that Mauthner attributes to all of Western civilization:

Here is direct expression — pages and pages of it. And if you don't understand it, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is because you are too decadent to receive it. You are not satisfied unless form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other... Mr. Joyce has desophisticated language. And it is worthwhile remarking that no language is so sophisticated as English. It is abstracted to death. Take the word "doubt": it gives us hardly any sensuous suggestion of hesitancy, of the necessity for choice, of static irresolution. Whereas the German "Zweifel" does, and, in a lesser degree, the Italian "dubitare". Mr. Joyce recognizes how inadequate "doubt" is to express a state of extreme uncertainty, and replaces it by "in twosome twiminds".<sup>9</sup>

This theme is further developed in relating Joyce to Dante:

They both saw how worn and threadbare was the conventional language of cunning literary artificers, both rejected an approximation to a universal language. If English is not yet so definitely a polite necessity as Latin was in the Middle Ages, at least one is justified in declaring that its position in relation to other European languages is to a great extent that of mediaeval Latin to the Italian dialects.<sup>10</sup>

Beckett emphasizes the fact that one cannot abstract a purely conceptual meaning from Joyce's writing:

Here form is content, content is form. You complain that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read — or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not about something; it is that something itself.<sup>11</sup>

One might recall the distinction Jung makes between a symbolic and a semeiotic in reference to alchemical language. Beckett's example of hieroglyphics (the same one used by Dilthey) is similar:

This writing that you find so obscure is a quintessential extraction of language and painting and gesture, with all the inevitable clarity of the old inarticulation. Here is the savage economy of hieroglyphics. Here words are not the polite contortions of 20th century printer's ink. They are alive. They elbow their way on the page, and glow and blaze and fade and disappear.<sup>12</sup>

This implies a new orientation to the idea of literary form, only two approaches being possible, exemplified in their extremes by the mature writing of Joyce and Beckett. Either the traditional distinction between content and form becomes inoperative, as in Joyce's case, or form "exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates". Beckett thus characterized his own writing during the course of an interview in 1961. Here is the full passage:

What I am saying does not mean that there will henceforth be no form in art. It only means that there will be a new form, and that this form will be of such a type that it admits the chaos and does not try to say that the chaos is really something else. The form and the chaos remain separate. The latter is not reduced to the former. That is why the form itself becomes a preoccupation, because it exists as a problem separate from the material it accommodates. To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.<sup>13</sup>

There is a group of contemporary critics who still translate certain notions about language into an uncertain metaphysics. These writers connect the failure of language to express absolutes with nihilism, and explore this false relation by demonstrating "linguistically" how modern literature confirms an absurd universe in undermining the traditional logical and psychological categories of language. Unfortunately, Beckett's writing is susceptible to this approach, which is neither linguistics nor criticism and only succeeds in reducing the works to a mundanity of meaning and leaving the impression that linguistics is a sophisticated way of talking about moral issues.

One writer who has incidentally promoted this approach is the French critic Jacques Derrida. In section I we quoted from the dissertation abstract of a study partly inspired by his ideas. Derrida

has wielded considerable influence in contemporary European and American criticism by providing, as it were, a semeiological rationalization for modern pessimism. Derrida is a structuralist insofar as he agrees with the methodological axiom that one cannot assume any substantial content as being prior to the linguistic function. To this extent his idea of placing the work of art "outside" in the "margin" of sign-theory (to cite the abstract) is entirely in keeping with current semeiological approaches. Derrida goes further, however, than "bracketing" non-linguistic content and postulates not merely a methodological but an absolute absence of the signified, justifying this with evidence taken from the works of Freud among others. It appears, if I have understood his ideas, that Derrida has attempted to impose a genetic solution on a structural problem; however interesting this solution may be, it is a hypothesis whose verification is a scientific problem outside the province either of linguistics or criticism. While Derrida's conclusions concur in many respects with those of Sartre and others presented in this essay, his manner of presenting them is idiosyncratic. Much of his newness is rhetorical and seems to lie in the conceptual acrobatics that can be exercised when the complex stratagems of sign-theory are invoked and discredited in a single operation.

## VII

Murphy, illiterate perversion of Morpheus.  
 -Oxford English Dictionary

In a letter written to his literary agent George Reavey in the fall of 1936, Beckett explained the intention of certain passages in Murphy and his refusal to accede to the suggestions of prospective publishers to edit them:

Let me say at once that I do not see how the book can be cut without being disorganized. Especially if the beginning is cut (and god knows the first half is plain sailing enough). The latter part will lose such resonance as it has. I can't imagine what they want me to take out. I refuse to touch the section entitled Amor Intellectualis quo M. se ipsum amat. And I refuse also to touch the game of chess. The horoscope chapter is also essential. But I am anxious for the book to be published and therefore cannot afford to reply with a blank refusal to anything.

Will you therefore communicate ... my extreme aversion to removing one-third of my work proceeding from my extreme inability to understand how this can be done and leave a remainder? But add that if they would indicate precisely what they have in mind, and the passages that cause them pain, I should be willing to suppress such passages as are not essential to the whole and adjust such others as seem to them a confusion of the issue... Do they not understand that if the book is slightly obscure it is because it is a compression and that to compress it further can only result in making it more obscure? The wild and unreal dialogues, it

seems to me, cannot be removed without darkening and dulling the whole thing. They are the comic exaggeration of what elsewhere is expressed in elegy, namely, if you like, the Hermeticism of the spirit. Is it here that they find the "sky-rockets"? There is no time and no space in such a book for mere relief. The relief has also to do the work and reinforce that from which it relieves. And of course the narrative is hard to follow. And of course deliberately so. 1

Why are causal-deterministic theories inadequate for explaining the behaviour of a character who is nevertheless referred to at one point as a "schizoidal spasmophile"<sup>2</sup>? What elements in the nature of language explored in the novel will elude descriptive linguistic approaches? An answer to these questions may contain a partial solution to the enigma Beckett has designated "the Hermeticism of the spirit". To be sure, our first mistake would be to consider Murphy the illustration of a philosophical thesis. We will miss its significance if we attempt to read Murphy's solipsism as an idea devoid of experiential content. If Murphy's inner world is unreal, it is not unreal in the sense that he could not have experienced it; on the contrary, its very reality as an experience contains the whole problem. While the novel's style encourages irony, we cannot permit our detachment to degenerate into a conceptualism that would explain Murphy away as an impossible fiction.

It is interesting that the dissenting publishers

recommended the excision of what is fair to regard as the central passage in the novel, namely the section devoted to the "justification of the expression 'Murphy's mind'",<sup>3</sup> the Galilean fulcrum outside the universe of fiction against which the events are levered. "Murphy's mind is after all the gravamen of these informations."<sup>4</sup> In the opening paragraph of section 6 that mind is declared inaccessible to the rationalizations of empirical psychology:

Happily we need not concern ourselves with this apparatus as it really was—that would be an extravagance and an impertinence—but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be.<sup>5</sup>

The impertinence is more than irrelevance. A science of cause can provide explanations for psychic contents but it cannot provide the "cause" of an orientation of consciousness. In psychoanalytic theory "consciousness" is a faculty associated with certain processes which, on account of these, can be distinguished from an "unconscious". We saw earlier, however, that the therapeutic success of psychoanalysis depends on the possibility of consciousness assuming an attitude vis-à-vis the past. At the crucial point in an analysis, consciousness must undertake the work of integrating the self. Its theoretical division of the psyche into two entities prevents psychoanalysis from appreciating the intentional aspect of experience:

Murphy was content to accept this partial congruence of the world of his mind with the world of his body as due to some such process of supernatural determination. The problem was of little interest. Any solution would do that did not clash with the feeling, growing stronger as Murphy grew older, that his mind was a closed system, subject to no principle of change but its own, self-sufficient and impermeable to the vicissitudes of the body. 6

We will not come closer to understanding this feeling by recourse to theories of repression, trauma or somatic deficiency. Moreover, these familiar materials are omitted from the novel. In reply to Mr. Kelly's interrogation, Celia can do little better for a case-history of her subject than the unfathomably obvious: "Murphy was Murphy"? From the point of view of causal theories the following description remains a puzzle:

The mental experience was cut off from the physical experience, its criteria were not those of the physical experience, the agreement of part of its content with the physical fact did not confer worth on that part. It did not function and could not be disposed according to a principle of worth. It was made up of light fading into dark, of above and beneath, but not of good and bad. It contained forms with parallel in another mode and forms without, but not right forms and wrong forms. It felt no issue between its light and dark, no need for its light to devour its dark. The need was now to be in the light, now in the half light, now in the dark. That was all. 8

Murphy chooses to obviate himself from what he calls the big world and flee into the little world of purely imagined irreality. Perfection would be a life so completely immured in the imaginative attitude that the real

world of action and perception would not even intrude as a banality but cease to exist entirely. The state of mind sought by Murphy is not peopled by half-real objects and thus a debased version of the real; it is wholly lacking in the quality of the actual. Moreover, while the imaginative attitude cannot be maintained indefinitely, it is always available, in day-dream, slumber, or sleep:

He therefore went to the other extreme, disconnected his mind from the gross importunities of sensation and reflection and composed himself on the hollow of his back for the torpor he had been craving to enter for the past five hours. He had been unavoidably detained, by Ticklepenny, by Miss Dew, by his efforts to rekindle the light that Nelly had quenched. But now there seemed nothing to stop him. Nothing can stop me now, was his last thought before he lapsed into consciousness, and nothing will stop me. In effect, nothing did turn up to stop him and he slipped away, from the pensums and prizes, from Celia, chandlers, public highways, etc. from Celia, buses public gardens, etc., to where there were no pensums and no prizes, but only Murphy himself, improved out of all knowledge. 9

The primary "split" is not between body and mind but rather between two intentional modes of consciousness. Murphy does not ignore the physical in order that he may concentrate on the mental, such as one might ignore pain or tiredness; nor does he merely trick his body into submission in the spirit of mortification. That is to say, Murphy's choice of the imaginary does not downplay the physical, it actually destroys its character of presence: his orientation alters the very nature of physical experience:

His body lay down more and more in a less precarious abeyance than that of sleep, for its own convenience and so that the mind might move. There seemed little left of this body that was not privy to this mind, and that little was usually tired on its own account. The development of what looked like collusion between such utter strangers remained to Murphy as unintelligible as telekinesis or the Leyden Jar, and of as little interest. He noted with satisfaction that it existed, that his bodily need ran more and more with his mental. 10

The foregoing excerpts from the novel have not described the abstract fiction of an idealized character, but the concrete features of an experience. Examples could be multiplied to show Beckett's astonishing insight into the imaginary consciousness. We will not do so because no schema has been outlined by which they could be ordered to present a coherent picture. The best that can be done in this respect is to direct the reader to an examination of the subject from a phenomenological viewpoint, such as can be found in Sartre's Psychology of Imagination.<sup>11</sup> To be conscious is to be able to exist in an inner world of imagined objects and feelings, to be able to negate the world of perceptual presence. Like all of Beckett's subsequent antiheroes, Murphy meets his inevitable end as the temporary vehicle for the author's self-excavation. Yet within the limits of the narrative he survives as a consciousness obliged to choose.

In his book Sartre describes what it means to seek the imaginary life:

But we must understand what a preference for the imaginary signifies. It is not at all a matter of preferring one sort of object to another. For instance, we should not believe that the schizophrenic and morbid dreamers in general try to substitute an unreal and more seductive and brighter content for the real content of their life, and that they seek to forget the unreal character of their images by reacting to them as if they were actual objects actually present. To prefer the imaginary is not only to prefer a richness, a beauty, an imaginary luxury to the existing mediocrity in spite of their unreal nature. It is also to adopt "imaginary" feelings and actions for the sake of their imaginary nature. It is not only this or that image that is chosen, but the imaginary state with everything it implies; it is not only an escape from the content of the real (poverty, frustrated love, failure of one's enterprise, etc.), but from the form of the real itself, its character of presence, the sort of response it demands of us, the adaptation of our actions to the object, the inexhaustibility of perception, their independence, the very way our feelings have of developing themselves.<sup>12</sup>

The preference for the imaginary is a possible orientation of consciousness inherent in its structure. Murphy's failure is not his particular preference for the imaginary, nor his particular refusal of the real, but the universal impossibility of conscious life outside this dialectical relation to the real and the imaginary.

At this point we are prepared to understand the special significance of language. Words are at once real and unreal. Their solidity as phonemes and as signs is negated by their incantatory power as votives of the imaginary. This dual aspect of language is on an entirely

different plane than the substantial dualisms we saw invalidated earlier. Precisely because words do not correspond directly to the non-linguistic universe they may be experienced now as finite now as infinite. The "because" in the last sentence is not logical: we are viewing the question from two perspectives. In other words, language itself is characterized by the contradiction inherent in consciousness, a negation of the real and the foundation of that negation, experienced successively as an alienation and a redemption.

This extreme plasticity of language is witnessed in an early scene in which Murphy, anxious and unwilling to broach the subject of their relationship, confronts Celia. His speech alternates between a commitment to love and a painful sense of estrangement from the ablated world of his perfect imagination:

He thought it wiser not to capitulate until it was certain that she would not. In the meantime, what about a small outburst. It could do no harm, it might do good. He did not really feel up to it, he knew that long before the end he would wish it had not begun. But it was perhaps better than lying there silent, watching her lick her lips, and waiting. He launched out....

He closed his eyes and fell back. It was not his habit to make out cases for himself. An atheist chipping the deity was not more senseless than Murphy defending his course of inaction, as he did not require to be told. He had been carried away by his passion for Celia and by a most curious feeling that he should not collapse without at least the form of a struggle. This grisly relic from the days of nuts, balls and sparrows astonished himself. To die fighting was the perfect antithesis of his whole practice, faith and intention. 13

The urge to communicate is succeeded by a resignation to its impossibility. The character of Murphy's speech undergoes a corresponding transformation: no longer spoken for Celia, the words cease to exteriorize a conscious presence:

She felt, as she felt so often with Murphy, spattered with words that went dead as soon as they sounded; each word obliterated, before it had time to make sense, by the word that came next; so that in the end she did not know what had been said. It was like difficult music heard for the first time. 14

The final in the novel's series of failed communications is played out in Murphy's chessgame with Mr. Endon, the schizophrenic inmate of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat who presents "a psychosis so limpid and imperturbable that Murphy felt drawn to it as Narcissus to his fountain".<sup>15</sup> He felt drawn, we are told earlier, because he needed a brotherhood,<sup>16</sup> in spite of his declared object for a life in the imagination. Indeed, Murphy has found whom he is looking for, but only for as long as Mr. Endon remains Murphy's projected desire for irreality. The whole imagined complex collapses the moment Murphy perceives Mr. Endon as a bodily existant who, as a consciousness, is precisely not there.

The chessgame functions as an analogue for language. (The comparison has been a familiar one since Wittgenstein but was probably first made by Saussure. In the Course

in General Linguistics the fixed rules and the variable playing of the game are likened to the synchronic state of a language at a given epoch and the spontaneous diachronic changes that occur over time. A somewhat different, and in some respects a more complete analogy, is drawn by Hjelmslev. In order that the reader may compare these versions I have cited the passages from both authors in a footnote.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Endon's 43 moves leave the board with the original number of pieces and his own players in much the same position from which they began. Murphy abandons the game in despair when he realizes that his partner has not played against him but only conducted an elaborate semeiological transformation without content, or meaning. Not having attempted victory Mr. Endon is unembarrassed by defeat. Murphy's exasperated efforts to force a confrontation have been played against a void.

When Murphy stares into the unseeing eyes of Mr. Endon, he stares into the nothingness that constitutes the very possibility of transcendence, but only at the expense of the real, of desire and the very world that alone can have meaning. What Murphy sees is the final impossibility of the infinite reflexive motion to exist at once as cause and effect of one's own consciousness. His self-alienation is figured in his banishment from the orbs of Mr. Endon's soul. The insuperable chasm must be filled with words:

Kneeling at the bedside, the hair starting in thick black ridges between his fingers, his lips, nose and forehead almost touching Mr. Endon's, seeing himself stigmatised in those eyes that did not see him, Murphy heard words demanding so strongly to be spoken that he spoke them, right into Mr. Endon's face, Murphy who did not speak at all in the ordinary way unless spoken to, and not always even then.<sup>18</sup>

In the incommunication of this undramatic scene are spelled out the terms of a paradox at the centre of Beckett's art: the appearance of words where none will suffice.

## VIII

Imagination, applied — a priori — to what is absent, is exercised in vacuo and cannot tolerate the limits of the real.

-Beckett

Imagination Dead Imagine is a failure, the failure to sustain an impossible project: to hold before the mind's eye a single ultimate image of unmitigated helplessness and destitution. The text elaborates this single action to construct and see collapse the ideal monument.

The danger of misinterpreting this project lies in reducing the image to artifice. To suppose that the voice is merely a device — a burlesque of the scientific spirit, for instance, by stages bewildered and at last in terror before a data whose complexity has destroyed its instruments — is to relegate the text to an exercise in craft and allegory. Such a reduction can only be made in the face of ignoring the identifications announced in the opening lines. Any irony anticipates the title. For the rotunda is not only the extraordinary conflation of

womb and tomb and world, but also, the space of its generation, in the white bone vault of the skull. If this self-reflexive doubling is not immediately obvious in the contradictory directives of the title and the instruction to "go in" where there is "no way in", it is unmistakable in the tautology which concludes the initial survey of the image: "rap, solid throughout, a ring as in the imagination the ring of bone"<sup>1</sup>. The metaphoric value of the rotunda is thereby raised to the second power, imagination in symbol, world in representation. Outside this dialectic there is no voice; within there are no absolutes, no final meaning.

The counters of the real world are disgorged at the outset: "islands, waters, azure, verdure, pff, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly, omit". Left in their vacuum is the impitiable zone of consciousness: "emptiness, silence, heat, whiteness". "It is naturally in the image that this profound and abstruse self-consciousness first emerges with the least loss of integrity."<sup>2</sup> Already so many blandishments to the void, articulated, ordered, and for a time fixed in the great whiteness.

The inescapable well-head that cast up and will ultimately dissolve this fabric resumes. Its action is signalled by the word "wait", precariously situated

between an imperative and an interrogative, between the compulsion and the resistance to destroy the fragile immobility of the white calm. Its effect is further registered in the questioning response to the strange synchronicity of light and heat. Already the elaboration of the image has begun to turn upon itself. How could it seem strange to an imagination certain of its purpose, grounded upon its own axioms? And in this first halting movement can be measured the infinite distance between an interminable destination and the finite journey of the project.

An inexhaustible set of correspondences to the actual can be extracted from the text. It is no longer a matter of delimiting the boundaries of metaphor in the conventional sense. The battle between container and contained with its regular treaty between form and meaning has been surrendered from the start. Evidently inspection reveals time and space plotted on the vastly collapsed scale of a Cartesian universe. The world and its unnumbered bodies have been foreshortened to the two nameless figures folded in their semicircle. A 60-second cycle of recorded time accommodates three alternating ages of light and dark.

The veritable dimensions of this conception are not, however, elicited by the stratagems of tape measure

and stopwatch, but by the long echo returned from the memory of "what would have seemed, in other times, other places, an eternity", the memory of life-long faiths and despairs which from this telescoped perspective appear as the unaccountable shifts of light and heat, attaining at least the beauty of symmetry. Against this lyricism, the irony of mathematical pretense is at last seen inflated to its grotesque proportions. The indiscriminate shades of grey appear now as ashen or leaden, the light no longer goes down but all too obviously fails. The lyric has entered with the words "experience shows", a phrase twice repeated and serving to hold in the foreground the tension between the horror implied by the image and its apparently dispassionate elaboration. For a time, the voice is still able to exorcise the torment of these little bodies, and seems assured of a temporary calm "in the black dark or great whiteness with attendant temperature, world still-proof against enduring tumult".

Here the text breaks. When the tiny fabric or world is rediscovered (the pronoun in the French original refers back to "monde" and forward to "le petit édifice") the voice resumes. "In perfect voids" the image has been altered. "It is no longer quite

the same, from this point of view, but there is no other." Why and wherefore are unanswerable, they are the light that fails, of still no visible source. But in the space of this passage we stand outside the text, in the zone of the artist who has manipulated this exercise in madness: an obligation assumed in a hopeless faithful gesture, endlessly repeated.

The dissolution is now played through. Unable to prevent its own annihilation, the syzygy of voice and image revolves in an ever tighter orbit around the spectacle of the immobile couple. Incredibly, as if at first sighting they had remained unnoticed, the features of these antique children are annotated. The moment of implosion is infinitesimally recorded by the almost silent utterance of "ah". Only this much for the terrifying pathos of the suppliant, asking to be looked at, hearing his own voice under the gaze of the derisive eye.

## IX

The main point of this essay is that criticism must be founded upon an ontology of consciousness. Writing for a creative end, like the practice of any art, presupposes the attempt to define one's self as a conscious being, though it is only in literature that this attempt can be made explicit; and the experience of art involves a repetition of this self-reflexive attitude. These ideas continue to be ignored in favour of seeing art strictly as an object, divorcing it conceptually not only from the immediate context of creation (which can never be recovered) but also from the very notion of a conscious creative act. Criticism indeed faces a difficult task. For when it undertakes to explain art and creativity it can never rest satisfied with the apparent irreducibles of psychology or anthropology, but must always pursue the question further to the very nature of a defining consciousness. At one time it could be said that art was in the service of religion. Today it is directed to other purposes, and the definition of these purposes will continue to evolve, because the artist can hardly avoid questioning his own significance and the human condition that makes it possible to do so.

## Footnotes

I  
(pp. 1-11)

The headnote is the opening sentence of Beckett's essay on Joyce, "Dante... Bruno.. Vico.. Joyce", first published in transition, 16-17, June 1929. It subsequently appeared as the first essay in Our Examination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress, published by Shakespeare and Company in the same year. All references are taken from a reprint edition (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1974).

<sup>1</sup> A bibliography compiled by David Willbern listing psychoanalytic and psychological criticism on Shakespeare between 1964 and 1975 contains 316 items. International Review of Psychoanalysis, 5(1978), 361-72.

<sup>2</sup> Eva Metman, "Reflections on Samuel Beckett's Plays," Journal of Analytical Psychology, 5(1960), 41-63. The article is reprinted in Samuel Beckett, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. M. Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> Studia Romanica 27 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1976). The title might be translated as follows: "Alienation as a constituent of bourgeois literature as seen in the works of Samuel Beckett. An attempt at a heuristic model synthesizing sociology and psychoanalysis".

<sup>4</sup> (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1970), p. 132.

<sup>5</sup> Ursula Maria Rehn Wolfman, Ecriture/Lecture: Jeu d'Espace Littéraire, Pictural, Sculptural: Samuel Beckett-Giacometti (Case Western University, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> Bookman, 77(August, 1934), 241.

II  
(pp. 12-19)

The quotation is cited by Beckett in "Dante... Bruno.. Vico.. Joyce", p. 13.

<sup>1</sup> J.P. Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. xlv.

III  
(pp. 20-37)

The headnote is taken from the second preface to R.D. Laing's The Divided Self (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 12:

<sup>1</sup>Sigmund Freud, Complete Works, Standard Edition, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), IX, 142. The quotation is taken from p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>Ernest Jones, Sigmund Freud: Life and Work, New Edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), II, 385.

<sup>3</sup>Freud, IX, 152.

<sup>4</sup>Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensens "Gradiva" was first published as the initial volume of a series entitled "Schriften zur angewandten Seelenkunde" (Leipzig und Vienna: Heller, 1907). Jensens's novella and Freud's analysis are collected in a 1973 paperback under the original German title (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag), and in a 1971 reprint of the 1941 Gallimard edition, Délire et rêves dans la "Gradiva" de Jensen. A 1917 English edition including both works is currently out of print (Moffat, Yard & Company).

<sup>5</sup>The information in this paragraph comes from the editor's preface to Freud's analysis and from the introduction to the 1973 German paperback edition which lists all the previous editions. The first French edition translated by Freud's friend Marie Bonaparte was brought out by Gallimard in 1931, coincident with a renewed interest in the work on the part of the Surrealists. Following the publication, Salvador Dali painted the first in a series of works treating the Gradiva theme. André Breton's Les Vases Communicantes, published the following year and in some respects a critique of Freud, contains as headnote a quotation from Jensen. In 1937 "La Galerie Gradiva" opened its Marcel Duchamp glass doors in Paris. These items and Freud's influence on the arts in general are discussed in J.J. Spector, The Aesthetics of Freud (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>Freud, IX, 94.

<sup>7</sup>Freud, IX, 91: "One of our circle — the one who, as I said at the beginning, was interested in the dreams in Gradiva and their possible interpretation — approached the author with the direct question whether he knew anything of such scientific theories as these. The author replied, as was to be expected, in the negative, and, indeed, somewhat brusquely". In a letter to Freud, Jensen denied having reacted in the manner described by Jung.

<sup>8</sup>References to Jung are made to the Collected Works edited by Herbert Read et al., quoted by volume and paragraph. The present passage (XV, 99) is from the translation of a lecture delivered to the Society for German Language and Literature in Zurich, May 1922.

<sup>9</sup>Hanna Segal, "On Symbolism," International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 59(1978), p. 315. See also Jones, "The Theory of Symbolism" in Papers on Psychoanalysis (London: Ballière, Tindall & Cox, 1948) for the full exposition of his ideas on the subject.

<sup>10</sup>Jung, XV, 126.

<sup>11</sup>Jung, XV, 152.

<sup>12</sup>Jung, XV, 152.

<sup>13</sup>Guy Rosolato, "Symbol Formation," International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 59(1978), pp. 307-8. Essais sur le symbolique was published in Paris by Gallimard in 1969.

<sup>14</sup>Existential Psychoanalysis (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1962), pp. 56-8.

<sup>15</sup>Bultmann, Essays Philosophical and Theological (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 234-61.

<sup>16</sup>Laing, pp. 31-3.

#### IV (pp. 38-48)

The statement was first made in a letter to Arland Ussher in March 1937. It was subsequently repeated in Watt (New York and London: Grove Press, Evergreen Editions, 1959), p. 13.

<sup>1</sup>Deirdre Bair, Samuel Beckett (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978). All biographical details of Beckett's life are taken from this book unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>See p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Jung, XV, 132-4.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Ellmann, James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 405, 480-3.

<sup>5</sup>Bair, p. 84.

<sup>6</sup>Ellmann, p. 483.

<sup>7</sup>Jung, XVIII, 1-415.

<sup>8</sup> Biographical information on Dr. Thompson, besides the facts narrated by Bair, is taken from an obituary notice in the International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, 58(1977), p.497.

<sup>9</sup> Bair, p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Bair, p. 205.

<sup>11</sup> Beckett, letter to Thomas McGreevy, 8 September 1935. Quoted in Bair, p. 207.

<sup>12</sup> Jung, XVIII, 204-5.

<sup>13</sup> Bair, pp. 209-10.

V  
(pp. 49-63)

The headnote is taken from Language, An Introduction, trans. Francis J. Whitfield (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Peter Owen, 1960), p. 16. All references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Jung, XVIII, 1691.

<sup>3</sup> Saussure, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Saussure, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> (New Haven: Yale University Press, Lantam Matrix Edition, 1970), pp. 120-151.

<sup>6</sup> Cassirer, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> Cassirer, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> Bertrand Russell, An Outline of Philosophy (London: 1927), p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> The English translation by Francis J. Whitfield was first published in 1953. References are made to the second revised edition published by the University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, in 1961.

<sup>10</sup> Saussure, p. 120.

<sup>11</sup> Hjelmslev, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Hjelmslev, p. 52. Saussure, p. 112: "the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas".

<sup>13</sup> Hjelmslev, p. 54. Saussure, p. 112: "the equally vague plane of sounds".

<sup>14</sup> Hjelmslev, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> Hjelmslev, p. 67.

<sup>16</sup> Hjelmslev and H.J. Uldall, Études de linguistique structurale organisées au sein du Cercle linguistique de Copenhague (Bulletin 11, 35), p. 13 quoted in Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. G.T. Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Hjelmslev, pp. 220-1.

VI.  
(pp.64-71)

The composite passage comes from Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache, (Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1923 [Photographic Reprint by Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Hildesheim]), I, 24, 665. The translation is my own.

<sup>1</sup>Bair, p. 90, who quotes Ellmann, p. 661.

<sup>2</sup>For edition, see the note on headnote to section I.

<sup>3</sup>Mauthner's Critique of Language (Cambridge University Press, 1970). The following footnote is found on p. 142: "It is of some historical interest that Mauthner's doctrine which we dealt with in this section has gained the approval of James Joyce, that great master of Wortkunst. 'Beckett read Joyce passages from the works of Fritz Mauthner, whose Critique of Language was one of the first works to point to the fallibility of language as a medium of discovery and communication of metaphysical truths.' (Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd [London, 1962, p. 26].) Mr. Samuel Beckett confirmed this in a private communication to me adding that Joyce had in his library the three volumes of B which have mysteriously disappeared after his death. Whether 'Mister Maut' who appears on p. 319, line 9 of Finnegans Wake is Mauthner or not will remain, in all probability, an unsolved problem."

<sup>4</sup>Mauthner, p. 229: "Man hat unsere Zeit oft und richtig mit dem verfallenden Altertum verglichen. . . Kaum aber ist bisher beachtet worden, dass der faulige Zustand der Weltanschauung sich zumeist und für helle Ohren am deutlichsten in der Sprache verrät. Das Latein der Kaiserzeit war eine totkranke Sprache, bevor es eine tote Sprache wurde. Und unsere Kultursprachen von heute sind zerfressen bis auf die Knochen. Nur bei den Ungebildeten, beim Pöbel, gibt es noch gesunde Muskeln und eine gesunde Sprache. Die Sprache der Bildung hat sich metaphorisch entwickelt und musste kindisch werden, als man den Sinn der Metaphoren vergessen hatte. Wie die römische Dame in ihrem Boudoir Fetische oder Götter aller Zeiten und Völker beisammen hatte, und darum in der Not nicht wusste, zu welchem beten, so hat der Dichter und der Denker unserer Zeit alle Wortfetische zweier Jahrtausende in seinem Gehirn beisammen und kann kein Urteil mehr fällen, kann kein Gefühl mehr ausdrücken, ohne dass die Worte wie ein gespenstischer Verwandlungskünstler auf dem Drahtseil ein Maskenkostüm nach dem anderen abstreifen und ihm auslachen und unter den Kleidern durch das Rasseln ihrer Knochen verraten, dass sie halbverwerste Gerippe sind.

In bunten Farben schimmern unsere Sprachen und scheinen reich geworden. Es ist der falsche Metallglanz der Fäulnis. Die Kultursprachen sind herunter gekommen wie Knochen von Märtyrern, aus denen man Würfel verfertigt hat zum Spielen.

Kinder und Dichter, Salondamen und Philosophieprofessoren spielen mit den Sprachen, die wie alte Dirnen unfähig geworden sind zur „Lust wie zum Widerstand“. Alt und kindisch sind die Kultursprachen geworden, ihre Worte ein Murmelspiel“.

<sup>5</sup>Mauthner, p. 653: „Nicht mehr auf des Cartesius schulmeisterliches ‚ich bin‘ stützt die gegenwärtige Menschheit das Bewusstsein ihres Seins, sondern weit bescheidener und kindlicher auf das Gefühl: ich bin. Ich bin mir bewusst, ich fühle, dass ich ein Zentrum bin für so und so viele Gesichts- und Gehörwahrnehmungen, die zu gleicher Zeit um meine Aufmerksamkeit streifen“.

<sup>6</sup>Mauthner, pp. 653-4: „Aber ich kann auf die Nadelspitze des Moments nur einen Eindruck spiessen, und so würde das Ich in ‚ich bin‘ wieder verloren gehen, wenn ich die Erinnerung nicht hätte, dass im Flusse des Werdens das Sein blieb, dass ich war. So stürzt mein Ich aus dem vollen Leben der Gegenwart in das schwarze Nichts der Vergangenheit, um sich selbst zu finden. Und wer sich diesen allergemainten Vorgang klar machen will, steht entweder bewusstlos und stumm oder muss Fopanze von Worten aufstellen, als wäre er ein Philosoph“.

<sup>7</sup>Mauthner, pp. 654-5: „Wenn wir nun von dem Worte Selbstbewusstsein die ethischen Nebenbegriffe entfernen die die Sprachgeschichte höchst interessanterweise daran geknüpft hat, so bleibt ihm kein anderer Inhalt als der des sogenannten Ichsgefühls. Ob wir sagen, ein Mensch sei aus einer Ohnmacht wieder zum Bewusstsein seiner selbst erlangt, immer meinen wir, der Mensch oder das Kind fühle sein Ich. Dieses abstrakte, grossgeschriebene Ich ist aber, wenn man die Flunkereien von Absoluten Ich auf sich beruhen lässt, nur ein zusammenfassender Ausdruck, und ein recht unglücklicher Ausdruck für die menschlichen Individuen, insofern jedes von ihnen ein empirisches Ich ist, d.h. stetige Erinnerungen an die eigenen Erfahrungen besitzt.“

Dieses empirische Ich wieder ist ein blosses Wort, durch welches nicht mehr und nicht weniger als die Einheit des Individuellen Gedächtnisses bezeichnet wird. Wenn wir mit einem Hauptpunkte dieser Untersuchung recht haben, wenn ein menschliches Denken ohne Sprechen nicht möglich ist, dann stehen wir nun vor der überraschenden Beobachtung, dass diese Einheit des individuellen Gedächtnisses, d.h. die einheitliche Beziehung aller Sinneseindrücke auf unseren eigenen Leib, früher da ist als sein sprachlicher Ausdruck, dass alle Kinder ihr Ich früher fühlen, als sie Ich sagen können, früher als sie (was auf dasselbe hinausläuft) von sich selbst mit ihrem Eigennamen reden. Das Ich ist überall nur der selbst verständliche und darum überflüssige Ausdruck für das individuelle Interesse“

<sup>8</sup>Mauthner, pp. 662-3: „Ist aber das Ichgefühl, ist die Individualität eine Lebenstäuschung, dann bebzt der Boden“

auf welchem wir stehen, und die letzte Hoffnung auf eine Spur von Welterkenntnis bricht zusammen. Was wir irgend von der Welt wissen können, war uns zu einer übersichtlichen Summe der von Individuum ererbten und erworbenen Erfahrungen zusammengeschmolzen; unsere Kenntnis von der objektiven Welt war zu einem subjektiven Bilde unserer Zufallssinne geworden. Jetzt schwindet auch das Subjekt, es versinkt hinter dem Objekt und wir sehen keinen Unterschied mehr zwischen dem philosophischen Streben menschlicher Jahrtausende und dem Traumdasein einer Amöbe. Auch der Begriff der Individualität ist zu einer sprachlichen Abstraktion ohne vorstellbaren Inhalt geworden".

<sup>9</sup>Beckett, "Dante...Bruno.Vico..Joyce", pp. 13,15.

<sup>10</sup>Beckett, pp. 17-8.

<sup>11</sup>Beckett, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup>Beckett, pp. 15-6.

<sup>13</sup>T.F. Driver, "Beckett by the Madeleine", Columbia Forum, 4(no. 3, 1961), pp. 21-5.

## VII

(pp. 72-82)

<sup>1</sup>Bair, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup>Beckett, Murphy (New York: Grove Press, 1957), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>Beckett, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup>Beckett, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup>Beckett, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup>Beckett, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup>Beckett, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup>Beckett, p. 108.

<sup>9</sup>Beckett, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup>Beckett, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup>Sartre, The Psychology of Imagination (New York: Citadel Press, 1965).

<sup>12</sup>Sartre, pp. 210-1.

<sup>13</sup>Beckett, pp. 36, 38.

<sup>14</sup>Beckett, p. 40.

<sup>15</sup>Beckett, p. 186.

<sup>16</sup>Beckett, p. 176.

<sup>17</sup>Saussure, pp. 88-9: "But of all the comparisons that might be imagined, the most fruitful is the one that might be drawn between the functioning of language and a game of chess. In both instances we are confronted with a system of values and their observable modifications. A game of chess is like an artificial realization of what language offers in a natural form.

Let us examine the matter more carefully.

First, a state of the set of chessmen corresponds closely to a state of language. The respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard just as each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms.

In the second place, the system is always momentary; it varies from one position to the next. It is also true that values depend above all else on an unchangeable convention, the set of rules that exists before a game begins and persists after each move. Rules that are agreed upon once and for all exist in language too; they are the constant principles of semiology.

Finally, to pass from one state of equilibrium to the next, or—according to our terminology— from one synchrony to the next, only one chesspiece has to be moved; there is no general rummage. Here we have the counterpart of the diachronic phenomenon with all its peculiarities. In fact:

(a) In each play only one chesspiece is moved; in the same way in language, changes affect only isolated elements.

(b) In spite of that, the move has a repercussion on the whole system; it is impossible for the player to foresee exactly the extent of the effect. Resulting changes of value will be, according to the circumstances, either nil, very serious, or of average importance. A certain move can revolutionize the whole game and even affect pieces that are not immediately involved. We have seen that exactly the same holds for language.

(c) In chess, each move is absolutely distinct from the preceding and the subsequent equilibrium. The change effected belongs to neither state: only states matter.

In a game of chess any particular position has the unique characteristic of being freed from all antecedent positions; the route used in arriving there makes absolutely no difference;

one who has followed the entire match has no advantage over the curious party who comes up at the critical moment to inspect the state of the game; to describe this arrangement, it is perfectly useless to recall what has just happened ten seconds previously. All this is equally applicable to language and sharpens the radical distinction between diachrony and synchrony. Speaking operates only on a language-state, and the changes that intervene between states have no place in either state.

At only one point is the comparison weak: the chessplayer intends to bring about a shift and thereby to exert an action on the system, whereas language pre-meditates nothing. The pieces of language are shifted — or rather modified — spontaneously and fortuitously... In order to make the game of chess seem at every point like the functioning of language, we would have to imagine an unconscious or unintelligent player".

Hjelmslev draws the analogy in Language, An Introduction, pp. 42-3: "To use a comparison that may perhaps be carried further, we can say that a language is organized like a game—like chess or like a card game, for example. The elements are the pieces or the cards. Different languages, like different games, have rules that differ in whole or in part. These rules state how a given element, whether piece or card, may be used and how it may not. To some extent, they restrict the possibilities of combination, but the number of permitted combinations or sign formations, in a language as in chess, is still enormous. The totality of the rules, stating how many pieces there are in a game and how each piece may be combined with the others, can be called the structure of the game; and it differs from the usage of the game just as the linguistic structure differs from the linguistic usage. An account of the usage of the game would have to include information not only about the way one is permitted to act (this is the structure of the game), but also how people are accustomed to acting in given situations or have in fact acted up to now (this is the usage of the game) — in other words, what combinations have time-honored status under given conditions. In the same way an account of the linguistic usage would have to include information about the customary use of signs at a definite point in time in a definite milieu under given conditions. An account of the usage of the game would also have to include information about the material of which the pieces are usually made, or have been made, or are most appropriately made, and would have to tell us how each piece or kind of piece usually looks or has looked (the knight in chess looks like a horse, and so on)—and in just

the same way, an account of the linguistic usage would also have to include a description of the material (graphic, phonetic, and so on) of which the elements are made, and would have to tell us in detail how the individual graphs, sounds, etc., are constituted. Every usage of a game presupposes the structure of the game, but not conversely. And many different game usages can be matched to one and the same game structure. The structure of a game remains the same, whatever use is made of its rules. This is precisely the reason why the same game structure can be used over and over again for new combinations—new games—just as the same linguistic structure can be used over and over again to form new signs. And the structure of the game remains the same, even if the pieces are made of a different material or given a different shape. In this respect the structure of the game allows complete freedom, with the one restriction that pieces differing in their rules of combination must be sufficiently distinguishable. In this connexion, it may be recalled that one can play chess by telegraph, without using pieces at all but representing the elements of the game by signs in Morse code".

<sup>18</sup>Beckett, pp. 249-50.

#### VIII

(pp. 83-87)

The headnote is taken from Froust (New York: Grove Press, 1951, 11th printing), p. 56.

<sup>1</sup>Quotations are taken from First Love and Other Shorts (New York: Grove Press, 1974), pp. 53-6.

<sup>2</sup>Beckett, "Denis Devlin", transition, 27 (Kraus Reprint Corp., 1967), p. 293.

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