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Ph.D Thesis

Samuel Beckett's Family Values:
The Family, Regeneration, and the Status of the Child in his work
For Pamela Robins, my mother,
and in memory of
Raymond David Robins, my father.
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ABSTRACT

By examining the ways in which Beckett is preoccupied with the structure of the family both as a discrete unit and as a wider network of genealogical human relationships, the thesis seeks to define the sometimes surprisingly humanist values evinced in the oeuvre.

The first part of the thesis focusses primarily upon antecedents, and examines Beckett's abiding fascination with ancestors and with the repetitive patterns of continuity manifest in successive generations. A substantial discussion of the early novel Watt treats of Beckett's ambivalent feelings about human kinship, affiliation, and succession, while Endgame provides the focal point for a study of Beckett's attitude toward the family unit and toward the home (or household) as an arena of human relationship.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to Beckett's writing about procreation and childbirth. It begins with a discussion of Beckett's mixed feelings about regeneration, discusses contraception, and closely examines three particular nativity scenes which in several ways mitigate against Beckett's notorious anti-birth ethos.

The third part underlines the importance of Beckett's peculiar fascination with the figure of the child, highlighting his tendency to dwell upon the diminutive and the incipient in all things. One chapter looks at a sample of important encounters with children in the oeuvre, and pinpoints some of the peculiarities of child-adult relations in Beckett. Another, focussing mainly on All That Fall, considers children as tokens of loss. Children are throughout found to be important sources for the metaphorical life of the writing.

By looking at the family in these general terms, and by looking closely at many examples of Beckett's best writing on it, the thesis shows how Beckett's "values" are more complex, less austere and arid, than is often supposed.
ABBREVIATIONS

Generally those editions have been selected which most conveniently gather together Beckett's works. Otherwise the most readily available editions have been chosen. For fuller details, consult the bibliography.

ASWT  As The Story Was Told
CC    Comment c'est
CP    Collected Poems 1930-1978
CSP   Collected Shorter Prose 1945-80
CDW   The Complete Dramatic Works
D     Disjecta
DFMW  Dream of Fair to Middling Women
E     Eleuthéria
FP    Fin de partie
HII   How It Is
M     Murphy
MC    Mercier and Camier
MPTK  More Pricks Than Kicks
NO    Nohow On
PA    Premier Amour
P     Proust and Three Dialogues
T     The Beckett Trilogy
W     Watt

Square brackets in the text denote my own ellipses.
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NOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY
One of Beckett's most celebrated novels, *The Unnamable*, contains a protracted and gleefully extravagant fantasy in which a voice speaks of a story - perhaps a memory - in which he became "rid at one glorious sweep of parents, wife and heirs" (T 296), "the bacillus botulinus [...] having exterminated my entire kith and kin" (T 295-6) in a devastating case of "sausage-poisoning" (T 292). He is surprised to hear that he was

upset at having been delivered so economically of a pack of blood-relations, not to mention the two cunts into the bargain, the one forever accursed that ejected me into this world and the other, infundibuliform, in which, pumping my likes, I tried to take my revenge.

(T 296)

Indeed he prefers to believe that he was only physically repulsed by "the howls of my family as they grudgingly succumbed and the subsequent stench" (T 296), and that otherwise he was indifferent to their fate. When he remembers continuing on his way "stamping underfoot the
unrecognisable remains of my family, here a face, there a stomach, as the case might be, and sinking in to them with the ends of my crutches", he insists that "[t]o say I did so with satisfaction would be stretching the truth. For my feeling was rather one of annoyance at having to flounder in such muck" (T 297).

On this evidence, Samuel Beckett's valuation of the family is not, perhaps, all it might be. By underlining his supposed indifference to his family the Unnamable seeks to pre-empt even the charge that his hatred is an index of his sense of the family's importance to him. Nevertheless one cannot help feeling that for Beckett this perverse wallowing in the demise and destruction of the family indicates something other than indifference.

Much of Beckett's writing comprises a notoriously vitriolic repudiation of family values: a wholesale rejection of filial connections and family commitments. And yet so insistent is the polemic, and so oft-repeated, that a sense of Beckett's profound preoccupation with family ties and arrangements is what finally emerges. For all the much evinced desire to see the end of the family line - for all the murderous family planning - the family plot in Beckett
remains "a plot in perpetuity" (T 124): family history is continually commemorated and rehearsed, and goes on into "the execrable generations to come" (T 166). "To saddle me with a lifetime is probably not enough [...] I have to be given a taste of two or three generations" (T 303).¹

The Unnamable, however, speaks from the midst of his punishing vortex of solipsism, from a place where family structures seem like mythical, fictional impositions. Thus he ends his apocalyptic filial fantasy by dismissing the whole wild notion of the family:

> Enough of acting the infant who has been told so often how he was found under a cabbage that in the end he remembers the exact spot in the garden and the kind of life he led there before joining the family circle. (T 297)

For him "the family circle" is as absurd an explanation of his provenance as the cabbage patch.

Nevertheless in Beckett's writing solipsism is almost always mitigated by an insistent aetiology, by recalcitrant "notions of forbears" (T 269). His works constantly betray what Malone calls the "[s]trange need to know who people are" (T 249), and where they have come from. Beckett seems to need to know not only 'how it is', but, as the novel of that name puts it, "how I got here" (HII 8). Despite an
early narrator's claim to be tired of "milieu, family, structure [...] consequent and antecedent", and of "the background pushed up as a guarantee" (DFMW 12, 13), such considerations prove time and again to be crucial ones. "Who is this Murphy?", asks Mr Kelly in Murphy, "What is he? Where does he come from? What is his family? What does he do? Has he any money? Has he any prospects? Has he any retrospect? Is he, has he, anything at all?" (M 14). It might be argued that Company, written more than forty years later, asks the same questions of its protagonist.

The first part of the present thesis seeks to define more precisely the nature of Beckett's ambivalent commitment to the family as both a provider of context and a repository of values. By discussing at some length Watt, together with How It Is and Endgame, this half of the thesis shows how central family structure is to Beckett's thinking; how much, indeed, his thinking and his writing are structured upon it. It considers, among other matters, Beckett's equivocal sense of the consolations of regenerative continuity, and his comic use of biblical genealogies and evolutionary theory.

In the middle section I examine Beckett's literary treatment of procreation itself, arguing for the importance
of those occasions in his writing which mitigate against a
dogmatic anti-birth ethos, and emphasising, through a close
examination of three nativity scenes, the vitality of
Beckett's writing about birth and incipient life. What
emerges is a Beckett fond, as well as wary, of new starts.

Being himself childless, Samuel Beckett was like
Malone's Macmann: "the son and grandson and great-grandson
of humans [...] his link with his species was through his
ascendants only" (T 221). Nevertheless, as a writer, at
least, children were hugely important to him (though this
is rarely acknowledged), and the third and last part of the
thesis aims to examine his literary treatment of them, and
bring out their crucial importance throughout the oeuvre. I
consider, for instance, the way that they become
representative of a child-like and diminutive humanity in
the hands of a parent-God, and examine their status as
tokens of loss and mourning. The child in Beckett is found
to be an exemplary figure, not one only to be loathed,
regretted, and feared.

Children in Beckett may or may not be children within a
specific family context - many are orphan figures - but, as
one narrator remarks, "everyone is a parent" (CSP 26), and
the young are rarely considered in Beckett as other than representative of the "rising generation" (W 100) in the family of man.

'Family values', then, is meant in its broadest possible sense. Rather than being, for instance, a psychoanalytic study of the structure of the nuclear family in Beckett\(^2\), the thesis instead examines more generally, and largely without recourse to psychoanalysis, the ways in which family matters—of antecedence, cyclical continuity, relatedness, fellow-feeling, family-planning, procreation, birth and parenthood— are all central to Beckett's artistic concerns throughout his writing career, and are all instinct with values and nuances that go well beyond the narrow pessimism and arid misanthropy conventionally ascribed to him.

To speak of Beckett's values at all is to court dissent from those critics who (increasingly, it seems to me) would seek to distance Beckett from a tradition of humanist writing about the life of man and the possible consolations of its continuities.\(^3\) I try to avoid sentimentalising Beckett, but I also try to show how his much-vaunted cynicism is a reaction to—or is the obverse of—his own
acutely sentimentalising tendency. I argue finally for a Beckett aware equally of the short-comings of both cynicism and sentimentality, and for a Beckett whose perhaps very best writing gracefully eschews either extreme, and is to be found - in Watt, for instance, and in Company - outside the Trilogy, the work on which his critical reputation is, more than any other, founded.

The thesis, which does not confine itself to any particular genre or period within the oeuvre, is not wholly chronological in sequence, nor does it in its second and third parts discuss works individually. There are a number of close readings of specific passages, however, and it is to be hoped that it does reflect both Beckett's developing style, and something of the shape of the oeuvre. Another aim, and one that partly accounts for the large number of footnotes, is to trace, as far as is possible, relevant stylistic continuities and tropes across the work as a whole. Beckett is in many ways a compulsive writer, returning over and over to play elegant variations not only on certain themes, but on individual scenes and even on specific turns of phrase. Repetitiveness and the patterns it makes are, after all, thematically central to my
argument.

Space has not permitted any sustained discussion of the French work, although footnotes will occasionally refer to it. Of the three works examined at length—Watt, Endgame, and All That Fall—only the second was written originally in French, and my discussion of it does make some use of Fin de partie as well as of earlier drafts in French. Beckett's English texts, where the English is the author's translation from a French original, seem to me to be sufficiently authoritative to stand in their own right. It is notable, moreover, that, much of Beckett's best writing about the family is to be found in those works which he chose to compose in his mother tongue. These, naturally, receive much attention in the following pages.

At no point is my argument simply biographical in nature, although it does not go out of its way to ignore biographical material. There can be few writers at once so elusive and so intimately personal in their expression as Samuel Beckett, and biographical studies—such as Eoin O'Brien's fascinating The Beckett Country, Lawrence Harvey's still seminal Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, and Deirdre Bair's much criticised, but (pending the official biography)
indispensable, Samuel Beckett: A Biography — are in my view invaluable to an understanding of his work.6

My own approach in this work, as will already be apparent, is not in any sense a 'theoretical' one. Beckett's writing — its nuance and grace, as well as its erratic unpredictability and comic élan — is in my view sometimes ill-served by critics who would foist on it a theoretical template. Having said this, much of the theoretically informed criticism of Beckett is useful, and some of it, more subtle than most, is very valuable indeed. My debt to its practitioners (especially Steven Connor, Leslie Hill, and Paul Lawley) — as well as to other more traditional Beckett scholars (Ruby Cohn, Stan Gontarski, Hugh Kenner, James Knowlson and John Pilling, in particular) — will, I hope, be obvious.7
Part I

Antecedents

"I was not found under a cabbage, I believe." (W 12)
PART I: INTRODUCTION

Families have been crucially important for writers of fiction:

narrative fiction during the European eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is based on the filial device of handing on a story through narrative telling; moreover [...] the generic plot situation of the novel is to repeat through variation the family scene whereby human beings engender human duration in their action. If a novelistic heroine or hero has one task set above all the others it is to be different, so heavily do paternity and routine weigh upon them. To be novel is to be an original, that is, a figure not repeating what most men performe repeat - the course of human life, father to son, generation to generation. Thus the novelistic character is conceived as a challenge to repetition, a rupture in the duty imposed on all men to breed and multiply, to create and recreate oneself unremittingly and repeatedly.¹

The family, then, can be seen not merely as a sociological, but also as a narrative structure. In the traditional novel story and plot are produced by the family, or more accurately, by the struggle between the generations which comprises the family history. The triple-decker nineteenth
century novel ends with the inauguration of the second
generation family unit whose very existence has been wrested
from the status quo of the first. The inauguration is also
an instauration, however, since the family is a flexible
structure which can both accommodate change and recuperate
losses. "With struggle, as between the generations of the
fathers and of the sons, there is difference generated, as
well as repetition."2

These ruminations on the family are from Edward Said's
essay on Giambattista Vico, the eighteenth century Italian
philosopher about whom Beckett himself wrote in an early
essay which set out among other things "to show how Vico is
substantially present in [Joyce's] Work In Progress" (D
23)3. Vico is present in Beckett too, and the Viconian
preoccupation with abstract human history as a sequence of
generational variations accommodated within a fundamental
repetition, is as typically Beckettian as it is Joycean.
Said paraphrases Vico:

Take history as a reported dramatic sequence of
dialectical stages, enacted and fabricated by an
inconsistent but persistent humanity, Vico seems to be
saying, and you will equally avoid the despair of
seeing history as gratuitous occurrence as well as the
boredom of, seeing history as realising a foreordained
blueprint.4
In his essay on Joyce, Beckett chooses several quotations from "Work in Progress" that genially endorse Vico's notion of human history, through regenerative cycles, as neither foreordained nor gratuitous - or perhaps, more accurately, as somehow both monotonous and haphazard: "our social something bowls along bumpily, experiencing a jolting series of prearranged disappointments, down the long lane of (it's as semper as oxhousehumper) generations, more generations and still more generations" (D 23); "We only wish everyone was as sure of anything in this world as we are of everything in the newlywet fellow that's bound to follow" (D 23). Such a sense of human history as a sequence of generations that is persistent and predictable but (paradoxically) also surprisingly various, inconsistent, and comically uneven will be seen, throughout the present thesis, to inform much of Beckett's work, where succession is inevitable but does not preclude the unexpected.

Succession and regeneration are for many critics, however, anathema to Modernism. Edward Said's claim that conventional European narrative fiction is based on what he calls a "filial" device is offset by his observation, elsewhere in the book, that
childless couples, orphaned children, aborted childbirths, and unregenerately celibate men and women populate the world of high modernism with remarkable insistence, all of them suggesting the difficulties of filiation.

A consequence of all this is, he claims,

a pressure to produce new and different ways of conceiving human relationships. For if biological reproduction is either too difficult or too unpleasant, is there some other way by which men and women can create social bonds between each other that would substitute for those ties that connect members of the same family across generations?

Said is not alone in suggesting that Modernism seeks "affiliative" rather than directly "filial" relationships. In his study of Wyndham Lewis as representative Modernist Fredric Jameson uses Beckett's own term "the pseudocouple" (T 272) to give a name to the structural device which he proposes as the Modernist replacement of the family. The device is, in Said's terms, wholly "affiliative"; and it is, Jameson claims, "a kind of compensation formation, a curious structural half-way house in the history of the subject, between its construction in bourgeois individualism and its disintegration in late capitalism." (It was Mercier and Camier to whom the term "pseudocouple" was first applied. For Jameson, Beckett's pair - and their fellows Vladimir and Estragon, Hamm and Clov etc. - stand as the apogee of a
Modernist tendency that began with Flaubert's Bouvard and Pecuchet, and Frederic and Deslauriers. Lewis' pseudo-couples include Tarr and Kreisler from *Tarr*, and Pullman and Sattersthwaite from *The Childermass*.) In the pseudocouple each character is a pole in eternal oppositional relation to its partner, trapped in a static framework of conflictual interdependency and restless symbiosis. The pseudocouple is thus "a pseudo-agon", "a reification of struggle arrested and transmuted into static structural dependency". Above all the pseudocouple is "a structural device for preserving narrative" in the absence of the family, "a framework that allows powerfully anti-narrative tendencies to be safely re-narrativised".7

Tony Pinkney has applied some of Jameson's theorising to the work of D.H.Lawrence, and found in his canon evidence of the Beckettian pseudocouple *avant la lettre*. In *Women In Love* (with Birkin and Gerald) and more especially in *Aaron's Rod* (Aaron and Lily) and *Kangaroo* (Jack and Somers) affiliative relationships take precedence. Pinkney emphasises the extent to which male friendships and bonds in Lawrence are a kind of strategic defence mechanism formed in reaction to the threat perceived to be posed by an
aggressive and possessive female sexuality and by the
demeaning and insidiously invasive nature of mass culture
(and other 'mass' activities like the war). But for
Pinkney, Lawrence's attempt to historicise the emergence of
the pseudocouple fundamentally differentiates his project
from that of Beckett, whose fictional world is "hermetically
sealed", and for whom "the couple's mutual frictional
dependency is simply a narrative given from the very
start."⁸

Pinkney points to a fundamental shift of values
evinced in the transition from The Rainbow to Women In Love.
The former is a novel which espouses the value and purpose
of the family; it is a novel rooted in the nineteenth
century narrative mode which is structured by the continuity
of the generations, and animated by the struggle between
them. Women In Love, however - a book in which the prose is
more episodic and fragmented - has lost faith in
regenerative procreation:

Childbirth happens but no children are born [...] "So
far in spirit from any child-bearing": this phrase,
which the text applies to Minette (who is pregnant)
could as well be applied to the book itself, which
effects a virtual hecatomb of the new generation.

Moreover, the novel seeks to undermine the role of the
family, not only by not producing a new one, but by severing connections with the old one: this is a novel of isolated couples rather than extended families. The novel's heroine demands autonomy, and an escape from childhood and history:

She wanted to have no past. [...] She felt that memory was a dirty trick played on her. [...] What had she to do with parents and antecedents? She knew herself new and unbegotten.

For Jameson and for Pinkney, then, and implicitly for Said — Beckett's work stands as the apotheosis of a Modernist tendency to posit, against the filial idea of the family, forms of affiliative relationship which are usually male, and which culminate in the reified, purely formal and ahistorical structure of the pseudo-couple. His work is symptomatic of a Modernist rejection of family history and continuity, and of the regenerative processes that bring them about.

My own argument runs counter to this. Although the pseudocouple is undoubtedly a crucial structure for Beckett, and one in some ways well described by Jameson and Pinkney, many of Beckett's works are built around a wider notion of the family which (although sometimes distorted, attenuated, residual) is in the end surprisingly obdurate. The family in
Beckett is, in Said's terms, often both filial and affiliative, the theme of adoption being a crucial one. Nevertheless filial relations are by no means dispensed with or successfully bracketed off by the pseudocouple. Beckett's world is not as airless and defeated as Pinkney suggests, and Jameson implies. There is a generosity and a comic sense of perspective in it that can make it (at times even in spite of itself) as genially accommodating as Joyce's.

These claims will, I hope, be substantiated in the discussions of Watt and Endgame that comprise the first part of the thesis. First, I will briefly discuss Beckett's earlier fiction.

For Pinkney,

This structure of feeling - pseudo-couple versus an opaque, ominous society - is the unquestioned presupposition of the mature Beckett world [...]. But even the Beckett universe did once have its historically specifiable origins. More Pricks Than Kicks (1934) and Murphy (1938) had laid the groundwork for it in their wholesale rejection of mass-culture, Irish nationalism, Catholicism, the 'German' dissolution of transcendental truth into Bergsonian flux and history, and female sexuality in the person of Murphy's girlfriend, Celia. These two texts constitute a labour of demolition which hoist [sic] Beckett's work from the historical to the ontological; his later minimalist works, which have by now thoroughly concealed the labour of their own production, can explore the irritable intricacies of the male
pseudo-couple without ever asking how that bizarre textual structure had come into being in the first place.

This is to overstate the case, or to put it too simply. Pinkney underestimates the extent to which those texts' apparent 'demolition' of history is not only unsuccessful but actually undermined within the texts themselves. They do not so much "hoist Beckett's work from the historical to the ontological" as show the futility of such an attempt. (Indeed, they represent what John Harrington has described as "capitulation to antecedent frames of reference".\textsuperscript{12}) It is Belacqua and Murphy, the two protagonists, who wish to withdraw from the messy contingencies of historical facticity into a cosy solipsism. But the novels themselves contain and situate what we are clearly meant to perceive as the follies of their heroes.

Significantly, in both \textit{More Pricks Than Kicks} and \textit{Murphy}, the protagonists - in spite of their transcendental aspirations - are survived by the feminine and workaday world of sex, marriage, and family which they themselves had repudiated with such callow aplomb. In the earlier work Belacqua's bathetic demise is followed by the comic carryings-on of the widowed Smeraldina "itching to be taken
at her - very much so to speak - face value, and by force 
for preference." (MPTK 201) If this can scarcely be said to 
betoken authorial sanction for the novel's survivors, the 
same is not true for Murphy.

In that novel Murphy's attempts to escape from a life 
of domestic and connubial commitments (which would perforce 
have to be financed by means of a regular job) into a 
meditative and solitary life of the mind threaten to 
dismantle the conventional novelistic plot which concerns 
itself with the establishment of the family. Although the 
 novel is partially sympathetic to Murphy's mystical leanings 
its values are still sufficiently rooted in the objective 
external world for us to regard his move to the lunatic 
asylum (the only place he will agree to work in) and his 
affinity with the patients there as dramatic ironies which 
expose his folly. The squalid bathos of Murphy's accidental 
death is in the end overshadowed by the genuine pathos of 
the last chapter devoted to Celia and her efforts to 
survive. Her walk in the park accompanied by the 
wheel-chaired Mr.Kelly, and her important encounter there 
with a child, constitute a belated and pathetically 
vestigial reference to the family life she has been denied.
The lyrical, elegiac tone of this concluding tableau suggests a kind of nostalgia on Beckett's part for the conventional novelistic conclusion.

Beckett's early fiction - and Dream of Fair to Middling Women should certainly be included in this - depicts a Modernist attempt to follow Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and "fly by [the] nets" of family and history into a private world of "silence, exile and cunning". But the depiction is partly an ironic critique - again like Joyce's Portrait of the Artist - of a misguided attempt to enter a bohemian world of artistic autonomy. Joyce would go on to write not only Ulysses, which is a book that warmly affirms both affiliative adoption (Stephen by Bloom) and fertility (Molly), but also Finnegans Wake, that profoundly affirmative statement of human relatedness and continuity that (as "Work In Progress") Beckett admiringly wrote about in relation to Vico. Although Beckett's project was to become increasingly different from Joyce's - something Beckett himself was in later years keen to point out - it will nevertheless be seen, in the chapters that follow, also to re-examine and revise an initial instinctive flight from family, and history, and context.
Watt articulates Beckett's equivocal feelings about local and universal attachments. The novel enacts a struggle between renunciation and affiliation, between a desire for autonomy and a need for context. Beckett seems torn between a repudiation of the family as a viable structure and a covert allegiance to traditional patterns of relationship and continuity.

In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* the Beckettian narratorial persona had professed weariness with the novel's conventional role as provider of personal, social, and historical context.

*Milieu, race, family, structure, temperament, past and present and consequent and antecedent back to the first combination and the papas and mammas and paramours and cicisbei and the morals of Nanny and the nursery*
wallpapers and the third and fourth generation snuffles...That tires us. As though the gentle reader could be no more than an insurance broker or a professional punter. The background pushed up as a guarantee...that tires us.

(DFMW 12-13)

Watt apparently begins with an endorsement of these sentiments. The eponymous hero mysteriously arrives ex nihilo, and the Irish grotesques who witness him, clearly the butts of Beckett's satire, profess to be in "utter ignorance" of his "nationality, family, birthplace, confession, occupation, means of existence, distinctive signs [...]" (W 19). Watt's character, in so far as he has one, is a tabula rasa. There is no "background pushed up as a guarantee".

Within a few pages, however, Watt meets an antecedent - Arsene - who gives him a dose of abstract history regarding not only the chain of servants at Knott's house, but also, analogously, the series of generations on the earth.

And the poor old lousy old earth, my earth and my father's and my mother's and my father's father's and my mother's mother's and my father's mother's and my mother's father's and my father's mother's father's and my mother's father's mother's and my father's father's mother's and my mother's mother's father's and my father's mother's mother's and my mother's father's mother's and my father's mother's mother's and my mother's mother's mother's and other people's fathers' and mothers' and fathers' fathers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' mother's and mothers' fathers'
The professed weariness with background is still there - for Arsene this all adds up to "an excrement" (45) - and yet this is a weariness that seeks relief not by omitting background, but by delineating it obsessively in a bizarre "comedy of an exhaustive enumeration" (P 92). Genealogy, a biblical practice, is plotted with arithmetical precision and Arsene, like the mathematical Thomas Nackybal, finds his roots by means of an extensive tabulation.

Far from flying by the nets of family, this passage, which I shall discuss at greater length below, spins a vast familial web. Beckett has widened "the family circle" (T 345), to include, by extrapolation, all mankind. It is a family of a notably abstract character, and is not the kind of background that helps to define a specific individual. But it provides a context, and a grounding, in a human history of succession and solidarity.

In the discussion that follows I look more closely at the novel's ambiguous status as both a testimony to human relatedness and a document of solipsistic obsession. I
highlight Beckett's sense of "obscure family [ ... ] relation[s]" (W 69), and his meditative fascination with the "nice processes" (69) that bring them about. I then discuss some aspects of the tonal complexity resulting from these before going on to look at particular representations of the family in more detail.

1.1 Obscure Relations

In some respects Watt is Beckett's most classical work: its themes are explicitly universal; its roots are in the bible; its diction is, for the most part, of a limpid clarity reminiscent of eighteenth century prose; its structure is notably symmetrical, "classically fourfold" according to John Pilling; its style is often ritualistic, sometimes almost ceremonious. On the other hand one can hardly deny that it is distinctively idiosyncratic, and John Pilling calls it "arguably the oddest of all Beckett's works". For all its universal dimensions the novel remains stubbornly opaque and wilfully cryptic. Its clarity always threatens to turn into a crazed pedantry. On closer
inspection its structure collapses. Its repetitiousness is characterised as much by the fever of neurotic compulsion as by the serenity of ritual.

Watt is animated by the tension between these conflicting impulses. It is suspended between a stable world of common truths universally acknowledged and the precarious instabilities of a private world of codified and secretive enunciations.

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The novel begins with a strange paragraph about Mr. Hackett's relationship to a bench:

Mr. Hackett turned the corner and saw, in the failing light, at some little distance, his seat. It seemed to be occupied. This seat, the property very likely of the municipality, or of the public, was of course not his, but he thought of it as his (5)

The episode is like a little dumb show summarising the drama to follow, for the book as a whole explores the relationship between the individual and the public sphere. The earth is "my earth", but it is also, for instance, "my mother's father's mother's", and indeed, "other people's fathers' and mothers'". Arsène's list of generations is importantly also a list of genitives.

In writing Watt Beckett too has "turned the corner",

though, to quote from an earlier work, it is "not [...] clear in what direction." \(^4\) In one sense he has simply gone round the bend. Beckett described the writing of *Watt* as "a means of staying sane" \(^5\), and it does betray signs of an author who might have wondered, like his protagonist, if he "was not perhaps slightly deranged [...] a little off the hooks." (120) The novel can seem impenetrably private - an obscure pattern of obscure events recorded in an obscure notation: as related by "Sam", *Watt* is a very "obscure [...] relation" (69). Beckett seems to render the public property of language "his" and his alone. On the other hand Beckett has "turned the corner" with *Watt* in the sense of having negotiated a difficult passage and arrived at a new maturity that eschews Belacqua's callow solipsism and acknowledges a communal world and the stabilities it may offer. For *Watt*, seen in a different light, seems Beckett's most public work.

The novel has two conflicting aims: to forge a private idiom in which to exorcise personal mental demons; and to establish relations, not always obscure, with universals.

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In his important book *The Irish Beckett* John Harrington
has a chapter on Watt that describes the novel as undertaking "renovations of intractable terms". For Harrington, and this is a useful insight, "anagrams offer a model of antecedent allowing limited latitude for revision" (117). Thus Mr. Spiro's anagram competition involving the rearrangement of the fifteen letters of the Holy Family to form a question and answer - "Winning entry: Has J.Jurms a po? Yes." (W 26) - "renew[s...] unalterable matters of inherited dogma" (117). It also foreshadows Watt's anagrammatic and codified speech described by Sam in section III, and illustrates Beckett's interest in family (re)arrangements. Harrington's focus is on Beckett's "equivocal relation to specifically Irish culture" (4). For him, Beckett's jokes about the Holy Family are evidence, principally, of a typically Protestant playfulness in regard to Irish material, a sense of "distance without complete separation" (115) or, in James Mays' phrase (quoted by Harrington), a "measure of detachment" (115), aloof but in touch.

In my view Beckett's revisionary preoccupation with antecedents - exemplified in the anagram, as Harrington points out - has as much to do with classical as with
specifically Irish dogma. Mr. Spiro introduces himself with an anagram:

   My friends call me Dum, said Mr. Spiro, I am so bright and cheerful. D-U-M. Anagram of mud. (W 25)

Dum spiro spero; while I breathe I hope - or as the Unnameable more loosely translates it, "While there's life there's hope" (T 306). But Spiro's bright and breezy optimism revises itself in a comically uncomplicated anagram that gloomily registers his hopelessly material condition - "of the earth earthy" in Malone's words (T 223). For all Beckett's Cartesian credentials and his much-vaunted interest in mind, one bass-note sounded throughout the oeuvre is Genesis 3:19: "For dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return". One has the sense in Beckett that however one perceives the human condition it can only ever be as an "anagram of mud". The implication is that for all its modernist instability the novel is only playing variations on a classical axiom.

Watt's trouble with pots only confirms this. Undoubtedly the episode of the pot is indicative of a twentieth century anxiety about language and in particular about the Saussurean problem of the referent. Watt loses
faith in the connection between word and thing, so that his pot "resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted." (78) Before long the pot has provoked disquiet about his own status.

As for himself, though he could no longer call it a man, as he had used to do, with the intuition that he was perhaps not talking nonsense, yet he could not imagine what else to call it, if not a man. (80)

So he calls himself a man, "but for all the relief that this afforded him, he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn." (80)

Complementing the scepticism about language and the possibility of defining man at all is a covert allegiance to the fundamental and classical tenet that man is an earthen vessel. The passage renders pot and man implicitly analogous: "pot" rhymes with Watt; the problem of the pot's identity reminds Watt of his own. Despairing of finding relief in the designation "man" Watt falls back on a significant classical figure. "He might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn" gives the impression that these alternative designations are purely arbitrary. The passage is, after all, about the arbitrary fit between
word and thing, and a few lines before Watt had decided to try calling the "pseudo-pot" a "shield" or "raven". But "box" and "urn" are, to borrow a phrase from Krapp, "most funereal thing(s)" (CDW 219). Far from being semantically neutral arbitrary signifiers, they are classical reminders of man's mortal condition. Even as the novel describes Watt's "loss of species" (W 82) then, it covertly restores him to a position "within humanity again just barely" (HII 50) - as a later and related novel will put it - by means of a cryptic affirmation of humanist orthodoxy.

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Spiro interrupts his own garrulous discourse with the remarks: "But why do I trouble you with this, you, a perfect stranger. It is because tonight I must speak, to a fellow wanderer" (W 26). Is Watt a "stranger" or a "fellow"? The whole novel is a negotiation between such terms: Watt, for instance, hears voices with which "if he was not familiar, he was not unfamiliar either" (27). Michael Robinson has described the relationship between Sam and Watt as "one of Beckett's curious 'friendships' that thrive on a fusion of remoteness and sympathy"; as such it mirrors the relationship between author (another Sam) and reader. The
reader feels like a fellow in so far as the novel addresses itself to the universal predicament of "every man" (162). On the other hand he feels like a stranger overhearing a cryptic tongue that is "so much Irish to me." (167) Watt transforms the mutuality and fellow-feeling implicit in an image of "two men, side by side", for instance, by defamiliarising it by means of a code: "Dis yb dis, nem owt." (166) Beckett's people share a common plight - in All That Fall Mr. Slocum's innocent question, "Are you going in my direction?" is answered by Mrs. Rooney's sombre acknowledgement that "we all are" (CDW 177) - but are nonetheless isolated and estranged. "Ah a nice mess we're in, the whole pack of us", remarks the Unnamable (with a nod to Oliver Hardy as well as Malvolio)

is it possible we're all in the same boat, no, we're in a nice mess each one in his own peculiar way. (T 342)

Arsene's "statement" (37) is representative of the novel as a whole in being both an open and all-inclusive classical statement of the human condition and a mysteriously private enunciation from which we are necessarily excluded. He speaks of the chain of servants at
Knott's house and it is tempting to regard them as representative of humanity at large. And yet the novel makes a clear distinction between those who serve at Knott's house and the stage Irish comic grotesques who people the first and last sections of the book. Tired of the speculations about Watt Mrs. Nixon remarks "What does it matter who he is? [...] Or what he does. [...] Or how he lives. Or where he comes from. Or where he is going to. Or what he looks like. What can it possibly matter, to us." (21, my emphasis.) Hackett, whose resemblance to Watt is marked, replies: "I ask myself the same question" - i.e. what can it possibly matter to you? The novel, for all its allegiance to a classical notion of a common condition, breathes a more modernist animus against the superficialities of the herd.

Arsene's speech to Watt, his successor at Knott's house, is self-conscious about its own status as cryptic enigma and simple, open 'statement' of universal application. When he remarks in an aside, "I trust I make myself plain" (42), it is not clear whether he is displaying ingenuous solicitude or the the knowing irony of the professional riddler. Arsene is both confused and confusing about the nature of his experience and the extent to which it is a common one:
For do not imagine me to suggest that what has happened to me, what is happening to me, will ever happen to you, or that what is happening to you, what will happen to you, has ever happened to me, or rather, if it will, if it has, that there is any great chance of its being admitted. For in truth the same things happen to us all, especially to men in our situation, whatever that is, if only we chose to know it. (44)

The first sentence begins in an oddly defensive mode, as though Arsene is anxious to distance himself from his successor. It ends with the implied concession that he is perhaps reluctant to admit that his experiences are indeed common ones. There follows what promises to be a definitive statement ("For in truth...") of a classical faith in core universalities: "the same things happen to us all...if only we chose to know it". Clarity is lost, however, in a comedy of qualifying elaboration. The universal happens "especially to men in our situation". There the word "especially" actually undermines the truth of the statement it sets out to intensify and corroborate. The same things cannot happen to everyone if they happen especially to a certain kind of person. (Just as, if all are equal, none can be more equal than others.) There's an opposition between egalitarianism (humanity at large, "us all") and cliquishness (men like us, in the know). Knowingness itself disintegrates, however, with the next
phrase: "whatever that is". Even the tacit understanding of those who share a certain "situation" seems threatened by sheer incomprehension. To what extent can the "same things" be said to happen to people who have no notion of what those things are, and so no criteria on which to make a judgement about sameness and difference?

There may be another reading of the penultimate clause that re-opens the door on the universal. Perhaps we should read, not "whatever that may be", but "whatever that may be". In other words Arsene may be suggesting that however much we may perceive "our situation" as being unique, it is (whatever it is) in fact a common one, "if only we chose to know it."

However we choose to read Arsene's words, they raise important questions about the status of the novel which like them is both dogmatic and provisional, torn between the axiomatic and the indeterminable.

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Arsene speaks with the authority of experience. As Watt's precursor he is a comforter and guide. He takes on some of the characteristics of Christ as Son of Man and
archetype of suffering humanity, as when he adopts the eschatological diction of the Gospels when referring to "this hour [...] my last on earth on Mr. Knott's premises" (47). Like the risen Christ he is something of an apparition and a revenant: he "[a]ppeared, to Watt" (37), and later "appeared again, to Watt" (62). He paraphrases words from Everyman and at the same time seems to bequeath something like the Holy Spirit when he tells Watt that "Erskine will go by your side, to be your guide." (62)

As archetype Arsene appears to address his speech to all, and yet the situation in Knott's kitchen is that of a private ceremony of initiation, and Arsene's remarks are at times sufficiently enigmatic and cryptic to alienate even the most patiently dogged reader.

The speech begins with a moment of recognition that is both an invitation and a deterrent to the reader's complicity.

Haw! how it all comes back to me, to be sure. That look! That weary watchful vacancy! The man arrives! The dark ways all behind, all within, the long dark ways, in his head, in his side, in his hands and feet [...] (37)

This is partly the seasoned campaigner recognising an earlier self in the relative innocence of the novice. Arsene
and Watt here have an almost allegorical status as representatives, respectively, of Age and Youth. Watt follows Arsene in being a sort of everyman, bearing his sufferings like stigmata. On the other hand there's an opacity about the experience apparently shared by these initiates: "dark ways [...] within" keeps its cards close to its chest. Watt, we note, is not any man, but "the man", and he has "that look" about him. The reader is made to feel like an outsider, and not a party to these characteristics spoken of with such familiarity. Arsene uses a mass of definite articles as he elaborates on an experience which seems mythic and universal in its structure and yet inscrutably private in its idiom:

All the old ways led to this, all the old windings, the stairs with never a landing that you screw yourself up, clutching the rail, counting the steps, the fever of shortest ways under the long lids of sky, the wild country roads where your dead walk beside you, on the dark shingle the turning for the last time again to the lights of the little town, the appointments kept and the appointments broken, all the delights of urban and rural change of place, all the exitus and redditus, closed and ended. (38)

Is Watt, one wonders, a turning towards or away from the public sphere? Is the novel an appointment kept with its readers or an appointment broken?
Arsene speaks of his "statement" as of a traditional rite of passage. He has passed on his experience to Watt "just as Vincent did for me, and Walter for Erskine, and as you perhaps will do for another [...]" (61). However, Watt breaks his appointment with his successor, and so breaks with tradition and continuity. Leaving Knott's he "recalled, with regret, that he had not taken leave of Micks, as he should have done. The few simple words at parting, that mean so much, to him who stays, to him who goes, he had not had the common courtesy to speak them [...]" (221). Watt is a novel that is equivocal about the "common courtesy" of acknowledging its readers as fellows.

1.2 Nice Processes

The variety of the novel's infamous lists illustrates its ambiguous status somewhere between neurotic symptom and classical statement. Steven Connor notes that there are "two kinds of sequence in the book": "closed sequences" that list "a finite permutation"; and "open sequences" that offer no prospect of a satisfactory conclusion or "bounding
frame". He goes on to argue that "in the one structure predominates over sequence, in the other, sequence asserts itself beyond the control of structure." There is a contrast, then, between those lists that succeed in imposing a kind of order on chaotic material and those that merely highlight the intractable nature of experience.

Connor gives, as a typical example of an "open sequence", Arsene's description of Mary, "quietly eating onions and peppermints turn and turn about, I mean first an onion, then a peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint [...]" (49-50). Such a description has the character of a nervous personal tic, "a kind of stammer". Consisting merely of the (arbitrarily terminated) alternation of two elements the list offers little in the way of structure and expresses only a sort of unending flux. (It illustrates, of course, "the difficult problem of hunger", and by extension, the gamut of human velleities that know "no remission" [50].) For a representative illustration of the "closed sequence" Connor points to the description of the voices Watt hears in his head. For Connor, however, "even the closed sequence seems arbitrary and unfinished" because it ends with the statement that
"there were other[...] voices not listed. According to Connor, then, even where structure predominates it is in danger of ceding its authority to an encroaching chaos glimpsed at the edge of the frame.

Here is the passage in full:

Now these voices, sometimes they sang only, and sometimes they cried only, and sometimes they stated only, and sometimes they murmured only, and sometimes they sang and cried, and sometimes they sang and stated, and sometimes they sang and murmured, and sometimes they cried and stated, and sometimes they cried and murmured, and sometimes they sang and cried and stated, and sometimes they sang and cried and murmured, and sometimes they sang and cried and stated and murmured, all together, at the same time, as now, to mention only these four kinds of voices, for there were others. And sometimes Watt understood all, and sometimes he understood much, and sometimes he understood little, and sometimes he understood nothing, as now. (27)

The tabulation of the voices' various modes and their combinations is disconcerting because systematisation seems extended, beyond the point where it serves usefully to inform, into a realm that indicates only a crazed obsession with detail and permutation. Apparently striving for clarity ("Now...") the prose merely glazes over in the fog of repetition. Instead of a limpid explanation of the voices in Watt's head, the reader is confronted with an opaque
representation of their "unintelligible" (27) nature. The reader suddenly seems to lose his status as addressee and is momentarily reduced to being merely the audience of a private neurotic ritual.

The effect of the list's concluding gestures, however, is less to reinforce, as Connor argues, the arbitrary and unfinished nature of the tabulation, than to re-establish relations with the reader by means of a flourish of conciliatory politesse. At the end of the list the needle frees itself from the groove; the nervous stammer is overcome and the narrative recovers its equilibrium. The phrase "to mention only", which comes up again and again throughout the novel, is reminiscent of eighteenth century discursive punctilio, and it serves as supporting evidence for Hugh Kenner's claim that in Watt, "provisionality, from being a point of epistemology, becomes almost a point of etiquette, as though to affirm anything at all [...] would be a discourtesy to the reader, a bullying".19 Kenner notes that the characters at the beginning of the book speak with a "bizarre civility" (bizarre because anachronistic), and this goes also for the narratorial voice.20

Having recovered from one list the narrative soon
embarks on another. This, however, is a list that really is "closed", in so far as it leaves no room for further possibilities, but is in my view of a different order from the dizzyingly repetitive lists considered by Connor which, however closed, always induce a sort of vertigo. It's a list of classical completeness and proportions, and though it has as the most crucial of its components a picture of utter ignorance, it remains serenely assured in its expression:

And sometimes Watt understood all, and sometimes he understood much, and sometimes he understood little, and sometimes he understood nothing, as now.

This list is in my view as representative as its predecessor. Compare, for example: "Yes, now the western sky was as the eastern, which was as the southern, which was as the northern"(22); or more comically: "For if there were two things that Watt disliked, one was the moon, and the other was the sun [...] And if there were two things that Watt loathed, one was the earth and the other was the sky."(31,34)  Watt is misrepresented in so far as its lists are regarded as evidence only of epistemological frustration. In its classical mode the novel aspires to and attains a confident inclusiveness of statement. This is
achieved when the attempt to record the particulars of an infinite series is given up and replaced by an appeal to more general categories.

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I want to return now to Arsene's description of the "poor old lousy old earth" and his insistence, via a parental catalogue, on its status as public property:

[...] my earth and my father's and my mother's and my father's father's and my mother's mother's and my father's mother's and my mother's father's and my mother's father's mother's and my father's mother's father's and my mother's father's father's mother's and my father's mother's father's father's and my mother's father's father's father's mother's and my father's mother's father's father's mother's father's and my mother's father's father's father's mother's father's and my mother's father's father's father's mother's father's and my mother's father's father's mother's mother's and other people's fathers' and mothers' and fathers' fathers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' mother's and mothers' mothers' and fathers' fathers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' mothers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' fathers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' mothers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' fathers' and mothers' fathers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' mothers' and mothers' mothers' and fathers' mothers' and mothers' mothers' and mothers' mothers' mothers'. An excrement. (45) 

Connor gives this as an example of an "open sequence" that "cannot" "come to an end". And yet not only is it true to say that the list does indeed come to an end, but also that it ends as it were decidedly (and not arbitrarily) at a particular point. This is underlined by the precise da capo
reprise of the original series: Arsene itemises his antecedents as far as his great-grandparents, and then, with precise symmetry, itemises in the same order, the generic antecedents, as far as the great-grandparents, of "other people". The exact repetition mitigates the sense of the arbitrary.

The tone that Beckett has achieved in this passage can be more easily discerned in the light of Jack MacGowran's edited recording, in which a rather different effect is produced. In an effort to exploit dramatic potential he cuts out the second series of fathers and mothers. As a result the section ends with the phrase "and other people's fathers' and mothers'", which MacGowran utters with a crescendo of impatient dismissal. It is as if MacGowran wanted to make the passage work like the sucking stones episode in Molloy (which can be found on the other side of the record). Molloy expatiates for several pages about the possible permutations of his sixteen sucking stones before confessing that "deep down" he "didn't give a fiddler's curse" (T 69). This is a familiar Beckettian manoeuvre whereby what is offered with one hand is snatched away by the other. What has been built up with patient care is swept
away in a violent gesture of self-cancellation. In the printed text of *Watt* this doesn't happen, and the list ends as neatly and as calmly as it began - with the punctilious punctuation of a full-stop (and not, for instance, with the arbitrarily placed " [...] and so on [...]" that ends the onion/peppermint series, but not the gargantuan sentence of which it is part).

It could be argued that the expletive "an excrement" constitutes a dismissal of the same kind as Molloy's. Importantly, however, these words are separated from the list by a full-stop. Beckett's prose undergoes enormous changes of tone between periods. "An excrement" seems too external, too much like something tacked on, to encroach upon the list. MacGowran tries to integrate it with the list by using "and other people's fathers' and mothers'" as a bridge; by turning this phrase into an irritable gesture of expulsion he makes "excrement" seem inevitable. It is important to stress, however, that in the published text the phrase "and other people's fathers' and mothers'" is not a gesture of expulsion, but one of inclusion: it links Arsene and his antecedents with other families. In any case "an excrement" is too coldly Latinate to be an effective
cancellation. It is more like a pedantic definition of the sum total than a cussing cancellation, and, as we have seen, this is a novel that is in earnest about the equation between humans and formless dead matter.

In spite of Arsene's professed weariness, then, with an earth that is old and "lousy" from the teeming generations that infest it, a number of those generations are listed with a determination that resembles Watt's walk in that its "regularity, and dogged air" (29) lend it grace by default. The list is tidy, orderly, processional; its delineation, indeed, is one of the novel's "nice processes" (69). Methodical diligence and intentness suggest careful attention and not tired carelessness. Arsene's abstract evocation of the family is representative of the novel's mode (only one of its modes) of precisely measured restraint and suspension of judgement with regard to the human family that contextualises us all.

Arsene's list is based on the passage in Ecclesiastes that states that "one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever". The Preacher contrasts human transience with the continuities of nature's processes, and draws a sort of chilly comfort from
the comparison. The individual life is only a tiny part of a wider pattern of human coming and going that can be seen to mirror the seasonal cycle of death and rebirth. Each individual generation is short-lived, but humanity as a whole, like the earth, abides. Arsene, too, moves quickly from the list of generations to a meditation on the seasons, but for him repetition and continuity seem at first to be a torment and not a comfort. The seasonal cycle, a classical theme for celebration, is found to be cause for complaint, and the yearly round is finally flatly dismissed. And yet the writing that precedes this remark has too much life in it, too many complex and contradictory feelings, to be so straightforwardly dispatched:

The crocuses and the larch turning green every year a week before the others and the pastures red with uneaten sheep's placentas and the long summer days and the new-mown hay and the wood-pigeon in the morning and the cuckoo in the afternoon and the cornrake in the evening and the wasps in the jam and the smell of the gorse and the look of the gorse and the apples falling and the children walking in the dead leaves and the larch turning brown a week before the others and the chestnuts falling and the howling winds and the sea breaking over the pier and the first fires and the hooves on the road and the consumptive postman whistling The Roses Are Blooming In Picardy and the standard oil-lamp and of course the snow and to be sure the slush and every fourth year the February debacle and the endless April showers and the crocuses and then the whole bloody business starting all over again. A turd.
MacGowran reads the passage as though it were one long and tedious list, but that is a reductive reading. The logic of the argument may suggest that that is the way to read it, but the rhythm is susceptible of other possibilities. There is not enough explicit weariness in the lines themselves to make the climax as clinching as it sets itself up to be. If "the whole bloody business starting all over again", is sure of its tone, the preceding passage is not. It only becomes conclusive with the introduction of the vocabulary of inevitability: "of course the snow and to be sure the slush." Before that the only thing that indicates weariness is the syntax: one of unbroken and unpunctuated succession. The long series of "ands" ("the crocuses and the larch [...] and the pastures [...] and the long summer days") picks up where the sequence of father and mother permutations left off. But does the series of conjunctions here create an irritable or a lyrical rhythm? The logic of the argument wants the unbroken syntax to convey unremitting repetition, but it it has a more positive effect too, indicating felicitous continuity. In this way the passage capitalises on an ambiguity latent in the Authorised Ecclesiastes. Arguing that the earth is coldly indifferent
to human movements, the phrase used is "the earth abideth" which suggests that its permanence is a reason for trusting it. To abide is not merely to remain, but to remain faithful.

The passage shows that a repetitive syntax which is supposed to be tormented can also accommodate the more conventional feeling that finds in abidingness a consolation.

Apart from the single conjunction "and", there are relatively few straightforward repetitions in these lines, and where they do occur they need not imply tedium. The cadences are delicately managed. "The larch turning brown a week before the others" echoes the earlier "larch turning green every year a week before the others". The effect there is one of balance, the second phrase rhyming with and complementing the first. "The smell of the gorse and the look of the gorse" could be articulated with fatigue or frustration, but alternatively the effect of this repetition could be one of surprise. It works rhythmically like a syncopation, with the second aspect of the gorse being stressed in a rhythmical quickening precipitated by a kind of extra beat: "[...] wasps in the jam and the smell of the
gorse, and the look of the gorse and the apples falling [...]". This gives it the effect of a momentary double-take.

The intentness that was manifested in the listing of parental permutations is carried over into this part of the passage, only here it is pursuing, not a cramped arithmetical logic, but the more spacious sequence of the seasons. The passage is full of careful observation about the nice processes of seasonal change, as in the lines about the larches being slightly out of synchrony. What seems at first like a hasty sketch of the seasons is actually precise in its details: almost every one of the twelve months can be specifically located. Such clear-sightedness justifies the use of clichés. These constantly threaten to take over, but they are judiciously deployed. So what purports to be weary of the seasons because they are predictable is not content to give them a tired or predictable treatment, as it might have been were it no more than a parody of pastoral.

The tone is not decided enough for parody. That "standard oil-lamp"; is it a lamp as predictable as the snow and the sleet ("the standard oil lamp and of course the snow and to be sure the sleet")? Or is it specifically a lamp that stands on the floor, a standard-lamp? Is it part of a
boring list of inevitabilities? Or a diligent list of particularities?

There is a danger here of misrepresenting the passage by sentimentalising it. It ought to be acknowledged that it is a typically Beckettian version of pastoral in its macabre detailing. Spring's renewal, for instance, is represented by those repellent "uneaten sheep's placentas", and then of course there is the "consumptive" postman. "Wasps in the jam" is idyllic in its way, but not for the wasps, and this little death in the midst of high summer is a characteristic observation. These slightly macabre elements suit the argument about the seasonal cycle being a hellish one.

But although the narrator claims to be appalled by the whole bloody business, the tone of the passage cannot be described merely as one of loathing. There is a cherishing, elegiac note too. In the lines about the summer, we are given a miniature of the yearly cycle in the movement from morning, through afternoon, to evening. The series has a classical air about it, it being a well-known metaphor for the brief life of man, as in the riddle of the sphinx. And for Beckett, the corn-crake, which comes with the evening, is a bird often associated with the death-rattle. 26 "Apples
falling" is more autumnal than it needs to be. It suggests very late summer, but those apples might easily have been growing and not falling. "Children walking in the dead leaves" makes the first explicit connection between the seasons and human life, and like the dying postman, it reminds us that the latter is as cyclical as the former.27

The elegiac tone, then, results from a sort of seepage of the autumnal elements in the passage beyond their proper boundary. But this does not destroy the sense of cyclical continuity; instead it draws attention to the transience that resides in the individual human life. Against this, the description of the seasons' endlessness cannot be straightforwardly characterised as weary. The argument from Ecclesiastes remains - human life is brief compared with the earth's permanence - but the feelings implied by it are not stable. When Beckett writes about "the endless April showers" he is making a sardonic joke, because the "endless" is finding fault, and not cherishing, as it conventionally ought to be. But there is more to it than that because there is at least some vestige of the mocked attitude that abides, however residually.

Finally, the complex feelings of the passage about the
seasons are not entirely suppressed by the cynical blow they receive with "the whole bloody business starting all over again", and a slight wistfulness or yearning is carried over into the lines that follow:

And if I could begin it all over again, knowing what I know now, the result would be the same. And if I could begin again a third time, knowing what I would know then, the result would be the same. And if I could begin it all over again a hundred times, knowing each time a little more than the time before, the result would always be the same, and the hundredth life as the first. (46)

Those lines express an uncompromisingly grim determinism, which concludes that "all is vanity" because in any case, and there are limitless possible cases, "the result would always be the same". Some comfort can be gleaned from this in terms of human solidarity: even if "the same things" do not "happen to us all", diverse lives come to the same thing in the end. Nevertheless classical dogma is tinged with romantic feeling because of the wonders worked with the syntax. It is a syntax of inevitability and logic; 'if x, then y', and the repetitions produce an argument something like a parody of an equation. 'If x=y, then (x+1)=y, (x+2)=y...(x+100)=y': the result is always the same.²⁸ It depends upon repetition to make its rhetorical point. And
yet it is just these repetitions that ensure that the initial clause - "if I could begin it all over again" - is charged with a wistful plangency that resists the constraint of the logic. There is thus a faint suggestion that the phrase 'if only' is hovering over the lines. For all his explicit tiredness with the processes of life and nature, Arsene indicates a residual desire, like Krapp's, to "be again" (CDW 223).

1.3 **Elegy and Rigmarole**

In a later part of his statement, Arsene intensifies the elegiac tone that is latent in his complaint to nature by returning to the detail of the children walking in the dead leaves.

But another evening shall come and the light die away out of the sky and the light from the earth and the door open on [...] the leaves falling through the dark from various altitudes, never two coming to earth at the same time, then bowling red and brown and yellow and grey briskly for an instant, yes, through the dark, for an instant, then running together in heaps, here a heap, and there a heap, to be paddled in by happy boys and girls on their way home from school looking forward to Hallow-e'en and Guy Fawkes and Christmas and the New Year, haw! yes, happy girls and boys looking forward to the happy New Year, and then perhaps carted off in old
barrows and used as dung [...] (W 56)

The syntax is deliberately ambiguous so that for a moment one sees the children and not the leaves being "carted off", not in barrows but in coffins. Once again humanity is equated with dung.

For all Beckett's notorious fear of longevity, then, his work is often elegiac in tone, and Watt perhaps more so than any of the other longer works, except perhaps Ill Seen Ill Said. Lawrence Harvey is surely right to characterise it as a novel of middle-age stock-taking.²⁹ It comes after the exuberantly youthful early fiction and before the trilogy's irascible fever to "have done". Although Watt, like the trilogy, breathes a certain animus against the notion of birth, it rarely manages to kindle an enthusiasm for making a quietus in the way that the French work does. Dying, in Watt, is at least as much a matter for regret as living. In fact the novel achieves its peculiar tone by remaining undecided on this matter.³⁰

Critics who focus on the novel's epistemological concerns and philosophical implications tend to understate its status as a work of literary elegy, a work that mourns the passing of time and lyrically laments the brevity of
life. Watt's game with the embers in the kitchen fireplace is an epistemological game (he finds that if he covers the lamp with his hat the embers glow more brightly than when the room is properly illuminated; best results are not always obtained in the glaring light of rational enquiry) and yet the embers, after which Beckett would name a later play, are dwindling: finally "the ashes would not redden any more, but remained grey, even in the dimmest light." (37)

The novel is haunted by the notion of time. During the long discussion of the episode of the Galls' visit to tune the piano we hear that "Watt could not accept [such incidents] for what they were, the simple games time plays with space, now with these toys, now with those, but was obliged, because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what they meant." (71-2) The episode is certainly, as many critics have suggested, an epistemological essay on the folly of man's need to know, his need to deploy meanings. Nevertheless, in the sentence quoted, the apparently abstract notion of "the simple games time plays with space" is far from being a neutral description of a situation prior to the ascription of meaning. Games involving the interaction of time and space might suggest the value-free
sphere of Einsteinian relativity, and yet here, time *plays* with space, its toy, like a malignant deity acting the heartless child. Implicitly the game is a cruel one because the sentence alludes to the classical axiom of *tempus edax*.

For a novel so apparently removed from the world of quotidian concerns, *Watt* keeps a steady eye on the clock: "time, as time will, drew on" (145); "these moments have changed us [...] we are no longer the same now as when they began - ticktick! ticktick! - to elapse" (48); Mr. Ash tells Arsene it is seventeen minutes past five but "a moment later Big Ben [...] struck six" (44). The nice processes of time are carefully monitored, as when, late in the novel, Watt's coat and hat are described:

> It was to be observed that the colours, on the one hand of his coat, on the other of his hat, drew closer and closer, the one to the other, with every passing lustre. Yet how different had been their beginnings! The one green! The other yellow! So it is with time, that lightens what is dark, that darkens what is light.

> It was to be expected that, once met, they would not stay, no, but continue, each as it must, to age, until the hat was green, the coat yellow, and then through the last circles paling, deepening, swooning cease, the hat to be a hat, the coat to be a coat. For so it is with time. (217)

This is a novel marked by dwindling decay in the face of
"centuries that fall, from the pod of eternity" (129). It is a novel of darkening skies and lengthening shadows (22,197), and one that features a moon "long past the full" and "waning, waning". Again and again we're reminded of the process by which "to dust thou shalt return". Mary's duster "fell from her fingers, to the dust, where having at once assumed the colour (grey) of its surroundings it disappeared [...]" (50). Mr.Graves, the gardener, is congratulated by Arthur for the way he "let[s] fall the seed, absent in mind, as the priest dust, or ashes, into the grave [...]" (180). The University grants committee retire from their bizarre meeting as though from a burial: "finally as from the filling grave, or with the loved one disappearing conveyance [...] slowly their sighing bodies they tore away" (194-5). The meeting as a whole has been punctuated by splendid mock-epic evocations of the coming night:

through the western window of the vast hall shone the low red winter sun, stirring the air, the chambered air, with its angry farewell shining, whilst via the opposite or oriental apertures or lights, the murmur rose, appeasing, of the myriad faint clarions of night [...] Rose and gloom, farewell and hail, mingled, clashed, vanquished, victor, victor, vanquished, in the vast indifferent chamber. (190-1)
An odd feature of the novel, and one that underlines its sentimentalising preoccupation with elegy, is its tendency to find opportunities for mourning even where loss has been averted. At the railway station, on the way to Knott's house, Watt bumps into a railway porter whose can rocks but does not fall. "This was a happy chance, for had it fallen on its side, full as it perhaps was of milk, then who knows the milk might have run out, all over the platform, and even on the rails, beneath the train, and been lost." (22) This is an odd aside, this mournful cry over unspilt milk. It finds an echo in the narrator's remarks about the fortuity of the stone hurled by Lady McCann landing on Watt's hat and the possibility that had it not "why then a wound had perhaps been opened, never, never again to close." (30) Watt's fear for the fate of the milk may also remind us of All that Fall, a mournful play in which "a little child fell out of the carriage [...] On to the line [...] Under the wheels" (CDW 199), and was lost.31

In a transition that is characteristic of the novel the milk that had been so nearly lost is soon re-represented, not as a vulnerable and precious commodity, but as the object of a Sisyphean labour. There are two groups of cans
at either end of the station. "[The porter] is sorting the cans, said Watt. Or perhaps it is a punishment for disobedience, or some neglect of duty."(24) The sorting is an analogue to the novel's tabulatory list-making; it can seem hellishly unending, but is undertaken lest anything "be[] lost".

For Watt betrays anxiety in the face of ending as well as continuation, and the lists provide a vehicle for the expression of both these anxieties. The list seeks both to define and to defer final definition; it wants to be exhaustive but dreads exhaustion. In Steven Connor's words: "always, mixed with a longing for the series to stop, there must also be a kind of fear that it will stop." 32

In spite of his horror of unending life, Beckett has always had a penchant for uncomfortably palpable representations of premature termination. Malone remarks of one of his characters: "It is right that he too should have his little chronicle, his memories, his reason, and be able to recognise the good in the bad, the bad in the worst, and so grow gently old all down the unchanging days and die one day like any other day, only shorter." (T 191) An abrupt conclusion mars the magisterial syntax that would, like a
life, "grow gently old" and come to an end only in the fullness of time. A traditional consolation about the timeliness of human mortality - "to everything there is a season [...] a time to be born and a time to die" - is here belatedly revised. Watt, too, has an acute sense of the untimely.

Take, for instance, the description of Watt's speculations on the length of his stay at Knott's house.

If the period of service, first on the ground-floor, and then on the first floor, was not one year, then it was less than one year, or more than one year. But if it was less than one year, then there was want, seasons passing, or a season, or a month, or a week, or a day, wholly or in part, on which the light of Mr. Knott's service had not shone, nor its dark brooded, a page of the discourse of the earth unturned. For in a year all is said, in any given latitude. But if it was more than one year, then there was surfeit, seasons passing, or a season, or a month, or a week, or a day, wholly or in part, twice through the beams the shadows of the service of Mr. Knott, a fragment of rigmarole re-read. For the new year says nothing new, to the man fixed in space.

This passage articulates a dilemma that lurks behind much of Beckett's work. To use a word that was sufficiently important to Beckett to become the suggestively ambiguous title of a late prose piece, one wants to be able to utter the satisfied "enough" that indicates the overcoming of want, but not the impatient "enough" that suggests surfeit.
The passage makes use of the balanced antitheses that are so characteristic of this novel, but which are less noticeable in the subsequent work. The antithesis in the passage quoted clearly sets elegy against parody, yearning against disgust. On the one hand there is an anxiety about unfulfilled potential, and on the other an anxiety about excess. Transience and longevity are weighed in the balance and found to be equally irksome.

The crucial juxtaposition is that of the image of the "page of the discourse of the earth unturned" with that of the "fragment of rigmarole reread". The first metaphor reaches back to the classical notion of the book of nature. It is a richly suggestive line, containing subsidiary images. "The earth unturned" is a picture of seasonal arrest; not only is it suggestive of a planet halted in its cosmological course but also of the ground unploughed and hence unprepared for the renewal of growth. In the second part of the passage a loss of coherence is registered; "page" has become "fragment", "discourse" has become "rigmarole". The notion of meaningful continuity has been replaced by that of rambling incoherence. Sequence is usurped by repetition.
Both metaphors are metafictional, and they draw our attention to our own activity in reading the novel *Watt*, a novel which is more likely than most to tempt us both to re-read pages and to leave them unturned.

In a sense the passage offers two explanations for the novel's obsessive use of permutative lists. On the one hand they are produced out of a desire to leave no stone unturned, a need to say all that can be said, on however limited a subject, in the face of time that is running out. On the other hand they seem driven by a sort of crazed spirit of parody, eager to turn sense into nonsense by means of almost infinite rereadings or reinterpretations of certain "events (if one may speak here of events)" (129). The novel wavers, then, between elegy and parody, between discourse and rigmarole.

A couple of pages later the narrator tells of Watt's sense, outside the "haven" (133) of Knott's house, of

> the languor of the task done but not ended, the fever of the task ended but not done, the languor and the fever of the going of the coming too late, the languor and the fever of the coming of the going too soon.

(133)

I take this to be another reference to "surfeit" and "want" (boredom and need, tedium and desire) in situations where
time is either surplus to requirements or simply not enough.
Later we're told of Mr. Gorman, the station-master, and his wish to leave a superior station to his successor "at his retirement, if he did not die before, or on his death, if he did not retire first" (229) There's a hankering here for synchronicity, leaving neither a surfeit of unfilled time nor a want of time to fill.

In the light of all this, the apparently absurd ambition of the Lynch family, to attain, as the sum of the ages of each living member, exactly a thousand years, is not entirely an object of ridicule. It is to their extraordinary chronicle that I want to turn in the next section.

1.4 The Lynch Millenium

The aim of the Lynches, according to Watt's reckoning as narrated by Sam - and there is a sense in which the aspiration is Watt's, for the Lynches are his cerebral creation - is to arrange matters so that the combined ages of the living members of the family adds up to a thousand
years. The precise reason for this is unclear but it seems another of the novel's representations of humans (the Lynches themselves, and Watt too) trying to impose pattern, order, or at least limit on unending and uncontrollable processes. The Lynch millenium is hardly triumphalist in character; it is merely as if, after a thousand years, the Lynches will have somehow completed their sentence. The project is pointless in the sense that its achievement is both obscure and negligible, and in the sense that the thousand year mark is elusive because no sooner achieved than surpassed.

We are told that when Watt enters Mr. Knott's house the twenty eight members of the family have a combined age of 980 years. (A footnote acknowledges that the figure is wrong; it should, incidentally, be 978). There follows a calculation as to the amount of time the family would have to continue to live in its present form to attain a thousand years exactly. This calculation makes the bizarre assumption that all the ages given are exact, and therefore that every member of the family shares the same birthday which is also the day Watt arrived. In another 8½ months the "Lynch millenium" (103) will be complete. (i.e. $8\frac{1}{2} \times 28 = 238$
months. 238 ÷ 12 = 19.8 years. 19.8 + 980 = (roughly) 10000.)

The calculation is only valid, in so far as it is valid at all, "if none died, if none were born" (101), that is to say, in one of Beckett's lapidary paragraphs, "If all were spared, the living spared, the unborn spared" (102). The living must be spared from dying, and the unborn spared from living. There's a wonderful even-handedness about this, in its implication that birth and death are matters for equal regret. Watt is more judicious about its judgements on 'life' than, say, the Trilogy.

Of course "all were not spared" (102), and the millenium calculations are jeopardised both by death and by the rigmarole of new life. A child is "expelled" (102), courtesy of Liz, and Liz dies. The millenium is duly retarded. Anne gives birth to two babies which brings the millenium forward slightly, but then Joe, Bill and Jim all die and "set back the longed-for day [...] by no less than seventeen years approximately" (107). Even the wild proliferation of the Lynch family, a family founded on excess - they are dreamt up to cater for Knott's leftovers - falls short in the end.
The idea of the millenium puts unusual stress on the fact of the frailty of human contemporaneousness. We are given a sense of a communal body living in unison, "[...] puff puff breath again they breathed, in and out, the twenty-eight, and all was changed" (101). But this synchronisation only holds until "there was death" or "there was birth". (101) The novel as a whole is much pre-occupied with generations over a vast stretch of time "until it be so long ago that all trace of them is lost" (58). With the Lynch family the emphasis shifts from diachronic patterns of humanity to a synchronic slice of life at a given moment. We're encouraged to think not in consolatory terms of those who *sub specie aeternitatis* are coming and going, but of those who, for the moment at least, are staying.  

The Lynches fall short of their hoped for thousand years, and yet, with the addition of Sam's numerous bastard children (104) they will have overshot the mark by some way. Having seemingly sprung from Knott's left-overs, the Lynches leave their own remainders, these unaccounted for half-Lynches. (Analogously the novel itself has its residua too, in the form of the unincorporated addenda.) Their project is foiled by the novel's twin demons, want and
surfeit. The description of the Lynches, like many of the lists in the novel, is undertaken in an effort to leave no page of the discourse unturned but courts the reader's weariness with rigmarole.

1.5 Keeping it in the Family

\textit{Merde for his family. Though they really were darlings, they were pets, with all their little faults and shortcomings [...] (DFMW 147)}

The episode of the Lynches is, among the novel's numerous examples of excessive tabulation, perhaps the comic \textit{pièce de résistance}. Its comedy, however, is more than that of "of an exhaustive enumeration" (P 92), and the episode is more than an arbitrary example of formal proliferation; the multiplying Lynches are thematically central too. With the Lynch episode Beckett underlines the novel's tendency to regard humans in terms of their extended family. The individual is both defined by and lost among a welter of filial relations and fellow creatures. When Liz Lynch dies we are told that

[...] a mother, a mother-in-law, an aunt, a sister, a
sister-in-law, a cousin, a niece-in-law, a niece, a niece-in-law, a daughter-in-law, a granddaughter-in-law and of course a grandmother (was) snatched from her grand-father-in-law, her father-in-law, her uncles-in-law, her aunt, her aunts-in-law, her cousins, her brothers-in-law, her sisters, her niece, her nephew, her sons-in-law, her daughters, her sons, her husband and of course her four little grandchildren [...] (102)

In the chronic chronicle of the Lynch dynasty Beckett adopts a neo-Swiftian point of view from which the Lynches' two most conspicuous characteristics - fertility and ill-health - are seen to define the family of man as a whole. The Lynches are only individualised by their particular defect. To each, as Hamm puts it in Endgame, "his speciality" (CDW 97). "Blind Bill" and "Maim Mat", in particular, show how illness is bound up with identity. Disease is the most prominent inheritable characteristic: there is Jack's son Tom, for instance

who some said took after his father because of the weakness of his head and others said took after his mother because of the weakness of his chest and some said took after his paternal grandfather Jim because of his taste for strong spirits and others said took after his paternal grandmother Kate because of a patch he had on the sacrum the size of a plate of weeping eczema and some said took after his paternal great-grandfather Tom because of the cramps he had in his stomach. (100)

The passage parodies Puritan rhetoric about the family as the all-too efficient vehicle for the transmission of
'weakness' - the physical and the moral being easily confused. With the Lynches, the sins of the fathers are visited on the sons. A Puritan moral tone (with coyness and prurience comically combined) helps both to localise the episode by characterising the Lynches as irresponsible Catholic breeders and to universalise it by preaching more generally on the sin of giving birth: " [...] and indeed it was very wrong of Sean, knowing what he was and knowing who Kate was, to do what he did to Kate, so that she conceived and brought forth Rose [...]"(100)

The Lynch family is, in more senses than one, the location of a great deal of mischief. From the description given it is possible to draw up a family tree of the five generations, but there are several misfits. No parentage is given for "the boon twins Art and Con" (99). Are they Lynches at all? Have they artfully conned their way into the family circle? In the description of the fourth generation there is a casual reference to "Frank's daughter Bridie" (100), but no Frank has been mentioned. (He is a remainder, or left-over, that might precipitate another genealogy.) The implication is that Frank is a "stranger from without" (106) who has fathered a child on one of the
Lynch women (we don't know which) and that she has passed off Bridie as a genuine Lynch. There is lengthy speculation as to the father of Ann's two babies; he may or may not be a Lynch. Adultery and illegitimacy are not the only skeletons in the Lynch closet. There is, as Malone will remark of the Lambert family, "incest [...] in the air" (T 198). Fifteen year-old Bridie was "a prop and stay to the family, sleeping as she did by day and at night receiving in the toolshed so as not to disturb the family for twopence, or threepence, or fourpence, or sometimes even fivemance a time, that depended, or a bottle of ale [...]" (100). "Receiving in the toolshed" is a lewd metaphor as well as a periphrasis and the syntax implies that it may be her family whom she receives as well as whom she tries not to disturb. Her prostitution may make her more than a financial prop then. In-breeding, if not actual incest, is suggested by the fact that four of the Lynch wives are "née Sharpe", Sharpe being the married name of May Lynch.

For all the disapproval of the pullulating Lynches - "such vermin pullulate" (44) - it must be said that there is a certain amount of authorial enthusiasm for their spirited resistance to life's handicaps. The portrait of Sam, for
instance, "whose amorous disposition was notorious [...] and who made no secret of his having committed adultery locally on a large scale, moving from place to place in his self-propelling invalid's chair [...]" (104) is tinged with admiration for one so eminently able in the one capacity in which he is not disabled. Given Sam's vocation, it is "a merciful providence" that he is "paralysed [...] from no higher than the knees down and from no lower than the waist up" (99). The treatment of Sam is an exaggerated version of the popular admiration for one who 'can still manage it at his age and in his condition'. Sam's transgressive acts of adultery are a sort of rebellious retort against the nature that has dealt him such a poor hand. Nevertheless Sam is a family-man as well as adulterer; his self-propelled transgressive individualism is matched by his allegiance to house and home: "he had no purpose, interest or joy in life other than this, to set out after a good dinner of meat and vegetables in his wheel-chair and stay out committing adultery until it was time to go home to his supper, after which he was at his wife's disposal" (104).
And would he have gone into the Lynch family at such length if, in thought, he had not been obliged to pass, from the dog, to the Lynches, as to one of the terms of the relation that the dog wove nightly, the other of course being Mr. Knott's remains. (114)

In outlining the weird proliferation of the Lynches Beckett passes wry comment on the distinctly odd nature of human provenance and human relations.

The family is introduced - with conventional novelistic authority - as though it was a straightforward empirical fact: "The name of this fortunate family was Lynch and at the moment of Watt's entering Mr. Knott's service this family of Lynch was made up as follows" (98). But the demonstrative ("this") is indicative not so much of the family's empirical existence as of its hypothetical status. Beckett emphasises the proximity of the story-teller to the logician: 'let there be a family and let this family be called Lynch...' 39

The family has its obscure beginnings some eleven pages before its formal introduction when, in discussing Knott's eating arrangements, the narrator lets fall the apparently casual remark that "Watt's instructions were to give what Mr. Knott left of this dish, on the days that he did not eat..."
it all, to the dog" (87). Having spent four pages on the
details of Knott's dining practice, this last remark, coming
(in the Calder text, at least) at the bottom of the page,
promises to be the end of the matter - it seems a
'throwaway' remark. The unsuspecting reader takes "the dog"
for granted; it is not something a novel would ordinarily be
required to elaborate upon. Trouble starts, however (and
the Lynches become a gleam in the eye), when we turn the
page and find that "there was no dog in the house" (88).
There then begins Watt's bizarre and elaborate speculations
on the logistics involved in ensuring that a dog can be
supplied at the right times to eat Knott's food. As so
often in Beckett an apparent conclusion - here about the
final resting-place of remains - is in fact only a
beginning. Knott's processed food is part of a nice process
that, like the incident of the Galls, was "not ended, when
it was past, but continued to unfold [...]".(69)

From the seemingly simple requirement, "the dog", there
grows with implacable logic and something like the spirit of
scholastic angelology, a vast population. If a dog is to
be brought to the door this presupposes a dog-keeper to
bring him. Then there is the problem of mortality. Since at
any time the dog or the dog-keeper may die, it is necessary to keep a reserve, and a reserve for the reserve, and so on. There must, in short, be a system of dynastic succession. What is needed is a "kennel or colony of famished dogs" (96) and "a suitable large needy local family of say two parents and say from ten to fifteen children and grandchildren passionately attached to their birthplace."(97) Moreover this family is to be provided for by means of "a handsome small initial lump sum to be paid down and by a liberal annual pension of fifty pounds to be paid monthly and by occasional seasonal gifts of loose change and tight clothes and by untiring well-timed affectionate words of advice and encouragement and consolation [...]" (97). The need for a dog - or rather "the dog", for "was a dog the same thing as the dog?" (93) - has occasioned the evolution of an entire working community, the growth of a small town.

Though the narrator affirms that the family was in place when Watt began his service at Knott's they seem at first more like the product of Watt's mental proliferation. The family is logical necessity before it is empirical fact, and it is as much Watt as the patriarchal Tom Lynch who has gone forth and multiplied. This is confirmed by the parallel
between Tom's physically invalid family and Watt's mathematically invalid calculations about their ages; a footnote tells us that "the figures given here are incorrect. The consequent calculations are therefore doubly erroneous" (101). Just as in-breeding accentuates inheritable diseases, so arithmetic can multiply an initial error.

The quasi-evolutionary processes of the Lynch family, who descend inexorably from the execrable dog, link the episode with that of the flea in *Endgame*. There too an apparently innocuous creature heralds (at least potentially) a burgeoning human race. A flea provokes Hamm to proclaim that "humanity might start from there all over again!" (CDW 108). Evolution is a preoccupation in Beckett because it widens the family circle even further, to include all life: dogs and fleas are not only fellow creatures but obscure relations.

The family, like the dog and the kennel, materialises from Watt's theoretical proposition into a "real live" (97) one, "in full swing, for all the world to see, and admire" (98). This makes the Lynches seem like creatures in the closed system of a zoo, or indeed, like creatures on a
divinely ordained earth. With the creation of the Lynches word becomes flesh. In this respect the creation of the Lynches is like the notoriously fishy fiat a few pages later: Erskine's movements are compared with those of "certain fish" which rise and fall from the surface to the ocean bed. "But do such fish exist?", asks the narrator; "Yes, such fish exist, now." (118) The novel makes great play with the link between author and Author. The description of Kate Lynch as a "bleeder" (100) elicits the book's most magisterial footnote: "Haemophilia is, like enlargement of the prostrate, an exclusively male disorder. But not in this work." (100) Provocative authorial sang-froid in the face of a fictional transgression of natural order mirrors what could be seen as the cold indifference of a deity that is responsible for disorders in His own works.

In ironic contradistinction to the Divine fiat that inaugurated the human race, Knott's casual remark about what is to be done with his leftovers triggers the growth of the Lynches, who are more like accidental by-products than lords of creation. They seem to have been carelessly set in motion, without prospect of cessation - "[...] and so on
indefinitely [...]" (96) - by a more or less absent deity.

There is an implicit parallel between the subsidised Lynches and the "famished dogs" (96) they maintain, for in the end they both live off the crumbs of Knott's table. Those crumbs - actually "a mess, or poss" (84) - are contained, as befitting remains, in "the famous pot" (84) that had given Watt such trouble and which had led him to thoughts of human mortality when "he might just as well have thought of himself as a box or urn" (80). Knott's dish of leftovers is, in other words, a pot with his remains in it. The Lynches' raison d'être is Knott's residua. For Nietzsche the death of God did not mean that he was simply absent, but that the universe was littered with his corpse. In such a universe, Watt implies, and specifically "on this bitch of an earth" (CDW 37), it's a dog's life.

1.7 A Dog's Life

The metaphor is among Beckett's favourites. In Endgame, for instance, Clov slavishly brings Hamm his toy
dog with the announcement "Your dogs are here" (CDW 111), and more explicitly Murphy's life had been "a dog's life without a dog's prerogative" (M 47). But the qualification in the last case implicitly acknowledges that a dog's life is, at least ordinarily, not wholly abject.

In his fascinating account of the metaphorical uses of the word, William Empson argues that when men are described as dogs the main derogatory feeling is offset by a variety of conflicting overtones suggestive of sympathy. "Dog" is not wholly dogmatic. For Empson words that articulate ideological formulae often contain within them "a kind of shrubbery of smaller ideas [...] which [...] may be a half-conscious protest against the formulae, a means of keeping them at bay." (158) Thus the moralism that describes a man as a dog may harbour secret sympathy and even respect. The complexity of the word can "build a defence against Puritanism" (159). Beckett's treatment of the Lynch family is characterised by Puritanical disapproval, and the implicit comparison with the dogs is part of this, but is also the location of latent sympathy.

The purpose of the dog metaphor, as described by Empson, and perhaps the one most obviously relevant to
Beckett, is to "blow the gaff on human nature" - a phrase that Empson glosses as "'give the low-down', with the extra idea of puncturing something inflated." (166) This can be a surprisingly constructive device. "Dog, it is absurd, but half-true to say, became to the eighteenth-century sceptic what God had been to his ancestors, the last security behind human values." (168) There is a feeling that "'if the worst is the dog, humanity is still tolerable'" (168). A kind of comfort is drawn from "a solid-rock bottom, a dog-nature". (169) Man as dog occasions security because it draws a line under investigations into the potentially abysmal depths of human nature and the human mind so prone - as in Shakespeare - to lunacy; "it makes what we do not know about the roots of our own minds seem cheerful and not alarming" (169). If man is a dog "the game [is] safe, and the field small enough to be knowable." (169) Empson suggests that the eighteenth century had a particular need for such consolation, for "the more you respect reason the more you must fear the irrational". (169) Swift, he argues, "kept himself sane for as long as he did on secret doses of this feeling [...] its goodhumour and humility are somehow at the back of and make endurable the most regal solvents of
his irony". (169) The feeling is there in Beckett too, as part of his Swiftian inheritance. I have argued that Watt, which Beckett wrote to stay sane, is torn between the instabilities of personal neurosis and a commitment to classical axioms; this is reflected in the conflict between an intimation that "the worst is not/ So long as we can say 'This is the worst'" and a covert resort to the underpinning dogma that "the worst is the dog". Empson remarks that if you think of yourself as a dog it isn't necessary to "hate yourself"; "the trouble about Evolution was that one could not feel the same about monkeys [...] There is a curious agreement [...] that if we are animals [the dog] is the kind of animal we would like to be". (170) It may be that for Beckett the disintegration of values consequent upon a "loss of species" (W 82) can be shored up by recourse to the dog.

Among the main derogatory senses of "dog" are, "vagabond" and, as Empson puts it, "loose in sex". (163) The impoverished and proliferating Lynches clearly fit these categories, but they are also subject to the word's "rogue sentiment", whereby what Empson calls a "hearty" sense complements, without ever quite replacing, the derogatory
one. The result is a "doggish mock-heroic" (169). The man condemned as an itinerant and licentious dog is secretly admired for his independence and freedom. There's an element of this in the treatment of Sam Lynch, "self-propelled" adulterer and rogue, genially outfronting his disabilities. "The dog [...] shows a cheerful stoicism based on [...] indifference to dignity", writes Empson (166). Sam is only the most extreme version of the family as a whole, whose proclivity for undignified illness (mangy curs the lot of them, all sick as dogs) is matched only by their stoical and dogged pursuit of the millenium.

"Doggedness" is a variant on the 'dog' metaphor that, as a previous section has indicated, is particularly important in Watt where the hero's awkward ambulatory motions have at least a distinct "regularity and dogged air" (W 29). Tracing the word's history, Empson notes that "the old sense was 'cursed, malicious', then 'fixedly malicious', 'obstinate' [...], and from this it took its eighteenth century twist into 'having rugged strength of character'."(167) Watt borrows more from the eighteenth century, in terms of diction, than from any other, and the novel as a whole exudes (and demands from the reader) a
Johnsonian admiration for gritty determination against the odds. "No doubt", writes Empson, "'dogged' itself was felt to be connected with the verb, and the verb took this direction because 'dogging a trail' was one of the more important activities of a dog and happened to need naming". (167) Like the narrator, the reader of Watt must dog many a trail of peripatetic lists and permutations and only doggedness will see him through. The narrative trail of the Lynch family, for instance, in an episode which has the form of an eighteenth century interpolation, requires the same kind of effort from the reader - "puff puff" (W 101) - as from the doggedly reproductive Lynches.

1.8 Conclusion

The Irish context of the novel should not be forgotten. The Lynch family represents "local indigent proliferation" (97) and is thoroughly Irish in character: "[...] there was Joe's wife née Doyly-Byrne [...]" (98). The episode is related to Beckett's early journalistic outburst against the Catholic Irish Free State's censorship procedures and the
outlawing of contraceptives - policies which for Beckett were intimately connected: "Sterilisation of the mind and apotheosis of the litter suit well together. Paradise peopled with virgins and the earth with decorticated multiparas." (D 87) The depiction of the Lynches as an irresponsibly loutish clan (not for nothing are they called 'Lynch') of impoverished but spectacularly fecund invalids can be seen as part of the novel's more general programme of Catholic-baiting. This is itself partly a defensive assertion of cultural identity from an author who had exchanged one Catholic state for another and who always remained conscious of his own family's Protestant-Huguenot roots, and partly a reaction to a literary inheritance of Ascendancy sentimentalisation of a backward and recalcitrant society. The Lynches are far from the idealised Gaels of Revival myth.

Nevertheless the episode is much more than a piece of localised satire. The distinctly biblical tone of the Lynch genealogy - "Kate [...] conceived and brought forth Rose"(100) - whilst underlining the protestant character of the narratorial voice, steeped as ever in the King James version, importantly lends the passage a classical air and
gives it a claim to universal application. A historically local situation is seen as representative of the human condition. An 'Irish' plight - one of poverty, servitude, disease and uncontrolled birth - is really a general one.

Indeed the "indigent proliferation" (97) of the Lynches is not merely "local" in so far as it is reflected in the proliferation of characters in the novel as a whole. Watt is a densely populated book, far more so than any other work by Beckett. There are for its hero "thousands of fellow creatures within call" (79); the trouble being that, as Arsene remarks of Mr. Ash, "such vermin pullulate" (44). Watt is as "lousy" as Arsene's poor old earth (45); it too plays host to multitudes.

The named dramatis personae are as follows:

Watt, Sam, Mr Knott, Mr Hunchy Hackett, the Glencullen Hacketts, Goff Nixon, Tatty Nixon, Professor Cooper, Mr.Cream, Mr.Thompson, Mr.Colquhoun, Mr.Berry, Grehan, Byrne, Hyde, Nelly, Tatty's mother Nelly, "several Nellies", Larry Nixon, Quin, Mr.Nesbit, Mr. Lowry (the station-master), Evans (the newsagent), Mr 'Dum' Spiro, Martin Ignatius Mackenzie, Lady McCann (of the McCann clan), Miss Ma Magrew, Mr. Man, Mrs. Man, Master Man, Miss Man, Arsene, Vincent, Erskine, Walter, Arthur, Micks, Mr. Graves, Mrs. Graves, Mr. Ash, Mary, Anne, Jane, the Galls (father and son), the Lynches (Tom, Joe, Jim, Bill, May Sharpe, Mrs Joe Lynch nee Doyly Byrne, Kate nee Sharpe, Joe's boy Tom, Bill's boy Sam, May's spinster daughter Ann, Jim's lad Jack, Art, Con, young Tom's wife Mag nee Sharpe, Sam's wife Liz nee Sharpe, Jack's wife Lil nee Sharpe, Simon, Anne, Blind
Bill, Maim Mat, Kate, Sean, [Frank], Bridie, Tom, Rose, Cerise, Pat, and Larry) Katie Byrne, Tom, Dick, Harry (and "another"), Mrs Gorman (the fishwoman), Mr. Gorman (her husband) Mr. Ernest Louit, Mr. Thomas Nackybal (a.k.a. Tisler), Mr. Fitzwein, Mr. Magershon, Mr. O'Meldon, Mr. MacStern, Mr. de Baker, Miss Lingard, Mr. Lingard, Mrs. Gorman (mother of Mr. Gorman) Mr. Gormon, Mr. Case (the signal-man), Mrs. Case, Mr. Nolan, Arsy Cox, Herring-gut Waller, Cack-faced Miller, Mr. Cole, Mrs. Penny-a-hoist Pim, Riley, Mr Art Conn O'Connery.

This is not to mention the dogs, O'Connor, Kate and Cis, nor the horse Joss.

Some of the other names alluded to include:

"judicious Hooker", George Russell (A.E.), Saint Bonaventura, Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales, Sanchez, Suarez, Henno, Soto, Diana, Concina and Dens, Cangiamila, Pope Benedict XIV, Buxtehude, Judge Jeffreys, Daphne, Watt Tyler, Big Ben, Christ, Bosch, Davus, Heem, "the Master of the Leopardtown Halflengths", Chinnery, and Slattery.

There is also a proliferating host of unnamed characters:

the kissing couple on Hackett's bench, the policeman, the pregnant woman who passes Hackett and the Nixons, the train-driver, the stoker, the guard, the station staffs, the consumptive postman, the porter, the "connoisseurs on whom the exceptional quality of Watt was not lost", the nun or priest spotted by Watt, the old man whom Arthur meets in the garden, the pianist in the second picture in Erskine's room, the old lady who takes off her wooden leg for Watt, the mistress or master in charge of Mary and Ann, the milkboy, the man "bitten by a dog, in the leg", the man "scratched by a cat, in the nose", the woman "butted by a goat, in the loins", the man "disembowelled by a bull, in the
bowels", the canon, the missionary, the priest "shat on
by a dove, from above, in the eye", Liz Lynch's baby,
Ann Lynch's two babies, Sam Lynch's fifteen legitimate
but dead children, Sam Lynch's numerous illegitimate
offspring, the priest friend of the Lynch family, the
boy who works at the station, the College Bursar,
Knott's friend who phones to enquire after his health,
"a meritorious widow", "a one-legged man", Mrs.
Gorman's admirers (before, after and during Mr.
Gorman), the partners of Watt's "two well-defined
romances", as well as his "male friends", "the maddened
prizeman", and the woman of whom an addendum notes "her
married life one long drawsheet".

Moreover, many of the characters in the novel have a
habit of invoking their families and forebears. Arsene
speaks specifically of his mother and father (not to mention
his "dear tutor"), as well as more generally of his entire
family back to his great grand-parents on both sides, and
also of the chain of servants at Knott's house whose names
have been forgotten. Watt speaks of his mother, father, and
grandfather, and he quotes a line from Farquhar that
addresses a "sister". Micks speaks of his parents, his wife
and his dog - "[h]appily [he] was childless". Hackett talks
about his mother and father; Arthur of a friend and her
husband. As well as his domestic troubles with his wife
Mr.Graves speaks of his father, his father's father, his
family, and his ancestors, and "Watt wondered if Mr.Graves
had a son". Mr. Fitzwein remembers his mother and alludes
to his wife and children at home. The station staff are pictured "anhelating towards their wives" and Mr. Case has an "unquiet wife", an "anxious wife", at home. Lady McCann has "Cavalier ascendants". Even Knott, we learn, has a family and is part of a "vermicular series".

The Lynch family, large as it is, is of course only one of the "immense impoverished families" that "abounded for miles around in every conceivable direction, and must have always done so" (97). A sense of an even wider community at large is conveyed by the narrator's reference to the gossip about the possible father of Ann's babies: "Several names were freely mentioned"; "Some said [...]"; "[...] there were not wanting those to insinuate [...]"; "Others said [...]"; "Some said [...]"; "Other names mentioned [...] were [...]"; "[...] a stranger from without was considered likely by many [...]"; "[...] the names of many strangers from without were freely mentioned [...]" (104-6).

Finally one might mention, without listing them, the Noah's ark menagerie of unnamed animals that throng the novel.

For a "book about a madman living at the centre of his
madness", as A. Alvarez has described it, Watt is oddly oriented towards a consideration of a very public world - "my earth, and my father's [etc.]". It is one in which "four-footed friends [...] and [...] bipedal brothers and sisters in God" (88) "abound[] in every conceivable direction" (97). Not surprisingly, given their multitudinousness, the people that people Watt are not fully developed characters (even Watt isn't quite that, being "as much a principle as he is a character"), but representative types of humanity. This uninterestedness in individual personalities (which doesn't preclude idiosyncratic types - like the "hunchbacked inebriate" (98) that is Jim Lynch) is another classical aspect of the novel. Like a novel by Fielding or Smollett Watt delights in an overview of a multifarious and animated cocktail of human types.

Beckett's early characters were drawn towards solipsism and privacy, but the speakers who make up the narrative of Watt are more concerned with public, if obscure, relations. It is significant that the novel was written during the second world war - a time when it was presumably much more difficult than usual to think of oneself as unconnected with
humanity at large. Beckett wrote the book while hiding from the Gestapo in the south of France, which meant that he was physically isolated, but, one imagines, much preoccupied with the movements of the larger body of mankind. That may explain the curious combination of private meditation, coded message, and abstract humanism of which the novel is composed.

It is my contention that in this novel Beckett articulates a renunciation of his immediate family and local background but registers a reluctant confession of allegiance - or at least a recognition of inevitable affiliation - to a wider human context. Watt (and Beckett too, one assumes) disdains the stage-Irish grotesques who dominate the first section of the novel and seek to pin the protagonist down with conventional notions of "nationality, family, birthplace"(19). But Watt's journey to Knott's is only partly a journey into an inner world and an escape from the general public. Knott's house becomes an adopted home for Watt, who joins the family of those who serve. There is a connection, I believe, between Watt's "period of service"(130) at Knott's and Beckett's work for the French resistance just prior to the composition of Watt. Arsene's
statement about his experience at Knott's speaks of a belated coming to terms with the responsibilities of service:

Having oscillated all his life between the torments of a superficial loitering and the horrors of disinterested endeavour, he finds himself at last in a situation where to do nothing exclusively would be an act of the highest value, and significance. And what happens? For the first time, since in anguish and disgust he relieved his mother of her milk, definite tasks of unquestionable utility are assigned to him. (40)

Arsene goes on to explain that the indignation of the new servant is short-lived because he comes to understand that he is working not merely for M. Knott in person, and for Mr. Knott's establishment, but also, and indeed chiefly, for himself, that he may abide, as he is, where he is, and that where he is may abide about him, as it is. (40)

In the resistance Beckett too was working for an obscure master in an adopted home in an effort to preserve the status quo - of a pre-war Europe that had looked so attractive from Ireland. 53

The war broke out just when Beckett had become settled in Paris. Having finally made a decisive break with the family with which he had struggled for so many years, having finally attained a significant degree of independence by
rejecting an academic career for the isolated life of a
writer, Beckett found that he had no choice in the midst of
war but to commit himself to a less localised community of
fellow-creatures. Affiliation proved inescapable and in
that sense "for all the good that frequent departures out of
Ireland had done him, he might just as well have stayed at
home" (249).

That he didn't stay at home, however - instead
"preferring France in war to Ireland in peace"⁵⁴, is a
testament to his newfound allegiances. Watt can, I think,
be understood as a statement of these.

When Arsene informs Watt about those who have served
Knott he says they have always, without exception, been of
two types: either "big bony shabby seedy haggard knock-kneed
men, with rotten teeth and big red noses"; or "little fat
shabby seedy juicy or oily bandy-legged men with a little
fat bottom sticking out in front and a little fat belly
sticking out behind" (57). This is a comically bathetic
classical affirmation of the ubiquity and poverty of the
human condition. Men differ only in the variety of their
monstrosity and share a fundamental shabbiness and
seediness. Men have always been this way "unless it be so
long ago that all trace of them is lost" (58). Arsene concedes that if one went back far enough one might come across "quite a different type of chap" (60), but this is impossible to ascertain "owing to the shortness of human memory" (59) and "on account of the vanity of human wishes" (59). (Forgetfulness and vanity are human characteristics that go back a fair way too). It is no coincidence that Beckett employs the title of Samuel Johnson's classical imitation of Juvenal's Satire here, for that is a poem that, like Watt, "survey[s] mankind" "with extensive view" in all "the busy scenes of crowded life", and finds it everywhere the same.

Arsene's division of servants into "two types" however, may reflect Beckett's perception of a world polarised by war. If that is the case then it suggests an attitude to the war that is somewhat apolitical. As a wartime novel Watt may be thought anachronistic in the sense that it adopts an eighteenth century tone of civilised irony about the ubiquitous nature of human folly and partakes of Olympian amusement at the chaos that results from it. On the other hand there is that important phrase about the "unquestionable utility" of the tasks assigned at Knott's,
and it is clear that Beckett was wholly (if perhaps belatedly) committed to opposing the Nazis - mainly because of the treatment received at their hands by his Jewish friends.56 (In reality the war was for Beckett not an example of human folly, but a fight against human folly at its worst.) The description of the "shabby seedy" men is a joke not only at Darwin's expense - evolution from "quite a different type of chap" being scarcely a matter of the survival of the fittest - but also, and by extension, one at the expense of those with dreams of a master race. At a time when fundamental racial differentiation was being posited with unthinking arrogance Beckett responded with a classical novel about shared "shabbiness" and "seediness". 1942-5 was not a time to deny human affiliation.
1.9  A Note On "How It Is"

*How It Is* is usually considered primarily as a post-Trilogy work, but it has peculiar affinities with *Watt* that are rarely discussed. Both novels, for instance, have similarly indirect modes of transmission; everything in *How It Is* is "ill-said ill-heard ill-recaptured ill-murmured" (HII 7), and as a result the book is as obscure a relation as *Watt*, a novel whose bizarre telling is ill-transmitted - "not perfectly clear[ly]" (W 164) - through Watt's codes and through Sam.

For the abject creature or creatures dragging through the mud in *How It Is* life's processes are not pleasant, but have a certain geometric nicety. Like *Watt*, and unlike the more loosely structured Trilogy, *How It Is* is peculiarly scrupulous about order: "natural order" (HII 7) and "justice" (HII 156) are constant refrains, and the dogged speaker speaks nicely of his precise project to "divide into three a single eternity for the sake of clarity" (HII 26). What he calls "the old business of grace in this sewer" (HII 24), "the regimen of grace" (HII 135), is not only a judicial matter, but also an aesthetic one. The novel is
patterned (against the odds) with delicate balance and poise. For all the appalling mess of the mis-en-scène (recalcitrant to the casual reader) the superficial aridness of this novel, like Watt, is redeemed by meticulous linguistic fastidiousness and discrimination: both novels are "far from unmelodious" (W 215).

The chief preoccupation that the two works have in common is the detailed tabulation of an infinitely extensive family of man.

Following Arsene’s seasonal description of the poor old earth and the vast human family that makes it lousy, How It Is also contemplates "those for whom and under whom and all about whom the earth turns and all turns [...] days nights years seasons that family" (HII 18). It too is preoccupied with "generation[s] (HII 91), "dynasties" (HII 92) and (with some wryness) the "honour of the family" (HII 92). Consonant with Watt’s ambivalent meditations on the successive generations that come and go is the only partly ironic recognition in How It Is of "a procession what comfort in adversity others what comfort":

those dragging on in front those dragging on behind whose lot has been what your lot will be what your lot is endless cortège (HII 53)
"In a word, here is all humanity circling with fatal monotony [...]" (D 23), as Beckett wrote in 1929, about Joyce's "Work in Progress". Although the "lot" in *How It Is* is decidedly not a happy one, this only partly mitigates against the comfort that might be found in the knowledge that it is shared by a lot of "others". For the infinitely proliferating system of alternating tormentors and victims proposed as logical necessity by the speaker is indeed comforting, and this is made clear at the end of the novel when the possibility that there was "never any procession [...] never anyone no only me" (159) seems more chilling than any of the visceral cruelties described hitherto. "O{ther inhabitants", however cruel, would be better than the madness of "me sole elect" (HII 14).

Like *Watt*, then, *How It Is* fluctuates between extreme senses of public and private. In one way it is a structured, classical statement of universal application, a general account of "how it is" for each and every one of us: "from sleep I come to sleep return between the two there is all the doing suffering failing bungling achieving until the mud yawns again" (HII 25) In a quite different way it is a "little private book these secret things little book all my
own the heart's outpourings" (HII 92). The novel is thus both the articulation of an impersonal wisdom - "ancient voice in me not mine" (HII 7) - and the intimate diary of a "monster of [...] solitudes" (HII 14).

For all the bleak unchangingness of the situation described in How It Is, the novel - again like Watt - evinces a sense of things as other than merely tedious and repetitious "rigmarole" (HII 147), partly by waxing elegaic about things that pass away: in this novel too there are "losses everywhere" (HII 7). Indeed, for a novel so bleak in its analysis of the human condition, How It Is is also profoundly lyrical in its evocation of a lost life "above in the light" (HII 8).

One of the most central losses, as in the earlier novel, is the "loss of species" (HII 29; W 82); the speaker is only precariously "within humanity [...] just barely" (HII 50). The Unnamable's embattled rationalism - "it's human, a lobster couldn't do it" (T 342) - is not enough to ensure the definition of the species in this novel, which tends to find affinities and not distinctions between mankind and the so-called lower orders. Like Watt, How It Is posits an ecumenically extended family and takes an
inordinate - and comic - interest in man's obscurest relations; it finds time, for instance, for sympathetic "reflections [...] on the fragility of euphoria among the different orders of the animal kingdom beginning with the sponges" (HII 43). The speaker dreams of a fellow creature - "a little woman within my reach" (HII 14) -

or failing kindred meat a llama emergency dream an alpaca llama the history I knew the natural (HII 15)

The novel is much preoccupied with natural history - though always questioning the assumptions in "natural" - and with the evolutionary processes that make even an alpaca llama, not to mention sponges, meat that is (however tenuously) kindred. Again and again the novel emphasises "our life in common" (HII 61), man's equal relations with animals: "I wake from sleep how much nearer to the last that of men of beasts too" (HII 30). 58

The novel's concern with "a selection natural order vast tracts of time" (HII 7) brings to mind evolutionary theory. That Darwinism is indeed in the air is confirmed both by the mise-en-scène - "warmth of primeval mud impenetrable dark" (HII 12) - and by the speaker's interest in "how I got here" (HII 8) from "the beginning [...] first
signs very first of life" (HII 8). It is not so surprising,
then, to find a direct reference to Haeckel (HII 47), one of
Darwin's theorising progeny.59

Gilian Beer writes that for Darwin

the history of man is of a difficult and extensive
family network which takes in barnacles as well as
bears, an extended family which will never permit the
aspiring climber - man - quite to forget his lowly
origins [...] The whole of animate nature becomes one
moving and proliferating family.60

Darwinism, like How It Is, confronts us with what Beer calls
our "uncouth [...] kin" (9), and the part of the novel that
describes "fellow creature[s]" (HII 60) etching words on
each other's backs with tin-openers seems a graphically
ironic illustration of the fact that "all things unto our
flesh are kinde".61

Nevertheless, as Steven Connor has argued, animals in
Beckett do not "merely provide[ ] a vocabulary of
defamation", they are not all uncouth, and if they are,
their uncouthness is not always the reason for Beckett's
interest in them. Beckett, in any case, has an
accommodating sense of man's "dignity" (HII 29), as we saw
in the extended analogy between the Lynches and dogs.

I will close this chapter with some more observations
from Gillian Beer. Her account of Darwinism reveals a number of features that make it apposite - in ways which I hope are now obvious - to Beckett's project, as I have defined it, in both Watt and How It Is:

[Evolutionary theory challenged the single life span as a sufficient model for understanding experience. (15)]

Evolutionary theory appeared to propose a more and more complex ordering [...] (16; Beer's emphasis)

Darwin saw the source not only of creativity but of loss. Evolutionary theory emphasised extinction and annihilation equally with transformation [...] (16; my emphasis)

The movements of transformation as Darwin describes them involve loss as well as gain, degradation as well as achievement. (132)

The all-inclusiveness of its explanation, stretching through the different orders of the natural world, seemed to offer a means of understanding without recourse to godhead. [Evolution] created a system in which there was no need to invoke a source of authority outside the natural order. (16)

Evolutionary theory created a system which could not be resolved into simple mathematical elegance. Profusion is a necessary component of its explanation. Selection is crucial also but it is a selection relying on hyperproductivity, upon a fertility beyond use or number. (16; my emphasis)

Plenitude includes the crabbed, crooked and marred: it does not mean unerring perfection. (75)

The lush and menacing superfecundity of the earth and of living beings could appal as much as reassure [...] Darwin's theory of development depended to a large extent upon that "rampancy of insatiable unmeasured
longing", on the unassuageable passion of the sexes for each other, on the vigour of survival, on the profusion and production and on the insurgency of growth. To that extent his is a daemonic theory, emphasising drive, deviance and the will to power. It is not a theory which readily accords with ideas of measure and reason.

The delineation of species tends to take the individual as its model, but such a model is instantly subverted by the fact that no single individual is archetypal - individuals are individual - and the discrepancies between them press upon the bounds of species-description, making it difficult to describe limits and conformities.

For Beer, Darwin "experiences the thisness of things [...] their resistance to interpretation in terms of man's perceptions and needs, and yet man's profound need to join himself to them [...]" (62; my emphasis). It was Watt's pot, it will be recalled, and his difficult relations with its thisness, that precipitated his "loss of species". Both Watt and the speaker in How It Is feel a profound need to join themselves to those things - Sam, Pim, sponges, alpaca llamas - most resistant to interpretation.

Like a nineteenth-century novelist, Beer argues, Darwin sought the "restoration of family ties, the discovery of a lost inheritance, the restitution of pious memory, a genealogical enterprise" (62). How It Is similarly seeks to "restore me to my dignity" (HII 29), for the "honour of the
family" (HII 92); its, like Watt's, is a profoundly genealogical enterprise.

Finally, Beer even points out the similarity of tone between Darwin and Ecclesiastes, the latter, as we have seen, crucially present in Watt. She highlights the biblical echo in Darwin's bleak conviction that "How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! how short his time! and consequently how poor will his products be, compared with those accumulated by nature during whole ecological periods." Or as How It Is puts it more succinctly, "my days an handbreadth my life as nothing man a vapour" (HII 88).
During his discussion of Modernism's rejection of the family as evinced (for him) in *Women In Love*, Tony Pinkney observes that "parents and antecedents are now consigned to the dustbin of one's personal pre-history - a metaphor which will be literalised in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*." It is misleading, however, for Pinkney to enlist the play's most arresting visual metaphor in pursuit of such an argument; for the play is partly about the difficulty of escaping both from "parents and antecedents" themselves, and from the process of oneself becoming a parent and antecedent. Binned they may be, but Nagg and Nell, "the old folks at home" (CDW 96), are stubbornly residual, and Hamm is himself a surrogate parent, in spite of his refusal to engender. Moreover, the alacrity with which Hamm would rid himself of his parents, the violence of his repudiation - "Clear away this muck! Chuck it in the sea!" (103) - serves as an index
of his, and of Beckett's, pre-occupation with them. For all its efforts, the play cannot keep a lid on procreative processes.

Few of Beckett's works concern themselves as deeply with matters of familial relations and filial obligation as does Endgame, but critics have been relatively slow to explore the matter fully. Ruby Cohn, for instance, writing in 1973, says only that "Fin de partie takes place in the living - and dying - room of a family. In some ways the family is ordinary with its attachments and disagreements; in most ways the family is extraordinary, being the last of the human race." Cohn's remarks, with their emphasis on the etiolated dereliction of the play - the last family in a dying room - tend to ally themselves with Pinkney's argument that Endgame is representative of a modernism that regards the family as an outmoded form. Though it must be acknowledged that the play is, as its title suggests, mainly characterised by entropy, my own contention is that the family, for better or worse, is remarkable in this work for its obdurate persistence in the face of adversity. The play ends, after all, with the mooted appearance of a small child. In its apparent "need to seem to glimpse afaint afar
away over there" (ASWT 134) an incipient life, the play alludes to the conventional novelistic ending where the next generation is glimpsed on the horizon - as, for instance, in the brief coda to *Dombey and Son*. In *Endgame* many things are running out - we're continually told that there are "no more" of things: no more bicycle-wheels, pap, nature, sugar-plums, tide, navigators, rugs, pain-killer, coffins. But despite the desire for the end of the species, there are never no more children, and the play ends with the possibility of a child running in: "[...] he'll die there or he'll come here [...]" (131).

2.1 Family Unity

There has been a tendency to regard *Endgame* as a work with less internal coherence than *Godot*. S.E. Gontarski, for instance, has written that

*Fin de partie* seems always to have been scenes, bits of dialogue, fragments, that Beckett arranged and rearranged over and over again, groping intuitively towards an honest, satisfying form, a form that allowed the combination of so many disparate elements, including memories of war, family deaths, disastrous sexuality, the failures of religion - all countered with burlesque comedy.
It will be seen, however, that most of Gontarski's "disparate elements" can be subsumed under the one heading of 'the family'; the play has a thematic as well as a formal unity. Sexuality is disastrous because of the fear of procreation and the consequences of an extended family. Religion is a failure because in this play God is presented as a vertical extension of a flawed family pattern. He too is a father - "Our Father" (119) - and he, like Hamm and Nagg, won't listen to those who call him, won't accept "his responsibilities" (133). Even the war memories, in the form they take in the published play, contribute to Beckett's comic portrait of the grandparent locked in nostalgic mode.

A bad performance of the play can give the impression that it is a fragmentary piece. In his own direction, however, Beckett insisted on dramatic coherence.

Clav has only one wish, to get back into his kitchen - that must always be evident, just like Hamm's constant effort to stop him. This tension is an essential motif of the play.

This iron's out, and Beckett was clearly anxious that it should, many of the text's apparent non-sequiturs. Hamm's comic question "No phone calls?" (97), for instance, comes out of the blue as if it were no more than an absurdist
joke, but we must read between the lines; in production Beckett suggested that it may be motivated by Hamm's desperate desire to keep Clov from leaving, to stop him in his tracks as he heads for the kitchen. As author-director Beckett went so far as to revise the text itself in order to elucidate the central dramatic tension.

In assuming the directorship of a number of his own plays, Beckett was in part motivated by a desire to correct the more wayward interpretations that had hitherto arisen, in order to provide a definitive production. At the same time, however, he took the opportunity to clarify stage-business that was ambiguous in the published version and to make corrections to the script. Thus a revised and definitive text was produced. The directions for Endgame may be seen, then, as having been designed mainly to intensify an "essential motif" latent in the text, but also, on occasion, to supply it. In each case it is clear that Beckett was anxious to ground the play upon something more substantial than a merely formal arrangement of essentially "disparate elements". Aesthetic coherence alone would scarcely justify Beckett's own insistence that this, his favourite play, "really has meaning".
What is meant by "meaning"? The author's production notes and his late revised text both reveal that what was important for him was not so much the philosophical implications of the dialogue as the dramatic tension of the situation. ("There's nothing in it about philosophy", Beckett has said.) The meaning is in the relationships between the characters on the stage. In a 1957 letter to Alan Schneider Beckett insisted on what he called the extreme simplicity of dramatic situation and issue [...] Hamm as stated, Clov as stated, together as stated, nec tecum nec sine te, in such a place and in such a world [...] (D 109)

Beckett has for polemic purposes over-emphasised the simplicity of the situation here; for to describe the play thus is to invoke the concept of the pseudocouple. This is reductive, because the relationships between the characters in Endgame are more complex than the term "pseudocouple" (T 272) implies - assuming that one accepts Fredric Jameson's definition of the term as a "reification of struggle arrested and transmuted into static structural dependency". It would be an oversimplification to describe Vladimir and Estragon as merely friends (they are, among other things, comrades, brothers, lovers), but their situation is simpler
than that of Hamm and Clov who are at once husband and wife, master and servant, father and son, patient and nurse. Moreover each has his own relationship with Nagg and Nell, the antecedents, and with the child perhaps glimpsed at the end. (Is the child the play's "dramatic [...] issue"?) *Endgame* isn't just about a couple, it's about a whole network of filial and affiliative relationships, both abstractly and concretely realised.

My contention is that the coherence of the play, a coherence finally achieved only after a number of draft versions and several productions directed by the author, is as much a thematic as a formal one. If one compares the printed text with the early draft now known as 'Avant Fin de Partie', one is struck by the intensification of the play's thematic concern with the family. If we are to believe a description given by one of the characters, the setting of this draft is more concrete than that of the final play. There's a specific geographical location - Picardy; a specific time - after the Great War; and a more conventional site - "un living room". Such explicitly realistic elements are lacking in *Endgame*; but, as a whole, the finished play is, in spite of the abstracting away of such
concretisations, the more substantial piece.

'Avant Fin de Partie' is a relatively thin and unengaging work partly because the dialogue between X and F (forerunners of Hamm and Clov) is unfocussed, having little thematic continuity. Only towards the end does the topic of the family come in when X sends for his mother and then tells a lengthy story about her before F enters dressed as the mother and begins acting her part. For most of the play, however, the dramatic situation is that of a master and servant passing the time with various props (a syringe, a bible, a thermometer, a spoon etc.) The dramatic situation is no more complex than that, with none of the depth and coherence lent to the final play by, for instance, the addition of Hamm's 'chronicle' (121). (The word is significant since a chronicle, unlike a story, necessarily covers a considerable period of time, involving more than one generation, and Hamm's central chronicle, the backbone of the finished play, renders Clov's status crucially ambiguous: he is a servant, but also perhaps a surrogate son.) Moreover, 'Avant Fin de Partie' is without Nagg and Nell, the characters which, as Hamm's parents, and Clov's surrogate grandparents, turn a pseudo-couple into an
extended family.

Dougald McMillan and Martha Fehsenfeld point out that in 'Avant Fin de Partie' "X is the abstracted embodiment of any half of numerous human relationships of which F is the other half - a master, lover, parent, or child - and not the real son of a real mother." X and F only pretend to be related. The play consists of a series of role-playing games. In *Endgame*, on the other hand the relationships are more concrete. Where X, for instance, pretends to be a son to F's motherly role, Hamm is indeed a son to Nell. The addition of Nagg and Nell means that Hamm is both son and father without merely pretending to be so as the mood takes him. Nevertheless there's still a high degree of fluidity among the various functions assumed by the characters. The play highlights the fact that roles are not fixed and permanent but subject to reversals: "One day you'll be [...] like me" (CDW 109). Hamm and Clov are each discomfited by their respective fathers' 'maledictions'. This was the word Beckett used to describe the analogous speeches in which Hamm predicts a time when Clov will be unable to move and Nagg looks forward (in both senses) to a time when Hamm will call out and not be heard. The juxtaposition of the
two passages establishes a series - Clov is to Hamm as Hamm is to Nagg - and the pattern of familial relationships draws attention to generational continuity; antecedents - far from being consigned to the dustbins of one's personal pre-history - prove fatally inescapable.

The play's sense of time continually emphasises a processional movement through successive stages. Clov's sombre and repetitive pronouncement on the state of play, "Something is taking its course" (98,107 etc.), a phrase which seems to remove all human agency from the workings of the play and bows to a grim sense of life as disease, is reiterated as a colloquial variation with Hamm's "We're getting on" (99), which - unlike the French "ça avance" (FP 29) - re-introduces the human subject, but with it a sense of purposelessness. (Getting on with what?) In a still more colloquial sense, also absent from the French, Hamm's remark has two further meanings. In the context of the domestic rowing it means, with sarcasm, "we're enjoying each other's company"; and with Nagg and Nell in mind, it implies "we're getting old". "We breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (97) During the play all four characters complain of the cold (100,124,125). In his
editorial note to the Revised Text, Gontarski remarks that "the increasing cold [...] further suggests a world losing its physical heat [sic] and, metaphorically, its humanity." But it's more than a token of the generalised entropy - it's a piece of realism: old people feel cold, and by echoing the complaint of Nagg and Nell, Hamm and Clov show how they too are ageing, or "getting on". During the play Nell, one of the grand-parents, dies; Hamm increasingly resembles his parents as his impotence grows (he throws away the gaff which almost enables him to move); and on the horizon a child appears just as Clov had appeared in the past: each character is passing on to a new stage, or "getting on". The play thus reflects the regenerative pattern described by Malone: "We are getting on [...] And on the threshold of being no more I succeed in being another" (T 178).

In production Beckett frequently employed musical metaphors to indicate his sense of the play's dynamics. He claimed that "it's a cantata for two voices" and directed rehearsals as though he were a conductor tapping out the rhythms of a score. Unquestionably, the play does constitute an impressive orchestration of verbal motifs - or
"fundamental sounds" (D 109) as Beckett preferred to call them. Nevertheless recent criticism has over-emphasised formal as against thematic considerations. Beckett's remark that "the play is full of echoes; they all answer each other"\(^{16}\) indicates more than a formal or aesthetic reciprocity; in the domestic melodrama of *Endgame* the members of the familial ensemble "all answer each other" in a ferocious pattern of mutual recrimination. (Hamm complains that Nagg keeps him awake [100] just as Nagg had been kept awake by the infant Hamm [119]; Nell and Hamm won't listen to Nagg's joke [102-3] just as Nagg and won't listen to Hamm's chronicle [116] etc.) The chiming 'maledictions' are particularly sonorous instances of such backbiting, and they eloquently show how characters in *Endgame* are ethically "answered" according to that hellishly efficient system of equity so frequently articulated in Beckett's work. In this play the sins of the fathers are visited on the sons, and, in answer, sons are visited on fathers:

Hamm: Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?
Nagg: I didn't know.
Hamm: What didn't you know?
Nagg: That it'd be you.\(^{(116)}\)\(^{17}\)
2.2 Forebears

_Endgame's_ own allusiveness is indicative of a cultural inheritance, and it suggests a certain continuity with literary ancestors and antecedents. Allusion may constitute an echo that is more than musical, and an answer that is more than - or indeed, something other than - an ironic repudiation of the past. It is too often assumed that Beckett's allusions are only ever indicative of ironic disparities between past and present - in the manner of Winnie's use of Milton's "Hail, holy light" (CDW 168) in the midst of a "blazing light" (CDW 138) that is palpably hellish. Often, however, Beckett engages in a more constructive dialogue with writers - his forebears - who have broached "the old questions" (CDW 110).

Many commentators have pointed to links between _Endgame_ and _King Lear_. The chess metaphor in the title of Beckett's highlights Hamm's role as impoverished king, with his throne (wheelchair), sceptre (gaff), and retinue. The two plays certainly share a bleak pessimism and a pre-occupation with cruelty. In one of Beckett's elucidatory moments, he explained Hamm's odd response to Clov's
observation about the calmness of the sea. Hamm says "It's because there are no more navigators" (124), and Beckett remarked "It's not worth the waves' while being angry because there are no more navigators to drown". That suggests a world at the mercy of malign powers not unlike those that Gloucester perceives. ("As flies to wanton boys, are we to th'Gods; / They kill us for their sport.") Lear examines the situation in such a universe of "unaccommodated man" - or, in Edgar's case, that of one mimicking such a condition. Endgame reiterates not only the sense of naked vulnerability in a savage universe but also the odd sense that a vision of such extreme indigence may be contrived: Hamm tells of a mad painter and engraver who literally en-graves his world by refusing to see anything other than "ashes"; the case, admits Hamm tellingly, is "not [...] unusual" (CDW 113).

Critics have been slower to observe that the two plays also examine the issue of accommodation itself. Hamm, once a rich and powerful man, may have emulated his forebear and taken pity on "houseless heads"; but, again like Lear, he himself feels homeless. Both plays feature ungrateful offspring, a curse on procreation, and a blind man deceived
by his son and helper. (Clov's description of the black dog as "nearly" white [111] is a comically limp version of Edgar's persuasive rhetoric about the "horrible steep" cliff.) Both plays address family issues: the duties of children; the wisdom and folly of age; the nature of pity; and the possibilities for affiliation.

As Michael Robinson has shown, another play that lies behind and informs Endgame is The Tempest, also about a spurious family or household. Apart from the direct quotation - Hamm's only partly ironic rendering of Prospero's "Our revels now are ended" (120) - much of the dialogue is reminiscent of Shakespeare's play.

Hamm: Do you remember when you came here?
Clov: No. Too small, you told me.
Hamm: Do you remember your father?
Clov: (wearily) Same answer. (Pause.) You asked me these questions millions of times.
Hamm: It was I was a father to you. (110)

Robinson rightly points to the echoes here of Prospero's opening scene with Miranda, during which he recounts the story of their exile, and attempts to inform a daughter who is, he claims, "ignorant of what thou art". In both plays the catechism seems to be a kind of ritual. Clov complains "you asked me these questions millions of times"
and Miranda says

[...] you have often
Begun to tell me what I am, but stopp'd
And left me to bootless inquisition.  

Robinson remarks:

It seems that Prospero, despite his magic, has also been silenced by the same impossible answer that eludes Hamm as it has eluded Beckett's earlier heroes. Who is it that can tell me what I am?

There is, to be sure, something peculiarly Beckettian about the idea of bootless inquisition into the nature of being, but as in *The Tempest*, the issue in *Endgame* is not purely a matter of ontology. What Clov and Miranda would like to know about their identity is not in the spirit of Montaigne's ruminative "Que sais-je" but rather in that of the child's first thoughts of antecedents and aetiology. (Miranda will ask, "Sir, are you not my father?" If Prospero and Hamm both stop short of telling their respective children what they are, it's not just because of the ultimate elusiveness of the meaning of being, but because withholding information gives them power. Robinson says Prospero is silenced "despite his magic", but in fact *The Tempest* shows that a good deal of Prospero's "magic" consists of coercive verbal manoeuvres that "amaze" and
literally fascinate those he would control. When, in *Endgame*, Clov asks "What is there to keep me here?" (120), Hamm's reply, "The dialogue", is more than just a banal metatheatrical joke; for Clov is indeed enthralled (in both senses of the word) by the ritualised catechism, because he knows it holds the key to his identity.

It may seem, from the weariness of Clov's response in the quotation given above, that he is not unduly anxious to know who he is, that "bootless inquisition" is hardly his concern. Nevertheless Clov's next line, "Yes. You were that [i.e. a father] to me", is bisected by the stage direction "He looks at Hamm fixedly", as if to suggest that he is under some kind of spell (110). Moreover, later in the play his desire to find some answers is made more manifest. At first he seems wholly uninterested in Hamm's story, and has to be prodded accordingly:

Hamm: I've got on with my story. (Pause.) I've got on with it well. (Pause. Irritably.) Ask me where I've got to.
Clov: Oh, by the way, your story?
Hamm: (surprised) What story?
Clov: The one you've been telling yourself all your...days.
Hamm: Ah you mean my chronicle?
Clov: That's the one.
Pause.
Hamm: (angrily). Keep going, can't you, keep going!
Clov: You've got on with it I hope.
Hamm: (modestly). Oh not very far, not very far. (121)

Soon, however, the roles are reversed:

Hamm: I continue then. Before accepting with gratitude
he [the beggar] asks if he may have his little
boy with him.
Clov: What age?
Hamm: Oh tiny.
Clov: He would have climbed the trees.
Hamm: All the little odd jobs.
Clov: And then he would have grown up.
Hamm: Very likely.
Pause.
Clov: Keep going, can't you, keep going!
Hamm: That's all. I stopped there.
Pause.
Clov: Do you see how it goes on?
Hamm: More or less.
Clov: Will it not soon be ended? (122)

Clov's repetition of Hamm's line "Keep going, can't you,
keep going" is more than just vaudeville tit-for-tat.
There's a real battle going on here, and Clov speaks with
some urgency, the importunate role having passed
surreptitiously from Hamm to him. Hamm is anxious to have
an interested listener, and he won't finish his tale because
to do so would risk losing his audience. Clov at first
pretends to be uninterested in Hamm's story but, as it
transpires, is more than curious to know whether this
narrative from the past actually ties up with his own
situation.

If Clov is, like Miranda, captivated by a father's
story, his situation is, as Robinson shows, in many respects more like Caliban's: he is held captive in a less metaphorical sense. From Hamm's point of view Clov, like Caliban, "serves in offices/ That profit us." Moreover, Clov's words directly echo those of the "deformed slave". He too has learnt to curse: "I use the words you taught me" (113). As Hamm would see it, he has taught him to "know thine own meaning." Clov, then, is both child and slave, Miranda and Caliban.26

The two Shakespeare plays to which Endgame principally alludes, then, are plays in which family relationships, (whether filial or affiliative) and household politics figure importantly. In this respect another work that can be seen to lurk behind Endgame is, ironically given their respective titles, Great Expectations. Like Pip with Miss Havisham, Clov pushes Hamm in a wheelchair around a room that will never be left by its derelict incumbent. Moreover, Pip and Clov are both uncertain as to their precise status in the household: servant or adopted son?
2.3 Household

*Endgame* has other antecedents within Beckett's own *oeuvre*, particularly in the form of his two earliest and least successful plays. Both are about families and households.²⁷

At first blush few works could seem less like *Endgame* than a historically researched comedy about Samuel Johnson and his circle, and critics have in the main pointed to links between *Human Wishes* and *Godot*²⁸; the few extant pages of the former comprise a scene in which characters *wait* - in this case for Johnson's arrival. The early play, however, has more in common with *Endgame*, for each examines the workings of a peculiar household.

*Human Wishes* is set in a room at Johnson's house at Bolt Court in April 1781, a time when, after the death of Tetty, Johnson both was and was not a family man. The house became a home for a number of needy folk on whom Johnson took pity, and the *dramatis personae* for the scene that exists are, accordingly: Mrs. Williams (a blind woman whose daughter, not mentioned by Beckett, also resided at Bolt Court); Mrs. Desmoulins (in charge of the kitchen); Miss
Carmichael (a former prostitute); the cat Hodge; and Dr, Levett. Beckett's playlet bears out the extremely Beckettian scenario sketched by Johnson himself: "Williams hates everybody; Levett hates Desmoulins, and does not love Williams; Desmoulins hates them both; Poll [Carmichael] loves none of them." Hodge, we may suppose, was indifferent.

Like Dr. Johnson (who is known to have virtually adopted his coloured servant, Francis Barber), the irascible Hamm has, if we assume that Clov is the boy described in his chronicle, pitied and taken in outsiders. In Hamm's household, as at Bolt Court, the distinction between servant and family member is an ambiguous one. According to Raymond Williams such confusion is rooted in etymology. His *Keywords* stresses that in early (pre-seventeenth century) usage, 'family' has

the direct sense of the Latin *household*, either in the sense of a group of servants or a group of blood-relations and servants living together in one house.

Beckett spoke suggestively during a rehearsal about Hamm's line "I'll have called my father and I'll have called my...my son " (126): "Please", he said, "no pathos on
'father' and 'son'. 'Son' can have an ironic touch instead. What is meant here is that which has served me as a son."

Elsewhere in the play Hamm relates how he "offered to take [the man who begged] into my service" (118). He was "offered a job as a gardener", Hamm later reveals (121). The man asked if he could have his boy with him and we're not told explicitly whether Hamm consented to this, but it seems likely that Clov is the boy grown up. When Hamm relates all this to Clov, the latter remarks of the boy "he would have climbed the trees" (122), hinting at the possibility of a happy and liberated childhood. Hamm merely remarks, "All the little odd jobs" (122). Those two comments summarise the tension in the play between the related roles of son and servant. Clov had earlier asked "Why do you keep me?" (CDW 95), and "keep" is significantly ambiguous: it can connote either something fundamentally selfish and acquisitive (to conceal, detain, withhold, etc.), or something much more generous and supportive (to guard, maintain, provide for, etc.). Both sets of meanings are entirely apposite to Clov's situation. He is both held captive as a kept servant, and nourished and nurtured as an adopted son.

Eleuthéria, subtitled "drame bourgeois", and the
nearest thing in Beckett to middle-period Ibsen, is again a play about a peculiar family. More precisely it's about Victor Krap's attempts to escape his bourgeois family and those that they enlist to help them drag him home. The stage is divided between the heavily furnished Krap salon, and Victor's sparse hotel room. In the first act Victor's zone is merely the site of the 'marginal action', but in the second act the functions are reversed, and in the third act Victor's room takes over the whole stage, the Krap salon having "fallen into the pit", as Beckett quipped. As the bourgeois salon is squeezed out by the more austere space the mise-en-scene adumbrates *Endgame* where the "bare interior" (92) seems superimposed on a more conventional room; curtained windows (here of course diminutive grey ones) and a picture turned to the wall are the only apparent vestiges of the bourgeois world. Although *Eleuthéria* is an unrefined play compared with *Endgame*, the stage action is by no means straightforward. The two zones seem to interpenetrate where they meet and characters from one space almost touch characters from the other. At one important moment in Act Two Victor steals across into the now empty salon space in order surreptitiously to sit in his father's
enormous armchair. The chair, and the symbolism of the son assuming the father's place not only re-enact the famous scene from the second part of *Henry IV*[^32], but importantly prefigure *Endgame*.

*Endgame*’s preoccupation with adoptive and dynastic families is not something accidentally or belatedly arrived at; it can be seen to have been anticipated in Beckett’s earliest dramatic writing.

2.4 **At Home Indoors**

The claustrophobia of *Endgame* is partly a reaction to the open outdoor quality that characterised *Godot* - with its moonlit road and tree - and it marks a return to the interior location of the early plays. As a dramatist Beckett was always more comfortable indoors, in a confined space. In letters to Alan Schneider written during the composition of *Endgame* he expressed a dislike for recent productions of *Godot* apparently because they were overly spacious: "I don't, in my ignorance, agree with the round and feel that 'Godot' needs a very closed box." (October
15th, 1956; D 107) Elsewhere Beckett has explained that he was first attracted to the theatre as opposed to the novel precisely because in it "you have a definite space, and people in this space." One of the letters to Schneider ends with a P.S.: "I quite agree that my work is for the small theatre. The Royal Court is not big, but 'Fin de Partie' gains unquestionably in the greater smallness [!] of the Studio." (April 30th, 1957; D 108)

Many phrases from this correspondence manifest a peculiar yearning for shelter: "I have nothing but wastes and wilds of self-translation before me [...]" (D 108); "I have retreated to my hole in the Marne mud [Beckett's house at Ussy] and am struggling with a play" (December 27th, 1955; D 106); "I'm in a ditch somewhere near the last stretch and would like to crawl up on it" (June 21st, 1956; D 107); "I am panting to see the realisation and know if I am on some kind of road, and can stumble on, or in a swamp." (October 15th, 1956; D 107) The language is reminiscent of Molloy's efforts to reach his mother's room, and the sense of being on a threshold is familiar. Neither in nor out, Beckett's characters often inhabit "shifting thresholds" (CP 59), their "unspeakable home" being only "as between two lit
refuges whose doors once neared gently close, once turned away from gently part again" (ASWT 108-9). In Molloy, for instance, Moran sees a dog and sympathetically imagines it returning home and stopping "at the threshold, not knowing whether he may go in or whether he must stay out all night" (T 147). The images from the letters to Schneider seem - perhaps not altogether surprisingly - particularly germane to Endgame: both the play and the letters, for instance, refer to the home as as a "hole" (CDW 111,117; D 106). It is especially notable that the letters place Beckett in the position of both the man who crawls to Hamm through the mud asking to be taken in and the perhaps imaginary boy at the end of the play who, again crawling through the mud, will either "die there" or "come here" (131). Endgame is unquestionably a play about the need to feel at home, and that need is clearly manifested in its author.

The "bare interior" (92) of Endgame, one of Beckett's most discomfitting and rebarbative works, seems barely adequate for the provision of the shelter implicitly sought after in these letters. It isn't the most appealing of abodes. Nevertheless an abode is what it is; dilapidated though it may be, it's more than just a shelter, and
homeliness is one of the play's concerns. It is important to regard the characters in the play as comprising a household. The two curtained windows, the picture, the kitchen, the chair, the dressing-gown and slippers, and Clov's function as domestic servant bustling about his housework are all elements which parody the conventional drawing-room drama.

Homes are, so to speak, an abiding interest in Beckett, where they function both realistically and as figures for safe places analogous to the womb. His first novel shows its hero, sated with the Continent, joyously returning to the Foxrock family home, and luxuriating in what - by being described as a "comfortable private residence, ineffably detached" (DFMW 145) - sounds suspiciously like his own callow ideal of solipsistic isolation. (The narrator speaks elsewhere, in a telling metaphor, of Belacqua's desire to "retire and settle down" in his mind, "clear of the pettifogging ebb and flow" [DFMW 122]. Belacqua's solipsism sees him "squatting in the heart of his store" [121], and his enjoyment of it is not unconnected with his languorous holiday occupation of the family's "rosewood privy" [145].) Murphy, too, can be read as a study of troubled domestic
economy as well as of mystical solipsism; Watt is an obsessive account of one person's attempt to ease himself into, and out of, a very peculiar household. Moran's house is depicted with comic detail in Molloy, as is his changing relationship to it. First Love, and, less directly, each of the other Novellas, is about home-making and leave-taking. The eponymous family of Ghost Trio, a version of the Trinity and of the Holy Family, dwells in a space knowingly (and punningly) described as "the familiar chamber" (CDW 408), and mapped out - with "door", "window", "wall" and "floor" (CDW 408-9) - as though it were a child's schematic drawing of a house.

Endgame, despite the desolate austerity of the stage and the eerieness of the situation, is a play about what makes a house a home, or what makes a situation habitable. Clov manages the housework, "doing [his] best to create a little order" (120), but it's Hamm who is especially house-proud. To Clov's remark, "I come ...and go", Hamm responds with obdurate and proprietorial plangency: "In my house" (109). Hamm returns to the theme of house and home shortly after:

Hamm: It was I was a father to you.
Clov: Yes. (He looks at Hamm fixedly.) You were that
Hamm: My house a home for you.
Clov: Yes. (He looks about him.) This was that for me.
Hamm: (proudly). But for me (gesture towards himself) no father. But for Hamm (gesture towards surroundings) no home.  

(110-11)

A notebook held at the Reading Beckett Archive and titled "Été '56" contains a number of sections of dialogue from Fin de partie, all apparently conceived at a late stage in the play's composition. Among them is the section quoted above. Scrawled above the fragment, as if as a title, are the following words: "Cosy (HOME HAMM)". On the following page, after the lines where Clov says he has bad legs and Hamm remarks "tu ne pourras pas me quitter" (FP 66), is, again, the word "COSY". These are suggestive, if cryptic, annotations. They certainly lend support to the theory that Hamm's name may derive from the old English word ham which means 'home'. (Importantly, the French text Anglicises the crucial word: "Ma maison qui t'a servi de home" [FP 56]. Beckett perhaps agreed with D.H. Lawrence that "chez-moi [is] cold and impersonal compared with the English home." He had adopted French because in it, famously, it was "easier to write without style" [DFMW 48], and because it provided an escape from some of the unwanted connotations of Beckett's Irish English. On this occasion, however,
Beckett has resorted to a familiar word precisely where familiarity is what he wants to evoke - though for his French audience, of course, familiarity is connoted, oddly, by a foreign word.) Hamm, at any rate, desperately needs to feel at home in his situation. Beckett has spoken of him as having found "refuge in a tyrannical attitude" and the metaphor is significant: Hamm enjoys a certain cosy security in his grim and aphoristic eloquence, and his lugubrious stoicism is partly a defensive pose. ("Nicely put, that" [CDW 133], he remarks after a morbid literary sally; Hamm wears a carapace of polished cynicism that renders him well placed - or nicely put - to deflect slings and arrows.) Above all, Hamm - like Clov - needs to feel at home in a story, comfortably placed in a narrative or chronicle that will make sense of his life.

2.5 Unheimlich

The atmosphere of the play, however, is not so much cosy as eerie, or uncanny; and these are all intricately related. Freud defined the unheimlich as "that class of the
frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." Such conflicting impulses towards the known and the unknown readily find a home in Beckett's work: Molloy, for instance, speaks of "places full of [...] familiar mysteries" (T 38) and of "that inner space one never sees" (T 11); and for Moran, Molloy is a strange and elusive monster, though at the same time "no stranger to me" (T 103). The mysteries in Watt are ones that "all the old ways led to [...]" (W 38); though they are "not familiar" they are "not unfamiliar either" (W 27). "It's the same old stranger as ever" (CSP 82), as another work puts it. For Beckett the unknown is often strangely familiar and the intimately known oddly remote, so that for the speaker in How It Is an age is "familiar in spite of its strangenesses" (HII 24), and yet for the Unnamable his "native land" is strangely "unfamiliar" (T 288). These paradoxes can be related to what John Harrington has called "antinomies of being at home and of being abroad"; they are symptoms of the writer in exile for whom home and away are by no means straightforward categories. Mercier and Camier, we're told, "venture forth", though they "did not remove from home" (MC 7), and Company speaks of one who in a lifetime wandered
thrice the globe's girdle "and never once overstepped a radius of one from home. Home!" (NO 49)

In *Endgame* too, what is frightening and eerie is bound up with the home, and with "the old questions, the old answers" (CDW 110). Explanations to the mysteries of origin seem both tantalisingly near at hand and only a distant prospect. The unknown future - represented by the all too familiar child posited by Clov - seems to depend partly on the pattern already established in Hamm's familiar but enigmatic narrative about the child he may or may not have taken in, a narrative gone through, we must suppose, "millions of times" (CDW 110) but still not concluded.

Freud's essay on the *unheimlich* opens with an extended dictionary definition of the German word *heimlich.* The whole entry is fascinating but I will confine my discussion to some selective remarks. The word in its original and now obsolete sense meant (Ia) "belonging to the house or family, or regarded as so belonging". It can be compared to the Latin *familiaris*, familiar. *'Die Heimlichen' are, in this sense, "the members of a household", so the word, like the English word 'family' discussed earlier, refers to those living in a household, whether blood-relations or servants.
In this obsolete sense \textbf{Endgame} is a \textit{heimlich} play.

The second definition offered is (Ib) "Of animals: tame, companionable to man. As opposed to wild". Hamm's desire for cosiness results in his demand for a very domestic animal - a toy dog (111) fetched by a tamed and servile Clov. Equally he fears the wild animal: "will there be sharks?" (109).

The third and most customary definition offered has to do with cosiness.(Ic) "Intimate, friendlily comfortable; the enjoyment of quiet content, etc., arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house." This is the condition to which Hamm aspires, and of which he pathetically falls short. The \textit{heimlich} thus represents a state of affairs about which it is tempting to say that the play is heavily ironic or that the play parodies. This won't quite do, however, because, as Freud shows, the concept of the \textit{heimlich} contains within itself a conflicting meaning, a strange correlative that works against the main sense.

Security may encourage secrecy, and thus the word can mean (II) "concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others." This
sense of the word may be thought germane to Beckett's entire oeuvre, being as it is often cryptic and difficult, appearing to withhold something from the reader, not yielding its secrets lightly. Beckett is an author heimlich enough to ask his audiences "What's it meant to mean?" (CDW 156) and heimlich enough for us not to know to what extent this is a taunt. Endgame, in particular, is cannily cryptic (Freud points out that the English 'canny' can mean both 'cosy' and 'shrewd'.) Endgame is like its protagonist Hamm in so far as its puzzles entrance and enthrall (Hamm-as-Prospero is a practitioner of what Freud's dictionary calls 'the heimlich art' - magic) and in so far as it witholds and conceals meaning. We, like old Mother Pegg (129), are liable to be kept in the dark.

Freud's dictionary bids us 'note especially the negative' compound - unheimlich. Though this, in having connotations of unknown fear, can stand in straightforward opposition to sense Ic ['intimate' etc.], nevertheless, oddly, it "is not often used as opposite to meaning II ['concealed' etc.]" In fact, it can have the same meaning as sense II of its theoretical 'opposite'. Thus Schelling's famous definition: "'Unheimlich' is the name for everything
that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light". Another dictionary referred to by Freud points out that the sense of 'heimlich' as meaning 'concealed' can be developed further to indicate "the notion of something hidden and dangerous." 'Unheimlich' comes to mean unknown fears which are also secret fears. Being something at once known and unknown the concept is easily recruited for Freud's theories about the unconscious. Freud sums up: "what is heimlich [...] thus comes to be unheimlich [...] In general we are reminded that the word 'heimlich' is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other what is concealed and kept out of sight."

Leslie Hill writes that "the uncanny [...] is a name for something close to home [...] which was once put at a - seemingly safe - distance and ought to have remained secret. Instead of that it stages a return, and comes back as a lifelike but grotesque ghost, to haunt the subject." The theatrical metaphor is Hill's and is nowhere to be found in Freud's essay, but it is, in connection with Endgame, highly suggestive; for in that play the return of the repressed -
in the form of a child (130) - is, if Clov is inventing it, indeed 'staged'. It may be seen as a strategy to catch the conscience of the king. Hamm is repressive in the authoritarian sense - he wants to exterminate any signs of life (103, 108, 118, etc.); but he is also repressive in the Freudian sense, as is indicated by his wanting to keep things "bottled" (CDW 103) and by his refusal to conclude his chronicle, his seeming reluctance to admit that he once adopted a child into his household (118, 122). Hamm's chronicle is quintessentially unheimlich: concealing and revealing at the same time, it covertly keeps at a distance that which is intimately known. At the end of the play, with the ghostly appearance of "a small boy" (CDW 130), Hamm is forced to confront something long familiar (familiar in every sense) and intimately known, something that comes at him from the seemingly safe - "outside of here it's death" (126) - without.
2.6 Family History: the Chronicle

Only relatively recent criticism of the play has fully appreciated the importance of Hamm's chronicle. In this section I will give a summary of and comment upon three useful contributions to the criticism of Endgame, all of which rightly emphasise its centrality.

Bennett Simon draws our attention to the play's connections with ancient tragic drama, a genre which focusses on the family and its struggle for continuation. Simon defines tragic drama "as the study of how the family can both wish to propagate itself and its values and simultaneously act in such a way as to foreclose that possibility". Moreover, family continuity depends crucially upon narrative possibility:

the content of tragic drama [...] carries with it a concern, reflected both in content and in form, about the prospects and possibility of story-telling. The very conflicts which threaten the continuation of the lineage, the proper sequence of generations, seem to undermine the conditions that make story-telling possible, namely a new generation that is able and willing to hear the tales of the previous generations.

(152)

Taking, among others, The Oresteia and Macbeth as examples, Simon argues that "plays that involve the killing of
children betray most clearly anxiety about the prospects for story-telling." (153)

But for Simon *Endgame* differs from older dramas in its apparent carelessness about continuity. "If ancient drama betrays an anxiety about the possibilities of continuation [...] it still holds as an almost unspoken value that the race and the house should continue" (162); *Endgame*, on the other hand, seems to want an end to humanity and to story-telling. Nevertheless Simon observes that though "the play as a whole has almost no plot, hardly a story worth summarising or repeating", yet "at least half of the action of the play consists of an attempt to tell stories, principally one story, Hamm's chronicle" (163). Simon notes, but never really resolves this paradox.

One of his main arguments is that *Endgame* posits a world where care (that is to say both feelings and interest) is either dying or dead: thus "the motives to tell a story are gradually eroded" (166). Simon argues that Hamm's verbose and affected story-telling numbs and frustrates audience interest (the audience both on and off the stage); it is frustratingly repetitious, but has no satisfying end, and its hearers have to be coerced (Nagg is offered a sugar-plum
if he will agree to listen). For Simon, there is no interest in family history, just as there is no interest in the procreation of a future family: "Story-telling is [...] set in the frame of failed father-son relationships [...] and is also placed in the context of a curse on engendering" (168). The chronicle has both "an indifferent teller and an indifferent audience" (169), and this partly explains its inconclusiveness, for "the ability to generate characters within a tale is clearly dependent upon the existence of an audience who cares about them". (169).

Nevertheless Simon also acknowledges, without offering a compelling explanation for the contradiction, that Hamm, for one, is in fact deeply interested in his chronicle, and only pretends disdain:

What is most deeply yearned for, and deeply dreaded - love and tenderness - is represented in story-telling, but represented at a safe distance and overlaid with enough cynicism [...] to be almost completely disguised. By concentrating on nuances of style, language and delivery, he can avoid the pain of realising that his chronicle is, in fact, his own childhood history, a version of the history of his neglect as an infant that Nagg has told. (168)

This is insightful, but the (admittedly implicit) feelings of yearning and pain registered in Hamm's story surely mitigate against Simon's main claim that Endgame represents
carelessness about narrative and genealogical continuity. Moreover, Simon ignores Clov's own interest in the chronicle.

Simon also argues that "the play [...] ridicules and undermines any serious sustained effort at the characters finding or constructing meaning among themselves" (162); continuities by plot or progeny are equally mocked as possibilities. He cites one of the play's most oft-quoted quips -

Hamm: We're not beginning to...to...mean something? 
Clov: Mean something! You and I, mean something! (Brief laugh) Ah that's a good one! (CDW 108)

- and notes that this is followed by the "exterminative frenzy" (Simon,164) precipitated by the flea from which "humanity might start [...] all over again" (CDW 108). Simon rightly sees a link between the need to destroy nascent meaning and the need to exterminate incipient life: "Acknowledge that any two things have connection or meaning, and once again you'll have started up the whole human race" (Simon,164). Nevertheless he overstates the extent to which the play successfully denies meaning, and as a corollary the extent to which it denies life. Clov's cynical joke - "Ah that's a good one" - is not the final word, but is answered
by Hamm's eloquent and more generous speculations about the possibility of "a rational being" who might "be liable to get ideas into his head if he observed us long enough... [...] Ah, good, now I see what it is, yes, now I understand what they're at!" (CDW 108) Not only is the possibility of meaning comically resuscitated after Clov's grim closure, but a new (kind of) life is posited as an agent of that meaning. Hamm's rational being testifies to his need for meaning, and thus to his (and the play's) sometimes genial resistance to the complacency of barrenness and confirmed meaninglessness.

Kristin Morrison - in a fascinating chapter of her important book on the use of narrative in modern drama - argues persuasively for the meaningfulness of Hamm's chronicle:

[the] chronicle has to do with both origins and with ends"; it 'accounts for' an entire world by presenting critical events and interpreting their meaning [....] The whole point of Endgame lies in the interrelationship between this chronicle, this value-laden record of past events, and the words and actions that make up the dramatic present of the play. The play ends when the narrative ends [....] when "time is over, reckoning closed and story ended". 48 Of the main event in the chronicle Morrison draws our attention to its "many counterparts in Biblical stories
where a parent intercedes on behalf of a dying child" (28). Hamm's "you're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (CDW 125) is thus a parody of the dispensation of divine mercy. Indeed Hamm is diabolical in his behaviour, for in offering to take the man into his service without the child he "tempts the man to betray his role as father, to abandon his own beneficence" (Morrison, 30).

Morrison's focus on the biblical and theological implications of the play is enlightening. She astutely notes the implicit logic in one of the play's apparent non-sequiturs: when Hamm abruptly abandons the first rendition of his chronicle he exhorts the others to pray to God, but concludes that "The bastard! He doesn't exist!" (CDW 119) Morrison writes that "what he turns to when he stops reveals indirectly what there was in the narrative that he needed to avoid" - the fact that "there is no father to care for him". (Morrison, 31) "If he curses the ideal father [...] it is due to neglect from his actual father." (31) (Nagg will go straight on to recount how he used to ignore his son's infant cries [CDW 119].) The play's compulsive story-telling thus "allow[s] the character simultaneously to reveal and conceal himself" (Morrison, 31).
Morrison puts much emphasis on Hamm's role as a failed god-father figure: he wants servants, attention, worship; it is in his power to dispense prizes - light and grain and benificence etc. "All those I might have helped [...] Saved", he reflects (CDW 125). "Hamm is thus the god who damn's by withholding or being unable to provide the means which make life possible, whether it be bread in the wilderness or light in the darkness" (Morrison,35). Hamm's failure to provide that which is life-giving is partly an act of revenge: "As son, Hamm was mistreated and abandoned, and as father, he has mistreated and failed his own creation. His chronicle is an attempt to offset the pain of these two basic related experiences".(35)

For Morrison the story of the man who begged on behalf of his son is thus painful not only because it reminds him of the love not given to him as a child, but also because it makes him conscious of his own heartlessness: "How can Hamm face such altruism?" (37) Hamm is both resentful - of Nagg, his uncaring father - and guilty in the face of the selfless man in the chronicle.

Morrison's character analysis of Hamm reaches its climax with his remark, in the last instalment of his
chronicle, about his having put the man "before his responsibilities" (CDW 133):

You don't want to abandon him? You want him to bloom while you are withering? Be there to solace your last million last moments? [Pause.] He doesn't realise, all he knows is hunger, and cold, and death to crown it all. But you! You ought to know what the earth is like, nowadays. (CDW 133)

The narrator's apparent argument - life on earth is so bad that a father's real responsibility is to avoid sustaining his son's existence - is really only a mask for the narrator's true feelings of resentment. The words "bloom" and "wither" betray the narrator's real motive, Hamm's real feelings. The corollary of a son's life is a father's death. By the natural order of human development, as one grows in to prime, the other passes beyond it, and the only term of that beyond is death. Hamm resents the fact that he will degenerate while another flourishes; thus his determination that there will be no more potential procreators in this world, no fleas or small boys from which humanity might start all over again. (Morrison, 38)

Morrison's remarks are enlightening, but it should be noted that they share a fundamental assumption with those of Bennett Simon, and that is that Hamm finally refused to take in the child. Although his final speech suggests that this was indeed the case, he does not actually say so, and the play offers other evidence that Clov is in fact the child in question. Hamm had earlier told Clov, "one day [...] you'll be like me, except that you won't have anyone with you, because you won't have had pity on anyone" (CDW 110; my
emphasis), and the implication, that Hamm had finally 
relented and pitied the beggar and his child, is clear 
enough. Elsewhere, moreover, Hamm asks Clov if he remembers 
when he came here as a small boy, and if he remembers his 
father. (CDW 110).

Only Paul Lawley, among the three critics considered 
here, acknowledges that Clov may have been adopted by Hamm 
and that: "the crucial question towards the end of the play 
surrounds the possible adoption of a small boy reported by 
Clov to be still alive outside the refuge." Lawley 
focusses on the theme of adoption, an act which offers 
"perpetuation of life without direct involvement in the 
processes of nature" (119).

Lawley cleverly observes that there is a link in Hamm's 
chronicle between adoption as a theme of the story and 
adoption as a narratorial procedure: "Would I consent to 
take in the child...", asks Hamm teasingly, before going on 
to report that "I'll soon have finished with this story. 
[...] Unless I bring in other characters" (CDW 118; Lawley's 
emphases.) Without the adoption of a new life/character, 
Hamm, as well as his story, will be finished. Thus for 
Lawley "adoption is the sole means of continuance" and "a
figure for the fictional process itself, the only acceptable means of self-perpetuation for characters who reject the processes of nature" (Lawley, 122).

Lawley's remarks on the reported sighting of the boy are again salient:

the episode from the fictional narrative is 'adopted' by the actual dramatic world, or, more accurately, by Clov. But, crucially, the element of indeterminacy in the chronicle-version ("assuming he existed" [CDW 117]) has now assumed a pivotal position. Hamm’s decision to end turns, it seems, not upon the decision to take in the small boy, but upon his belief that Clov is 'inventing'. At last Hamm too perceives adoption as the figure of fiction-as-continuance. Even though Clov intends to kill the boy, it is his proposal of the fiction that matters, his attempt to bring the boy in to their life-story.

Hamm’s aside after Clov’s sighting of the boy - "Not an underplot, I trust" (CDW 130) - confirms the connection between generational and narrative continuance. Thus Lawley can go to ask, "Is [Hamm] (self-) invented, a story?" (Lawley, 125), for "it is at the moment Clov sights - or invents - the small boy outside the refuge that the fictional chronicle impinges most strongly upon the stage-world" (125). At that point, indeed, "the question of the ontological status of the stage-world" is brought "to crisis point" (125).
Lawley concludes that "Hamm's refusal [at the end of the play] constitutes a decision not to adopt a fresh fiction into the stage-world rather than a decision not to take a child in" (125).

For Lawley, then, Clov's 'sighting' of the child is offered as a prompt to Hamm, an echo perhaps of his earlier remarks: "Keep going can't you, keep going [...] Do you see how it goes on?" (CDW 122). My own contention, as stated in an earlier section, is that there is some urgency in these prompts; they are more than attempts to continue, in so far as continuing means passing the time. If the child is invented by Clov, he is invented as a trick in which to catch the conscience of the king; by positing a child outside the refuge Clov is attempting to gauge Hamm's reaction in order to try to establish what had happened on the earlier occasion recounted, but not concluded, in the chronicle. Clov is trying to compete with Hamm's tantalising fiction with an invention of his own; he is also trying to re-enact or stage the return of that earlier elusive event, an event that perhaps explains his own origins.

Past and future are in Endgame mutually dependent on
one another. Thus the past as represented in the story holds the key to Clov's position in the household and in the world, and may show him what to expect in the future. But what happened in the story is never finally concluded, and seems implicitly to depend on what happens to the child perhaps only invented by Clov at the end of the play. The play finally rests on these two mutually sustaining ambiguities.

2.7 Life Goes On

Without ever quite circumscribing its focus on a particular family group, *Endgame* nevertheless offers a perspective on the more abstract, long-term family that is "humanity" at large (108). It thus develops the preoccupations set out in *Watt* - especially in Arsene's disquisition on the "poor old lousy old earth", with its genealogical list of generations, and tendency to start "all over again" (W 45-6). Like the earlier novel, the play reworks biblical passages and themes to give a theological and blasphemous overview of the creatures who find their
abode on an earth that, if ever more tenuously, abides.

Beckett's work, as later chapters will confirm, is full of new beginnings, moments of incipience, potential burgeonings; and these ensure that there are always new things to get old so that the process of decay is itself continuous: "even olden things each time are first things" (CSP 135). Although such moments are more often than not overtly regarded as threats, set-backs and disasters, they inevitably animate the work, and inject a certain liveliness, because the expectations they raise, and the values they confer through traditional connotation, cannot be entirely eradicated by Beckett's black humour. Thus the possibility — occasioned extravagantly by the flea and more credibly by the child who (perhaps) appears at the end (108, 130) — that "humanity might start [...] all over again" (108) is not, despite Hamm's protestations, one of unmitigated horror. "Starting all over again" can mean different things; it can be a torture or a dispensation, depending on your status as a Sisyphus or a Noah, and the play is in touch with both of these senses.

One of the more compelling of the theories about the provenance of the characters' names has it that Hamm refers
to the biblical Ham, son of Noah, and progenitor of the dark races. The story of Noah and his family is among the more celebrated examples of humanity starting all over again, and it's a story to which an early draft of *Endgame* directly alludes. At the request of the Hamm prototype (simply called A) the Clov prototype (called B) reads some verses from Genesis:

> And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for in the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.
> While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

The significance of this passage within the play is blasphemous in two distinct senses. On the one hand God's avowed intention henceforth to sustain the earth and the life on it is to be ironically contrasted with the evident desolation of the play and hence offered in a spirit of derision, just as, in a later work, the biblical claim that "the Lord upholdeth all that fall" is greeted with howls of disbelieving laughter (CDW 198). On the other hand, a divine promise to refrain from destruction can only be regarded as an ugly threat, because the characters of the play purport
to desire nothing more than the end of all things; as in the second *Rough for Theatre*, another Cold War play, "the extermination of the species" (CDW 242) is not the fear of fears but a consummation devoutly to be wished (and paradoxically a reason to go on living). The contemplation of the ceaseless seasonal cycle aligns the quotation quite clearly with that section of Arsene's speech (in *Watt*) which meditates on the yearly round and which is itself based on the biblical verse "the earth abideth". The other extract that B reads to A also echoes that passage from the earlier novel. In fact he reads one of the genealogies to which the permutative list of fathers and mothers had playfully alluded. It's a list which emphasises not only pullulation, but also that other Beckettian fear, longevity. As Hamm will wearily remark in the finished play, "Life goes on" (CDW 125):

And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber:
And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.
And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg:
And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters.
And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu:
And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters.
Comically, this recitation renders A sexually aroused, and he calls aloud for a certain Sophie with whom he himself might beget. But when B appears disguised as Sophie (wearing, that is, a wig and a dress), A finally demurs, fearing the consequences of procreation.

Even without the explicit quotation from the relevant chapter of Genesis, vestiges of the Noah story (in addition to Hamm's name) remain in the published text. Clov uses his telescope to peer through the windows onto a desolate without as if he were looking for a sign like the dove in the biblical story (CDW 106-7); finally he sees, not a dove, but a boy (130). One of the windows is the 'sea window' and the other the 'earth window' (123-4), though uniform desolation makes them hard to differentiate. At one point, in a clear (and blasphemous) allusion to the flood, Clov mistakes the sea for the earth window and exclaims "Christ, she's under water!" (128) When Hamm contemplates with a mixture of pity and disgust "all those I might have helped [...] Saved! The place was crawling with them" (125), he sounds not unlike the God who exterminated, and yet - by a kind of literal synecdoche, for in rescuing Noah he rescued humanity - saved, "every creeping thing
that creepeth upon the earth".

The French town of Saint-Lo, having been "bombed out of existence", became, in the years following the war, a place where a portion of humanity had to start all over again. Beckett spoke of this (ten years before the publication of *Fin de Partie*) in "The Capital of the Ruins", a broadcast given on behalf of the Irish Red Cross, for whom he had worked at Saint-Lo. He spoke unsentimentally, but with hope, of the unknown "period of time [that] must be endured before the town begins to resemble the pleasant and prosperous administrative and agricultural centre that it was." (ASWT 26). Saint-Lo as Beckett knew it, was a place of peculiar contradictions. Here life and death, beginnings and endings were strangely proximate; the hospital was opposite "the remains of [...] a stud farm" (17); the walls of the hospital were built from redundant war-plane sheet-metal (19); it was a place where "children played with detonators" (21); and it was a place which gave rise to a "vision and a sense of a time-honoured conception of humanity in ruins" (27).

*Endgame* is at some level evidently connected with the Saint-Lo experience, though it is undoubtedly a gloomier,
more cynical work than "The Capital of the Ruins". Where the broadcast celebrates the hospital's capacity to discharge "its cures" (26), the play offers the rejoinder, "You're on earth, there's no cure for that!" (CDW 118) Nevertheless there are a number of common themes and details: the bleak shelter surrounded by desolation, for instance, and the pre-occupation with compassion amongst extreme suffering. Like Saint-Lô, Hamm's domain, too, was once a place of agriculture and administration; he once had copious granaries (118) and organised rounds of inspection on behalf of his paupers (96). In both situations there is a shortage of medicine - penicillin in the one case, pain-killer in the other (ASWT 23; CDW 127) - and an excess of rats. (CDW 126) Beckett was given the Herculean task of exterminating them from the hospital.

Starting all over is a "heroic" (ASWT 24) enterprise for the people of Saint-Lô, whereas for the people in Endgame it is apparently a horrid possibility. Nevertheless though the characters claim to be so disgusted that they are scarcely able to entertain such an idea, they are in fact strangely pre-occupied with thoughts of regeneration. Hamm is impatient with the sanguine: "what in God's name do you
imagine? That the earth will awake in spring? That the rivers and seas will run with fish again? That there's manna in heaven still for imbeciles like you?" (118) But then it might be thought a little odd that one so sceptical should so readily connect the sight of a flea with the prospect of a rejuvenated humanity.

"It's time it ended," says Hamm," and yet I hesitate to end" (93). In fact Hamm does more than hesitate to end, he positively procrastinates by constantly imagining new beginnings. For instance, he avails himself of the clichés of romantic flight: "If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see...the sky, the blue earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me" (100). Later he exhorts Clov "with ardour": "Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft and the currents will carry us away, far away, to other...mammals" (109). This is an appeal, albeit a vain one, to the world of romantic adventure and escape where you are the only girl in the world and I am the only boy (if not the only mammal), and where there's little to do but start all over.

In another memorable flight of fancy Hamm not only imagines but actually impersonates a "rational being"
visiting the earth (108). He therefore posits the existence of a plurality of worlds and the possibility of a host of populated planets. Hamm, it would seem, is not without the science-fiction writer's faith in new worlds as places perhaps to start again. 56

For all the destructive animus breathed by the characters, with their constant mania for extermination and desire to "finish" things (93,118), they have a curious habit of evoking powerful images of burgeoning life. For instance, in his attempt to frighten Clov with the thought of "infinite emptiness all around you", Hamm both intensifies and oddly weakens his point by adding a rhetorical flourish: "All the resurrected dead of all the ages wouldn't fill it" (109). They might not fill it, but they would surely make an impression. The image comes (so to speak) peculiarly alive again a few pages later when Clov remarks that the alarm clock that is intended to indicate his departure is "fit to wake the dead" (115). 57 Hamm can't conceive of his final solitude without creating strange proliferations: "Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together in the
dark" (126). Such a singular sense of being together in the dark looks forward to the company of *Company*. It may also recall the Unnamable's odd locution: "Did I wait somewhere for this place to be ready to receive me? Or did it wait for me to come and people it?" (T 271) An individual may inhabit a place, or occupy it, but it is odd to think of him "peopling" it. To *people* a place you must either be a people already or you must be ready to procreate one.

The most compelling example of this habitual crowd-formation belongs to Clov when, having remarked that "things are livening up", he turns his telescope towards the audience and exclaims, "I see... a multitude ...in transports...of joy" (106). Given Beckett's popularity something like a multitude is likely to be there, but, given the poor nature of the joke "transports of joy" is an exaggeration. (Describing what are probably at best wry smirks as "transports of joy" reinforces the point the play has already made about the disparity between laughter and happiness: Nagg is offended by the thought that Nell had once laughed for happiness, and not at his joke. [102][58]) Accordingly Clov then makes an even worse joke, "That's what...
I call a magnifier". It has magnified an audience into a multitude, titters and smirks into transports of joy. This last joke is, as Beckett acknowledged, much better in the original French, where Clov says "Ca alors, pour une longue-vue c'est une longue-vue" (FP 45); better because "longue-vue" means not only a telescope, but can have the sense of "in the long run", "in the longer term perspective", and suggests also "far-sightedness". These connotations give added force to the notion of "a multitude in transports of joy" ("une foule en délire"). The multitude may be interpreted as a heavenly throng (the resurrected dead) or as an earthly population (humanity all over again); either way, it is in Endgame a remote possibility. The French phrase expresses this in both a hopeless, ironic key (stressing the remoteness of the possibility) and a hopeful one (emphasising that it remains a possibility, however remote). Thus it can mean either "no chance", or "you never know": "Ca alors, pour une longue-vue c'est une longue-vue".
Part II

Regeneration

"So in some ways even olden things each time are first things [...]" (CSP 135)
PART II: INTRODUCTION

The second part of my thesis is in the form of a more general discussion - not confined to single works - of Beckett's whole oeuvre, and its thematic and stylistic treatment of the processes of human regeneration themselves. My aim is to delineate briefly the now familiar (but still disruptive) stance against fertility, birth, and the continuation of life itself, but also to read between the lines of this misanthropic facade.

My argument is largely a plea for a necessary sensitivity to the complex, sometimes contradictory, tone of the writing. The body of critical work on Beckett, so collectively impressive as a scholarly and hermeneutic edifice, seems to me - and this is obviously a broad generalisation - perhaps at its weakest when it comes to sustained literary (as opposed to quasi-philosophical) analysis of particular passages. I have devoted a whole
chapter of this part of the thesis to close textual readings of three such passages (in this case passages about childbirth) in the hope of indicating at least some of the richness of the writing - the "words" which, precisely because of the complex life in them, have for Beckett "been my only loves" (CSP 135).

I hope to demonstrate that there is, in these passages, and in much of Beckett's writing about repetition and regeneration, a clear connection between the life in the words and the life - the new life - that is so often the focus of attention.
it was very wrong of Sean, knowing what he was and knowing what Kate was, to do what he did to Kate, so that she conceived and brought forth Rose, and indeed it was very wrong of her to let him [...]

(Watt)

Throughout his career Beckett examined the situation and responsibilities of the potential progenitor with sustained attention. Over a period spanning six decades, from a piece of student journalism on contraception in 1929 to Company's treatment of pregnancy and childbirth in 1980 Beckett's oeuvre continually focusses - sometimes with ironic playfulness, sometimes with bitterness, sometimes with moving plangency - on the processes and the ethics of procreation itself. Though the writing is notoriously fraught with the vocabulary of impotence, sterility, barrenness, and abortion it is also surprisingly alive to moments of fertility, pregnancy and birth. In it, despite
the arch moral strictures, children are continually conceived and brought forth, and this is not always perceived as a matter only for regret.

The following discussion, in this and the next chapter, will cover a range of texts from across the oeuvre, acknowledging Beckett's strictures against reproduction, but seeking to identify ways in which a dogmatic anti-birth ethos is mitigated or indeed opposed by other currents of feeling.

3.1 The Vexed Issue of Birth

In spite of Beckett's much-vaunted scepticism, his work is often held to evince certain axioms, among which one of the most obvious is that any conceivable life is inherently nasty - "nasty, brutish and long" as one critic has nicely put it\(^1\) - so that one ought not to to inflict it on anyone else by giving birth to them. 'Giving birth' is itself a cliche under some strain in Beckett: where conventional usage holds life to be a gift, his characters insist that it is one which is both unsolicited and unwelcome: "the
inestimable gift of life [...] rammed down my gullet" (T 273). An early poem, "The Vulture", describes "the prone who must/ soon take up their life and walk" (CP 9), in blasphemous allusion to Christ's ministration to the palsied: "Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk". By substituting "life" for "bed" Beckett suggests that life is not so much a gift as a burden - "a thing I carry about with me" (CDW 198) perhaps, like a cross.

Life is a curse, then, and propagation an evil. These often seem chillingly axiomatic in Beckett's writing. Accordingly procreation may seem a vexed issue for Beckett only in so far as he is compelled over and over again to affirm the certainty that one's issue will be thoroughly vexed.

This is to ignore, however, the more generous perspective offered, for instance, in Beckett's comedy. "It was not enough to drag her into the world", bemoans one of Beckett's fathers, "now she must play the piano" (CDW 259). There is a comic compassion in that remark, a witty recognition that petty vexations are at once wholly unrelated to the metaphysics of an ontological condition and at the same time only quantitatively so. Beckett often
comically conceives life as an aggregate of little irritations - and littler pleasures - and this is presented as in some senses a just reckoning, and in others an absurd travesty of a proper assessment of the quality of life. For a potential suicide the case for might be as follows:

...sick headaches...eye trouble...irrational fear of vipers...ear trouble... [...] ...fibroid tumours... pathological horror of songbirds...throat trouble ...need of affection... [...] ...inner void... congenital timidity...nose trouble... [...] ...morbidly sensitive to the opinions of others... (CDW 242)

And the case against?

...good graces of an heirless aunt...[...]...unfinished game of chess with a correspondent in Tasmania...hope not dead of living to see the extermination of the species...literary aspirations incompletely stifled... bottom of a dairy-woman in Waterloo Lane... (CDW 242)

There are troubles a-plenty, of varying magnitudes, and only the most paltry and desultory pleasures. Nevertheless, for all the desire for oblivion - for "the extermination of the species" - there is an irrepressible (if paradoxical) "hope not dead of living" to see it, as well as a comic vitality that animates this particular "ledger of weal and woe" (T 63).

"[H]appiness too, yes, there was that too, unhappily." (CSP 201) "Unhappily" partly because remembered happiness
can be salt in the wound of present misery, but partly also because happiness spoils the felicitous neatness of a life of pure suffering. "There's the rub [...] Catch-cony life! To be nothing but pain, how that would simplify matters! Omnidolent!" (CSP 8). "If there were only darkness," Beckett has said, "all would be clear. It is because there is not only darkness but also light that our situation becomes inexplicable". To be born is to see the light - "You first saw the light in the room you most likely were conceived in" (NO 9-10) - and light paradoxically dispels the relative clarity of unremitting gloom.

With a comically brittle decisiveness, and then the tone of one who, being a reasonable fellow, 'mustn't grumble', the narrator of From an Abandoned Work says "No, I regret nothing, all I regret is having been born" (CSP 132). Unlike Piaf then, he regrets quite a lot, after all - but chiefly, one feels, what E.M. Cioran has in a Beckettian vein called "l'inconvenient d'être né." For Beckett to be born is to be "put out", in a phrase with which First Love, in particular, makes great play (CSP 18); it is to be inconvenienced by an irreversible expulsion and disturbed by a state of affairs - life itself - that complicates matters
decidedly. Nevertheless his writing is as much a critique of curmudgeonly and splenetic ingratitude in the wake of birth as a manifestation of it.

As Steven Rosen has shown in his excellent book *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition* Beckett draws on a strand of pessimistic thinking which, although not a coherent body in quite the way that Rosen's title suggests, nevertheless stretches from the wisdom of Ecclesiastes and the pre-Socratic sages through the Cynics to relatively modern exponents such as Leopardi and Schopenhauer: these often propound the idea that life is a fundamental evil to be eschewed at all costs. Sometimes, however, this is offered merely as a rhetorical *coup de grâce* - a consciously extreme view not inviting whole-hearted endorsement so much as administering a revivifying shake-up of long settled complacencies. This is certainly the case in Beckett, too. Out-and-out pessimism is in any case a difficult view to maintain with absolute honesty and tends, if pushed too far, to seem like callow posturing, and Beckett knows this as well as any. Rosen is absolutely right to argue that although one of Beckett's main strategies is to wield a withering and acidic pessimism aimed at dissolving flaccid
'consolations', he also turns a critical and often comic eye on the "fatuous compulsion" that pessimism can itself so often become. As Rosen argues in a crucial discrimination, "the object of ridicule [...] is not 'life', but the tendency to formulate judgements about life's quality, whether positive or negative". If it is true, as Lawrence Harvey among others has noted, that Beckett draws on a tradition that holds sterility to be the highest good, it does not follow that he thereby exemplifies that tradition.

3.2 Weighing the Pros and Cons

There are, of course, numerous passages in Beckett's work that speak of a virulent contempt for the engendering of life. In Eleuthéria Dr. Piouk puts his case unambiguously enough:

Here it is. I would prohibit reproduction. I would perfect the condom and other appliances and generalise their use. I would create state-run corps of abortionists. I would impose the death-sentence on every woman guilty of having given birth. I would drown the newborn. I would campaign in favor of homosexuality and myself set the example. And to get things going, I would encourage by every means the recourse to euthanasia, without, however, making it an obligation. Here you have the broad outlines. (E 43)
Dr. Piouk's programme is, as James Knowlson acknowledges, the more repulsive for the fact that "only a matter of months before, several of Beckett's friends (notably Alfred Peron and Paul Leon) had suffered and died during the war from similar extermination techniques."¹⁰ ("I do not lay claim to originality", says Piouk, "It is a matter of organisation.") Nevertheless Knowlson's conviction that such proposals "must have struck Beckett as execrable" is too simple, for it avoids the question of why Beckett felt a compulsion to write, again and again, in this hysterically misanthropic mode, as if exorcising a demon. Of course Piouk does not speak simply on behalf of Beckett, but in passages like this - and they abound in the Trilogy where they are given in the characteristically ironic and splenetic first-person voice less easily distanced from the author - Beckett is expressing something (not necessarily the whole story) that seems deep-rootedly personal.

The play's whole project, of course, is to 'épater la bourgeoisie', and in particular to be one in the eye for supposedly bourgeois complacencies about the value of the family. Moreover the play's polemic is aimed at Ireland - not only at his particular family with whom relations were
to say the least under strain, but at the state which had
banned, to Beckett's undying disgust, both contraceptives
and abortions. The speech, above all then, represents a
rhetorical display of dissent.

The tone rings through much of the oeuvre, continually
overturning the expected pieties. Molloy provocatively
reverses the conventions of filial gratitude when, with a
flourish of ironic magnanimity, he feels able to forgive his
mother:

I know she did all she could not to have me, except of
course the one thing, and if she never succeeded in
getting me unstuck, it was that fate had earmarked me
for less compassionate sewers. (T 19)

Here the womb is a blocked drain, but one that is preferable
to life outside it, and "getting me unstuck" equates the
foetus with troublesome detritus. In Murphy, accordingly, a
father is accompanied by his "eldest waste-product" (M 47);
in More Pricks Than Kicks a child is a "by-product of a
love-encounter" (MPTK 133); and in Mercier and Camier
children are for one character "brats the off-scourings of
fornication" (MC 40). ("Off-scourings" are here the poor
relations of conventional offspring.) In Embers Henry's
memory of his father calling him a "washout" merely prompts
the bitterly laconic remark: "Wish to Christ she had" (CDW 256).

"I'm looking for my mother to kill her," says the Unnamable, but not satisfied with that he adds, "I should have thought of that a bit earlier, before being born" (T 360). Matricide and suicide are here grimly equated, in a moment of grim esprit de l'escalier. A psychobiographical reading of Beckett's work might conclude that it is in some senses an act of revenge - or a belated defence-mechanism - against the mother who perpetrated him. Mary Bryden speculates that

perhaps the overriding sting of such passages, full of scalding resentment towards implication in the forcible birth process, testifies not so much to a powerful dismissal of the explicitly female parturitive vehicle per se as to a surge of powerless and hopeless self-defence from a life-participant only too well aware of his own vulnerability.

This sense of vulnerability can, it seems, only be coped with on the long-term basis which the life-sentence demands by means of a number of survival-strategies, of which the [...] vituperative diatribe is one.

Bryden's argument is familiar and persuasive: a misanthropic and misogynist vision is less a tenable intellectual position than a symptom of a personal malaise.

Nevertheless the vituperative diatribes of such a vision
are only half the story. Commenting on Piouk's outburst against children Bryden writes that though "this dictator figure may be a parody", "it might also be noted that no Beckettian character ever posits a pro-birth argument in equally clear-cut or forceful tones." This is true, but as even Arthur Schopenhauer acknowledges, what runs counter to the anti-birth argument is not another argument, but something much less logical:

If children were brought into the world by an act of pure reason alone, would the human race continue to exist? Would not a man rather have so much sympathy with the coming generation as to spare it the burden of existence? or at any rate not take it upon himself to impose that burden upon it in cold blood.

"Pure reason alone", Schopenhauer implies, is not all that moves mankind to procreate. Discussing William Empson's pre-occupation with the problem of propagation Christopher Ricks makes the following observations:

It is not rare for people to believe that the world [...] is such that children should not be brought into it; it is uncommon [...] for people to act on this belief, and on principle to have no children; more usual is for people to acknowledge the force of a grim truth and yet also to have children because of what seems a different duty and delight.

As relevant criteria, 'duties and delights' might be thought alien to Beckett's ethos, but when Ricks speaks of the
pessimistic view of children as "unappeasable, but overruled", then we are in plausibly Beckettian realms of paradox. Procreation can't (or oughtn't) go on, but it goes on, and Beckett's feelings about it are mixed. It would after all be odd to think that this is one subject (unlike almost everything else) upon which Beckett is not - to use a phrase from Joyce's "Work in Progress" that he especially commended - "in twosome twiminds" (D 28).

To be unappeased but overruled is to be in conflict, and this is very different from the serene complacency manifested in the following anecdote:

Once being asked why he did not himself become a father, he answered, that it was because he was fond of children. The riposte is not Beckett's, but that of one of his beloved pre-Socratics, Thales. This paradoxical sentiment is at the root of much rhetoric about the ethics of procreation, and, in a similar vein, Vivien Mercier remarks that in Beckett's work "the best mother [...] is the one who has no children". But there is something too neat about this; the paradox is too easily accommodated. Thales and Mercier court the pious self-satisfaction of having it both ways just because of the untroubled single-mindedness of the wit, and
the refusal even to countenance something like Ricks' "different duty and delight" renders the response strangely hollow and sentimental. It chimes with another critic's precious and complacent description of "the child-abuse of mere existence" in Beckett. For all its raillery against birth, Beckett's writing is rarely as decisively morbid as this, rarely as comfortably settled in its grim convictions. An unappeasable sense of life's inherent suffering does not simply govern his work: it is constantly in conflict with - now and again even overruled by - more generous impulses.

In Eleutheria Piouk's diatribe is answered not by a counter-argument, but by the comic and candid contradiction of his own ensuing admission that

I want a child, first off, to amuse me during my leisure hours, more and more brief and dreary; second, that it should receive the torch from my hands, when they can no longer bear it. (E 44)

It might be argued that Beckett is merely scoffing at the knee-jerk return to conventional pieties of even this most outspoken advocate of sterility. Nevertheless the volte-face is characteristic; Beckett's work as a whole tends to revise its outspokenness, rewriting raillery against birth into something less polemical and dogmatic. It
is sometimes something more wistfully hopeful about the possibility of children, sometimes something more mournfully regretful about their absence. Very often the counter-current to a superficial anti-birth rhetoric is indicated in a much more genial comic mode of writing about the processes of procreation itself. All of these will be examined in ensuing sections of this and the following chapter.

Piouk recalls staying up all night with his new wife "weighing the pros and cons, incapable of making a decision" (E 45). Procreation or contraception? It is my contention that, about such matters, Beckett's writing is also much less decided than is generally supposed.

3.3 Dying for Successors: "From An Abandoned Work"

I too. Last of my race [...] No son. Rudy. Too late now. Or if not? (Ulysses)

A trace, it wants to leave a trace [...] it's with that it would make a life. (CSP 113)
For all his ostentatious misanthropy Molloy is still able to speak with a touch of yearning about a son. Having taken his mother's place he presumes he "must resemble her more and more":

All I need now is a son. Perhaps I have one somewhere. But I think not. He would be old now, nearly as old as myself [...] It seems to me sometimes that I even knew my son, that I helped him. Then I tell myself it's impossible. (T 9)

Molloy's remarks are not without a residue of exasperation - "all I need" does not quite escape the impatience of the colloquial 'that's all I need' - but the conventional consolation of continuity, one generation coming to resemble the next, is evoked without irony.

"Perhaps I have one somewhere": the remark is partly rakish, but the distant prospect of a child, however tenuous (as, for instance, in Endgame) is one that is stubbornly and often wistfully entertained throughout Beckett's oeuvre. Again and again a child is posited (albeit ambiguously, indirectly, tangentially) as a partly longed for possibility, however far removed. Later chapters will substantiate this more fully, but for now, a short post-Trilogy work will illustrate the point.

Like Molloy, the narrator of From An Abandoned Work
conveys a sometimes splenetic, sometimes fond desire to have done:

let me get up now and on and get this awful day over and on to the next [...] Over, over, there is a soft place in my heart for all that is over, no, for the being over [...] (CSP 135)

This characteristic attitude seems to indicate nothing but tedium in the face of repetition, and yet it is importantly mitigated by a contrary sense of individual transience and of repetition as renewal:

So in some way even olden things each time are first things, no two breaths the same, all a going over and over and all once and never more. (CSP 135)

This ambivalence about the nature of repetition informs the story's tangential remarks on children, for this narrator, again like Molloy, is much preoccupied by generational succession. The story is essentially an old man's memories - of a day when he waves goodbye to his mother as a young man, of "some other day at a later time" (CSP 134), and of a third day, years later, made memorable by "the look I got from the roadman" (CSP 136), a look that reminds him of an old childhood companion: "the look I got from Balfe, I went in terror of him as a child. Now he is dead and I resemble
him." (CSP 136, my emphasis). The story is concerned with generational repetition and succession: it contemplates both the death of parents and the birth of children. I will come to further discussion of the story by way of two German writers for whom Beckett had much respect.

For Arthur Schopenhauer, as so often for Beckett himself, children elicit feelings of bleak unchangingness and tedious repetition:

He who lives to see two or three generations is like a man who sits some time in the conjuror's booth at a fair, and witnesses the performance twice or thrice in succession. The tricks were meant to be seen only once; and when they are no longer a novelty and cease to deceive their effect is gone.

Schopenhauer, in the name of an ancient wisdom, writes against the grain of a Rousseauvian faith in the infinite potential of the child. For Schopenhauer the child represents not the hope of change, but the certainty of continual failure. This, however, is a difficult attitude to maintain without appearing ridiculous, as William Empson has remarked:

You must have done a great deal before you can appear disillusioned with any dignity; you must then remember that anyone else, given the accident of your successes would also be disillusioned, otherwise you can be placed as a poor creature unhappy in his psychology; avoiding boastfulness you must not be plaintive, or you
may be pitied for having lost your strength; and in either case you become fatuous once you expect people to admire you for making a to-do about a truth that, by hypothesis, they themselves are at bottom facing with fortitude.

Schopenhauer's view of children does not acknowledge the possibility that his pessimistic conclusions may be only locally, and not universally, applicable. The seer, after all, may be short-sighted.

In his Diaries Kafka records a note about childlessness that stands in useful opposition to Schopenhauer's remark:

An unfortunate man, one who is condemned to have no children, is terribly imprisoned in his misfortune. Nowhere a hope for revival, for help from luckier stars. He must live his life, afflicted by his misfortune, and when its circle is ended must resign himself to it and not start out again to see whether, on a longer path, under other circumstances of body and time, the misfortune which he has suffered could disappear or even produce something good.

Couched in negative terms, this is gloomy enough. And yet the possibility here represented by a child - of "something good" in "other circumstances" - is wistfully entertained in a way that is anathema to Schopenhauer's Weltanschauung.

In Beckett's From An Abandoned Work such wistfulness is comically ironised, and thus seemingly pre-empted and forestalled:

Never loved anyone I think, I'd remember [...] In a way
perhaps it's a pity, a good woman might have been the making of me, I might be sprawling in the sun now sucking my pipe and patting the bottoms of the third and fourth generation, looked up to and respected, wondering what there was for dinner, instead of stravaging the same old roads in all weathers, I was never much of a one for new ground. No, I regret nothing, all I regret is having been born, dying is such a long tiresome business, I always found.

(CSP 132)

The narrator posits a family idyll as a once possible alternative to his life of lonely wandering, but the idyll is pastiche - the bachelor poet's comic parody of the bourgeois success story, in mocking allusion to the biblical tableau in which the patriarchal Job stands proudly in the midst of his new-found chattels. As a picture of complacent ease and satisfaction it is designed to provoke dissent in the same way as the scenario proposed by Beckett in rehearsal as an alternative to Krapp's miserable solitude:

Beckett depicts with a smile the image of an old Krapp who had made the opposite decision: surrounded by an aged wife and many, many children...'Good God!'.

In both cases the "opposite decision" to the choice of childless solitude is caricatured as tedious rigmarole reminiscent of Schopenhauer's "conjurer's booth". And yet both From An Abandoned Work (written in 1955) and Krapp's
The phrase "I always found" seems wearily to assume that
life will always be found so because that is 'how it is' necessarily, but equally it may be an acknowledgement that the finding is empirical, not categorical - local, not universal. Part of the effect here is achieved by the fact that "always found" rhymes with "new ground", so that the moment of weary resignation re-introduces through an echo the possibility of forward-looking thoughts. "I always found" "dying" (i.e. life) "a long tiresome business" - but then remember that "I was never much of a one for new ground".

The narrator's pre-occupation with "dream-animals" - a preoccupation that manifests itself just prior to the imagined family idyll - testifies to his unstated yearning for that which is beyond present "circumstances of body and time":

Never loved anyone I think, I'd remember. Except in my dreams, and there it was animals, dream-animals, nothing like what you see walking about the country, I couldn't describe them, lovely creatures they were, white mostly. In a way perhaps it's a pity, a good woman might have been the making of me, I might be sprawling in the sun now [...] (CSP 132)

The narrator has already encountered just such an animal when he saw "at a great distance a white horse" (CSP 130); "I had never seen such a horse, though often heard of them,
and never saw another" (CSP 131). This assuredly
dream-like animal is linked tentatively to the figure of a
child - it was "followed by a boy, or it might have been a
small man or woman" (CSP 130) - and the composite image is
reminiscent of the numinous boy and goat whom the narrator
of The Calmative "might have taken for a young centaur" (CSP
41). In these texts, as well as in The Expelled and The End
children might be considered as a species of "dream-animal",
as uncanny apparitions that are elusive but strangely
comforting, and as images of life "under other circumstances
of body and time".26

Later on in From An Abandoned Work the narrator
considers a different set of such "other circumstances" when
he contemplates his own final dissolution:

Oh I know I shall soon cease and be as when I was not
yet, only all over instead of in store, that makes me
happy, often now my murmur falters and dies and I weep
for happiness as I go along and for love of this old
earth that has carried me so long and whose
uncomplainingness will soon be mine. Just under the
surface I shall be, all together at first, then
separate and drift, through all the earth and perhaps
in the end through a cliff into the sea, something of
me. (CSP 133-4)

Far from wishing for "new ground", the narrator longs only
for the comfort of "old earth". Yet it is just here in
decay that his movements become most exploratory - far from the beaten track of those "same old roads" he does literally break new ground: "separate and drift, through all the earth and perhaps in the end through a cliff into the sea". There's an air of flight and release about that. (The sea, after all, is a regenerative element; it "tosses up our losses", it is where life originates.) Here "old earth" is putatively not a final resting place but a thoroughfare.

Indeed it is similarly represented in Old Earth, where every third year a generation of cockchafers finds release.

Three years in the earth, those the moles don't get, then guzzle guzzle, ten days long, a fortnight, and always the flight at nightfall. To the river perhaps, they head for the river. (CSP 201)

That text too, like From An Abandoned Work, contemplates and merges dissolution and renewal: "{...} see the sky, a long gaze, but no, gasps and spasms, a childhood sea, other skies, another body" (CSP 201). The "gasps and spasms" may be those of the dying or of the new-born; the other circumstances of body and time alluded to subsequently may be the fragmentary memories of a dying man, or his forward looking thoughts concerning incipient life.

In the circumstances of dissolution imagined in From An
Abandoned Work the narrator would be "all over" only in the sense of being ubiquitous. Arsene's meditation in Watt on the "poor old lousy old earth" - "lousy" because infested by the teeming generations represented by the list of fathers and mothers - was essentially retrospective (W 45). Here the narrator's contemplation of "old earth" looks forward, not only to his own decomposition, but also - through a perhaps subliminal ambiguity in the syntax - to prospective generations, to successors: "[...] all together at first, then separate and drift, through all the earth [...] something of me." For all its overt desire for oblivion, then, From An Abandoned Work also registers a residual and covert desire to "leave a trace" (CSP 113).

3.4 Incipience and New Life

The passage discussed in the last section may be drawing on Schopenhauer's thought where it comes closest to pantheism. For Schopenhauer the world as a whole is merely the objectification of Will, Schopenhauer's version of the Kantian thing-in-itself. Will is a constant striving to no
end and is manifested in the world as a whole, both animate and inanimate nature. The Will is thus indifferent to individuals, the individual merely being an entity created by the *princípium individuationis*. When an individual dies, no change is registered by the Will which merely continues its striving in other forms. The Will "appears in every blindly acting force of nature, and also in the deliberate conduct of man". In death those subdued forces of nature win back from the organism, wearied even by constant victory, the matter snatched from them, and attain to unimpeded expression of their being. (I.146)

That well describes the sense of release looked forward to in *From An Abandoned Work* (though there the narrator's final insistence - tacked to the end of the sentence - on "something of me" suggests a slight reluctance to surrender the *princípium individuationis*). For Schopenhauer the idea that the forces of nature acting on a decaying body are themselves manifestations of the same will that was manifest in that body when alive is not meant to be a source of comfort, for it only testifies to the implacability of the Will which is itself evil. (The death of an individual can in no way diminish the stock of will in the world.)
Nevertheless, in *From An Abandoned Work*, the idea that somehow "something of me" will be wending its way through inanimate matter seems a source of some comfort. Usually in Beckett the unendingness of life, in whatever form, is regarded as a torment, but it's notable that this passage suggests a sort of benign pantheism.

Schopenhauer, unlike many later philosophers — notably Nietzsche — characterises the Will as fundamentally evil, because it keeps us in a constant state of want.

Every attained end is at the same time the beginning of a new course, and so on ad infinitum. The plant raises its phenomenon from the seed through stem and leaf to blossom and fruit, which is in turn only the beginning of a new seed, of a new individual, which once more runs through the old course, and so through endless time. (I.164)

This lies behind Arsene's diatribe against the seasons in *Watt* which ends only with, "the whole bloody thing starting all over again" (W 46), and it explains Schopenhauer's view that to see children is to see a tiresome re-run of a performance. The "old course" is related to the "same old roads" of *From An Abandoned Work*.

It is notable, however, that in *The World as Will and Representation*, despite the conclusion that the best thing is denial of the will to live, the prose is most compelling
and animated when describing the multitudinous manifestations of the Will. Though Schopenhauer intends to demonstrate that the world is everywhere the same, he succeeds only in demonstrating its heterogeneity. One can't help feeling that the energy of this protean Will, for all the suffering it causes, is something in itself to be wondered at and admired.

Beckett, too, seems alive to the animated élan as well as the regrettable suffering of what the Unnamable, after Darwin and Schopenhauer, calls "the great life torrent streaming from the earliest protozoa to the very latest humans" (T 295). Although often associated only with attenuated dereliction, Beckett's world is also one of burgeoning profusion and constant incipience. The great life torrent, while overtly regretted, is also indirectly celebrated; the writing has a life of its own.

For Beckett new life is both inevitable and surprising. In the early fiction, one of Belacqua's girlfriends is threatening because a "brood-maiden" (MPTK 128); she is in the habit of "looking babies in his eyes" (DFMW 19). To "look babies" is to gaze into the eyes of another and create the reciprocal reflections of faces in irises, and this
multiple replication tends to evoke the possibility of procreation. For Schopenhauer, any particular love affair is a manifestation of the Will, which transcends individual concerns:

The true end of the whole love-story, though the parties concerned are unaware of it, is that this particular child may be begotten [...] It is the future generation in the whole of its individual definiteness which is pressing into existence by means of [the] efforts and exertions [of any two lovers...] The growing attachment of two lovers is in itself in reality the will-to-live of the new individual [...] *Its new life, indeed, is already enkindled in the meeting of their longing glances* [...] (II.535-6; my emphasis)

In Beckett - where "one is born every minute" (MC 32) - the next generation is always, for better or for worse, pressing into existence: "a press of sombre shaggy bulks hemmed them about, thicker and thicker as the hour wore on" (MC 23). But if "new life" is "the fruit of a collision" (DFMW 117), this is not only a callous description of a child as an accidental but inevitable by-product of love. It also suggests, more comically, and perhaps more generously, incipient life as haphazardly animated, something with impetus. In Beckett, new life is always popping up unexpectedly, and at such moments vitality is often injected into the prose too. There is, for instance, the comic
exaggeration of the facility - occasionally the alacrity -
with which a child is engendered: "Can it be she is with
child without your having asked for so much as her hand?"
(NO 34) The narrator of First Love has barely asked for as
little from his partner, but "one day she had the impudence
to announce she was with child, and four or five months gone
into the bargain, by me of all people!" (CSP 17). Whether the
tone is that of the bemused ingénu or the impotent cynic,
each voice is quickened by surprise. Incipient life is for
Beckett (of all people) a subject of great fascination.

Despite his obsession with ends and ending, Beckett
writes a great deal about the condition of being at the
beginning of something. Beckett's world is pregnant with
incipience and new starts. Of course Beckett will often
equate beginnings with ends - "What finished me was the
birth" (CSP 18); "They give birth astride of a grave" (CDW
82); "Birth was the death of him" (CDW 425) - so that his
work appears to be governed by a grim determinism that
precludes new departures. In Watt "the birth of a child" is
implicitly equated, by juxtaposition in a list, with "the
backing of a loser" (W 52), and White's first move in
Murphy's chess game is "the primary cause of all white's
subsequent difficulties" (M 137).

And yet Beckett - a tireless innovator - is continually starting again, if only because every end needs its beginning. Perhaps "[t]he best would be not to begin. But I have to begin" (T 268). In the Texts for Nothing, which start again thirteen times, a voice speaks of the need to "get into my story in order to get out of it"; "one is frightened to be born, no, one wishes one were, so as to begin to die" (CSP 81;85). Beckett's title For To End Yet Again combines the weariness implicit in "yet again" with a sense of the prospective conveyed by the peculiar locution "for to" which indicates - with a sort of taking in of breath - a formulated intention, a new initiative, a proposal to commence or "buckle to anew" (CSP 169). Similarly the static implications of the title How It Is are in the French original offset by the aural pun available in Comment C'est, and the novel's division into strophes represents the successive re-commencements after each breath is taken: "suddenly yip [...] off we go" again (HII 33).

Beckett's writing is frequently described in terms of stasis and impasse; it is worth considering how much it owes to a sense of momentum, momentum imparted by beginnings (of
narratives as of lives) that are either explosive - "Exeo in a spasm" (CP10) - or at least sprightly: "Up bright and early, I was young then [...]" (CSP 129); "all the livelong way this day of sweet showers"(CP 17). His prose is continually re-animated by comic explosions of energy: "peekaboo here I come again" (CSP 108); "yip off I go again, like a young one" (T 289).

Any just appraisal of Beckett's writing on the prospect of new life must take into account the unofficial life of the writing, the animated impetus that belies the doctrinal longing for quiescence.

3.5 A Deeper Birth: "Texts for Nothing"

An argument such as mine will have to engage with the notorious Beckettian doctrine about the difficulty of birth. Pozzo's disarming definition of the human condition - "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth" (CDW ) - has provided the starting point for Paul Lawley's persuasive account of the importance, throughout the oeuvre, of "the image of the 'difficult birth', of a birth imperfect,
obstructed or continuing". I want both to acknowledge the force of Lawley's argument (adding some observations of my own) and to highlight some aspects of Beckett's writing about birth that mitigate the familiar sense of terminal stasis and impasse.

One of the most resonant images of a child in Beckett is described by Mrs Rooney in All That Fall:

I remember once attending a lecture put forward by one of these new mind doctors [...] I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and how he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her, he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he could see was that she was dying. And she did in fact die, shortly after he had washed his hands of her [...] it was just something he said, and the way he said it, that has haunted me ever since [...] When he had done with the little girl he stood there motionless for some time, quite two minutes I should say, looking down at his table. Then he suddenly raised his head and exclaimed, as if he had had a revelation, The trouble with her is that she had never been really born!

(CDW 196)

Beckett himself attended a lecture at the Tavistock Clinic in October 1935 in which he heard Jung describe a patient with words like these, and they undoubtedly haunted him ever after. Watt, begun in 1943, includes them among its addenda - "never been properly born" (W 248) - and they are at the heart of All That Fall, a play written twenty one years...
after Beckett first heard them. Five years after that
Beckett spoke to Lawrence Harvey of a sense of "existence by
proxy" and an intuition of "a presence, embryonic,
undeveloped, of a self that might have been but never got
born, an être manqué"; and another seven years later he
again alluded to Jung's remark in an interview given in
1968:

I once attended a lecture by Jung in which he spoke
about one of his patients, a very young girl. After the
lecture, as everyone was leaving, Jung stood by
silently. And then, as if speaking to himself,
astonished by the discovery that he was making, he
added: In the most fundamental way, she had never been
really born. I, too, have always had the sense of never
having been born.

The 'little girl' encapsulates the Beckettian
apprehension of the self's lack of full being. Most of
Beckett's characters can be said to be incompletely born -
life is for them a mere passage, a fluid state of transition
rather than the stable locus of full presence. Thus the
ghostly characteristics of many Beckettian creatures,
typified by May in Footfalls. In that play the voice of her
mother speaks of May as being "in the old home, the same
where she - [Pause.] The same where she began" (401); May
was not properly born, she merely began. Beckett told
Billie Whitelaw when she played May in London in 1976, "Let's just say you're not quite there"\textsuperscript{36}, and indeed Walter Asmus has reported that at rehearsals for the German premier of \textit{Footfalls} in the same year Beckett told the actress playing May the story of Jung's remark about the little girl: "'The girl wasn't living', he said, 'She existed but didn't actually live.'"\textsuperscript{37}

If no one is really born or properly born, then every birth is a kind of miscarriage or abortion. The pain implied by a birth that is strangely incomplete would be a reason for not undertaking to give birth at all, and the notion of the \textit{être manque} partly explains the animus directed at the idea of procreation in Beckett.

On the other hand Beckett's fascination with the description of one not properly born testifies to his urgent desire for a satisfying birth. Indeed Beckett's fiction - which is constantly "straining towards an issue" (CSP 47) - powerfully articulates a yearning for "a deeper birth" (CSP 111). The handicap of not being really born may perhaps be overcome, not by not being born at all or by returning to the womb, but by being born more properly. In 1968 Beckett's words about feeling not properly born like the
girl described by Jung significantly emphasise not regression and withdrawal, but incipience:

I have always sensed that there was within me an assassinated being. Assassinated before my birth. I needed to find this assassinated person again. And try to give him new life. (my emphasis)

Since Beckett's work is predicated on the idea of life as a passage to death - a "being given [...] birth to into death" (T 260) - it may be that the "deeper birth" is only a euphemism for death, and indeed the context in which the phrase occurs confirms this:

It's a winter night, where I was, where I'm going, remembered, imagined, no matter, believing in me, believing it's me, no, no need, so long as the others are there, where, in the world of the others, of the long mortal ways, under the sky, with a voice, no, no need, and the power to move, now and then, no need either, so long as the others move, the true others, but on earth, beyond all doubt on earth, for as long as it takes to die again, wake again, long enough for things to change here, for something to change, to make possible a deeper birth, a deeper death, or resurrection in and out of this murmur of memory and dream. (CSP 111)

This is from the Texts for Nothing, among Beckett's most difficult and beautiful writings. The speaker - if he can be thought sufficiently at one with himself to be so named: "we seem to be more than one" (CSP 71) - is located in some Dantesque limbo from which he cannot escape except through
desultory memories (or imaginings) of life above in the
light. His strange twilit existence is in fact unlocatable,
neither here nor there in time or space. It is precisely the
state of one incompletely born, in so far as birth may be
taken as a metaphor for arrival; indeed at one point he
imagines prayers "offered for my soul, as for that of an
infant dead in its dead mother" (CSP 87). He requires only
that his memories or dreams sustain him for such time as it
takes for a significant change in his condition to occur,
that change being figured as "a deeper birth, a deeper
death, or resurrection". The phrases are presented as
synonyms, and yet to speak of "resurrection", and especially
of "a deeper birth", is to betray a longing for something
other than quiescence. It may imply a hope for the condition
of those less manqués, less unhappily unbirthed, "true
others [...] on earth". 39

The thirteen often lugubrious meditations that comprise
the Texts For Nothing are consistently galvanised by a
(sometimes comic) impulse towards incipience that opposes
the letheward drift: "nothing like breathing your last to
put new life in you" (CSP 73). By figuring the death-wish
as a mode of rejuvenation, Beckett reveals that his
preoccupation with ends has much to do with beginnings: his "infant languors in the end-sheets" (CSP 114) are both doom-laden and "pregnant with promise of the future" (CSP 96).

The ninth text ends:

And I have no doubts, I'd get there somehow, to the way out, sooner or later, if I could say. There's a way out there, there's a way out there somewhere, the rest would come, the other words, sooner or later, and the power to get there, and the way to get there, and pass out, and see the beauties of the skies, and see the stars again. (CSP 103)

This alludes to one of Beckett's favourite images of metaphorical birth, Dante's emergence from hell in the last Canto of the Inferno. These words stand in contrast to those of the earlier poem Whoroscope, in which the speaker alludes to the hopelessly self-enclosed "starless inscrutable hour" that has been his life (CP 4). Although the emergence in Text IX remains only a possibility, as yet unaccomplished, the rhythms and cadences of the prose convey a tone that is genuinely hopeful, if far from sanguine.

John Pilling argues that the speaker is "at no time concerned with the possibility of experiencing the 'way out' but only with the possibility of being able to say it; "[he] can only imagine himself [...] in movement, and only
find solace in the imaginings of others [...] A real emergence [...] is as far away as ever". But the grim logic of the text's narrative structure is at odds with its surging rhythms, and owing to these the reader, at least, does finally experience a sense of emergence.

"I gave up before birth [...] but birth there had to be" (CSP 197, my emphasis); for all the lassitude in Beckett, for all the regressive impulses towards womb-like serenity, there is finally an insistence on the need to emerge: "Be born, that's the brainwave now [...]" (T 207).
CHAPTER FOUR

CHILDBIRTH: THREE NATIVITIES

The arguments from the preceding chapter will better be illustrated by a closer look at Beckett's treatment of childbirth in some specific and extended nativity scenes. These - from Watt, First Love, and Company - are all very different in tone, and not only illustrate Beckett's developing style, but testify to his far from doctrinaire treatment of an abiding theme. In each case a close reading of an entire passage will, I hope, bring out something of the complexity of Beckett's response to childbirth. I will begin, however, with some general remarks about Otto Rank, whose psychoanalytic theory features indirectly in each case.

4.1 The Trauma of Birth: Otto Rank and Beckettian Obstetrics

Otto Rank's post-Jungian The Trauma of Birth was
published in London in 1929, five years before Beckett underwent analysis with Wilfred Bion at the Tavistock Clinic, and six years before he heard Jung's pivotal remark about the little girl who had never been properly born. It is the kind of book Beckett would have read with great enjoyment, and many of its ideas are to be found in his oeuvre. Nevertheless Beckett's allusions to Rankian ideas are never straightforward endorsements; his literary treatment of psychoanalytical theory often involves a revivifying revisionary gloss.

Rank is a far less subtle writer than either Freud or Jung, and *The Trauma of Birth* comprises an implausibly monolithic thesis about birth as a primary and catastrophic trauma:

"The human being needs many years - namely, his whole childhood - in which to overcome this first intensive trauma in an approximately normal way. Every child has anxiety, and from the standpoint of the average healthy adult, one can, with a certain amount of justification, designate the childhood of individuals as their normal neurosis. Only this may continue into adult life in the case of certain individuals, the neurotics, who therefore remain infantile or are called infantile."

For Rank, "every infantile utterance of anxiety or fear is really a partial disposal of the birth anxiety", and "every pleasure has as its final aim the re-establishment of the
intra-uterine primal pleasure" (16,17). Indeed as Rank's relentless argument unfolds, it transpires that virtually every conceivable human activity - sex, religion, and art, for example - is explicable in terms of the primal trauma of birth and the coping strategies deployed as a consequence of it. Each instance of human behaviour represents a manifestation either of the wish to return to the womb - "[an] attempt[] to re-establish by means of the most varied forms of substitutional gratification the lost primal state" (199) - or of the resistance to or will to control such a wish.

So the primal tendency to re-establish the first and most pleasurable experience is opposed not only by the primal repression, acting as a protection against the repetition of the most painful experience associated with it, but simultaneously also by the striving against the source of pleasure itself, of which one does not wish to be reminded because it must remain unattainable. (199)

Beckett's characters often display this sort of behaviour rather conspicuously: Belacqua's search for a "wombtomb", for instance, (DFMW 45) is a manifestation of the "primal tendency"; and Murphy illustrates the "striving against the source of pleasure itself", for he "never wore a hat" because "the memories it awoke of the caul were too
poignant, especially when he had to take it off" (M 45). Nevertheless the wryness of that last example might remind us that in both of these early novels the protagonists' doctrinaire Rankian behaviour is offset by an authorial irony that partly finds fault with their callow and regressive solipsism.2

Indeed Rank's tone in The Trauma of Birth is so consistently self-confident and triumphalist that it is difficult to imagine Beckett taking it wholly seriously. Rank continues the passage quoted above by saying that "in this primal ambivalence of the psychical is answered the riddle of human development [...]" (199; my emphasis). This absurd reductivism is exactly what Beckett would disdainfully describe as "Davus and the morbid dread of sphinxes, solution clapped on problem like a snuffer on a candle" (D 92). Beckett may allude to a number of Rank's ideas, but he does not offer them as simple 'explanations'; they are usually only one component in a wider picture. Rank consistently represents birth in a negative light, as a trauma that precipitates only regret and withdrawal. Beckett does this too, but sees the matter from other angles as well. Where Rank is sometimes unintentionally comic in
his unflinching morbidity, Beckett deliberately elides out the comic aspects of the theory, and this, as always with comedy, is a matter of seeing a wider perspective.

For the child, Rank argues, "the rhythmic games of movement (swinging, hopping, etc.) simply repeat the rhythm felt in the embryonic state" (23). This is hugely reductive about children's games, and significantly under-estimates the energy and feistiness of children. Compare Mercier's fascination with the place where "heavy chains, hung between small stone pillars, festoon [...] the pavement [...]":

Here Mercier would come to play when he was small. Running along the line of chains he set them going, one after another, with a stick, then turned back to look how the great jolts shook the pavement from end to end till it seemed they would never come to rest. (MC 78)

The force and violence of the writhing rhythm of the chains - "great jolts" - repeats not so much a gentle embryonic rhythm as the more disruptive rhythm of labour and delivery itself. (Indeed two of Beckett's descriptions of the trauma of birth describe labour as being "in swing" (NO 10), or "in full swing" (W 12).) Moreover, the way in which the chains seem to swing in perpetuity is partly analogous to the unending cycles of human birth and death that, once having
been set in motion, will perhaps never come to rest. Nevertheless, Mercier exhibits an un-Rankian exuberance and celebratory fondness for disruptive "swing".

Beckett's poor old lousy old earth is always a "clonic earth" (CP 23), a place where the swing of labour is ubiquitous and unending, a place fraught with the muscular spasms of contraction and relaxation. Paul Lawley is surely right to point to the felicity of the visceral connotations in Beckett's famous description of art as "a contraction of the spirit" (P 65). In his early poetry, especially, Beckett frequently deploys images of visceral jolts and "convulsions" (CP 20). Although the narrators purport to be in horror of such things, their fascination betrays awe as well as disgust.

In "Serena I" the narrator witnesses a snake eating a rat in a "strom of peristalsis" (CP 21), and the image seems to draw on Rank's observation in The Trauma of Birth that "beasts of prey [...] provide a rationalisation [...] of the wish - through the desire to be eaten - to get back again into the mother's animal womb" (13). The unpleasantness of the image is more than matched in "Serena II", where a chronically clonic earth is made manifest by a bitch in
labour: "she is fat half dead [...] in the stress of her hour/ the bag writhes she thinks she is dying" (CP 23).

Foreshadowing the "birth astride of a grave" described by Pozzo (CDW 82), "in a hag she drops her young" (CP 23). This "light randy slut" is "ashamed" to be in labour (CP 24), and the narrator, who has been led by the dog to a vision of his own birth and his future death, regards her with a mixture of pity and contempt.

For all the horrors of the poem, however (and they are many) an element of something other than grimness is invested in it by a line which seems to speak of a nature not only sympathetic to the dog's "straining", but heartily willing to lend a hand: the bitch drops her young "with a yo-heave-ho of able-bodied swans" (CP 23), as though their movement "out from the doomed land" resembles the setting to of sailors at the oars. A similar phrase is used in First Love where the narrator's constipated "sessions in the necessary house" - sessions that are an analogue to the pains of labour described (or rather not described) at the end of the story - result in his having "strained, heave! ho! heave! ho!, with the motions of one tugging at the oar" (CSP 4). (Naturally, there was "only one [Rankian]
thought in my mind, to be in my room and flat on my back again.

Heave-ho is one way to describe the trauma of birth - the trauma, for the mother, of labour and delivery, and the trauma, for the child, of passage: "What that infant must have been going through!" (CSP 18). For both mother and child, as for the bitch in "Serena II", "the rest is free-wheeling" (CP 23). But although "heave-ho" is derogatory about the process of birth, equating it implicitly with anal expulsion, it is also partly benign in its un-Rankian recognition of the rumbustious riotousness - of birth as of life - that is not only traumatic, but also vigourous, momentous, and vital.

"Sanies I" (CP 17-18), a "free-wheeling" poem about human and mechanical cycles, sustains this tone almost throughout. It is a boisterous poem, "pounding along", in which the narrator remembers being "born with a pop with the green of the larches". He is "belting along in the meantime", "pestling" the transmission of his bicycle with frenzied motions - "potwalloping" - that evoke the sexual intercourse that not only brought him about but that threatens to make him a father.
At the end of the poem he sees "her whom [...] I have
dismounted to love", a "dauntless daughter of desires", but
he packs her off Hamlet-like ("get along with you now") -
not to a nunnery, but "home to the cob of your web in Holles
street". The predatory female is banished to the Holles
Street Maternity Hospital (celebrated in Ulysses) where she
will inaugurate another life and perpetuate the cycle. The
poem moves from child-bed to child-bed.

Although the poem explicitly claims to regret the
trauma of birth - "ah to be back in the caul now" - its
rollicking rhythm betrays something other than a longing for
quiescence, something more like a fondness for swing. The
poem's spasmic motions and rhythms are not all or only
painful, but also tirelessly exuberant, charged with impetus
and momentum:

    tires bleeding voiding zeep the highway
    all heaven in the sphincter
    the sphincter

    muuuuuude now
    potwalloping now through the promenaders

If the narrator was, in another spasmic voiding, "born with
a pop", this is partly because he was ("oh [...] the pain")
"drawn like a cork", but partly also because celebratory
champagne was indeed on hand: "buckets of fizz childbed is thirsty work". The gleeful irony of that line does not wholly diminish the perceived festivity of the occasion, it merely highlights the proximity and the inter-relatedness of life's pains and pleasures. Traumatic experiences may be matters as much for celebration as for regret.

It is important not to sentimentalise the poem, and to recognise that its principal aim is to mock the conventional pieties of birth-day celebration. My argument is simply that the poem partakes of a carnival atmosphere, revelling in bodily "roly-poly", and not only regretting "the pain" of being viscerally born:

    for the midwife he is gory
    for the proud parent he washes down a gob of gladness
[...]
    sparkling beestings for me

For the reader this is gory, this lurid candour about the messiness of birth. There is ill-concealed resentment - the poem is not "without rancour" - directed at "the proud parent." With "he washes down a gob of gladness", "the inestimable gift of life" is "rammed down [the ] gullet" (T 273) in the unpalatable form of a bolus of uterine mucus. "Beestings", as Lawrence Harvey observes, means both "the
first milk from a mammal after parturition" and "a disease from imbibing beestings"; "here, naturally, the disease would be life itself". "Sparkling" connects the beestings with the champagne and parades an acerbic mock-relish for life's first fruits.

The poem's title - "Sanies" - means not merely "morbid discharge", as a note in the Calder edition indicates (CP 173), but, more viscerally and more precisely, "a thin fetid pus mixed with serum of blood, secreted by a wound or ulcer" (O.E.D.). Beckett thus deliberately exaggerates to the point of comic absurdity Otto Rank's glib observation that "birth is actually only a menstruation en masse" (51); the poem is written as though this were true, but manages, in the process, to show how it is not.

Many years later Beckett would write of life as a secretion in one of his translations "long after" Chamfort (CP 155): "Live and clean forget from day to day/Mop life up as fast as it dribbles away" (CP 161). There, as another narrator says of his own work, the "latter line limps a little" (CSP 2), and deliberately so. "Sanies I", on the other hand, does not limp; it keeps "pounding along" "all the livelong way". Although the poem speaks of "ebbing" -
"tired now hair ebbing gums ebbing ebbing home" - its rhythms are on the whole tirelessly exuberant and breathless. (Only in the forty-third line do "I see main verb at last"). Its active, animated momentum importantly mitigates its sense of life as passive "ooze".

In "Sanies I", the narrator is "bound for home like a good boy". This is partly a matter of his being a prodigal son, returning "after a brief prodigality" abroad. But in a Rankian fashion he is also returning compulsively to the place of his inception, and of his ante-natal safety "in the caul". In his discussion of this (for him) universal instinctual need to return to the condition anterior to the trauma of birth, Rank points in passing to "the wonderful homing instincts of birds of passage and migrating fish, which return to their place of birth from every strange place to which they have been taken or to which they themselves have migrated" (27). One such fish is the salmon, and the salmon's celebrated homing instinct is part of the wonderful suggestiveness, in Watt, of Tetty's remark about her son Larry, and his singular behaviour prior to his birth: having once "leaped in [her] wom", Larry "continued to leap, like a salmon" (W 11).
To imagine an embryo as a fish is entirely apt, since both inhabit watery worlds; and "leap like a salmon" is in itself a cliché, somewhat stilted. Nevertheless the image startles, and has a peculiar life of its own. To leap in the womb like a salmon is in one (very Rankian) sense to express an extreme reluctance to go downstream into the world; it suggests the need to resist the current, and a desire to remain within the safety of the mother's body. (There is a comedy in the precocity of the embryo's desire to return to origins; salmon wait till they are older.) In another more obvious sense, though, this urgent leaping indicates considerable vitality, and is conventionally regarded as a sign of the incipient life's readiness for the world. Indeed Larry threatens imminently and acrobatically to "tumble out on the floor" (W 11). Moreover, salmon return to their place of birth not simply to die, and thus to re-assume an original quiescence, but also to breed and inaugurate new lives. To be really "like a salmon" one must inevitably be not only athletic, but also dogged, determined, and stubbornly intent on both survival and propagation; it is not a simile immediately suggestive of a desire only for lassitude and quiescence.
"If it's lepping", says First Love's narrator about another child in the womb, "it's not mine" (CSP 18). This tiredness distancing itself from all activity - "I gave up before birth" (CSP 197) - is the Beckettian mode for which he has become notorious, but it is not his only mode. In "Dante and the Lobster", for instance, it is precisely the lobster's status of being livelily alive - or "lepping fresh" (MPTK 17) - that makes it (another fish, this one shaped more like an embryo) such a forceful object of Belacqua's empathy. Beckett's voice can be surprisingly in touch with the sprightly and the strenuous (even when it is in ruins: "What ruined me at bottom was athletics", remarks a later narrator (CSP 194), "My fortieth year come and gone, and I still throwing the javelin".) Indeed, in 1961, Beckett used a wonderful image of athleticism, clearly connected with Watt's leaping Larry, to describe his own situation: "the writer is like a foetus trying to do gymnastics." This gives the lie to much of the Rankian dogma commonly attributed to Beckett.

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to commentaries upon three important nativity scenes. My aim
is to show how, in very different ways, Beckett's writing about birth goes beyond the doctrinal and the dogmatic. I begin with a closer look at the birth of Larry.

4.2 The Experience of Birth in "Watt"

Tetty's story about Larry stands in Watt as a displaced account of the birth of Watt, who otherwise tumbles into the novel from a passing tram. The story as a whole (W 10-13) is one of the novel's finest moments, and something of a set piece, so I will quote it in full despite its length. The passage is marked by a bizarre comic tone, mixing the mechanical and the stilted with moments of startling élan. It is thus an appropriate analogue to the bizarre unevenness - the rough and tumble - that is the passage, for the child, both into and through life itself.

A woman in a shawl passed before them. Her belly could dimly be seen, sticking out, like a balloon.
I was never like that, my dear, said the lady, was I?
Not to my knowledge, my love, said the gentleman.
You remember the night that Larry was born, said the lady.
I do, said the gentleman.
How old is Larry now? said Mr. Hackett.
How old is Larry, my dear? said the gentleman.
How old is Larry, said the lady. Larry will be forty years old next March, D.V.
That is the kind of thing Dee always vees, said Mr. Hackett.

I wouldn't go as far as that, said the gentleman.

Would you care to hear, Mr. Hackett, said the lady, about the night that Larry was born?

Oh do tell him, my dear, said the gentleman.

Well, said the lady, that morning at breakfast Goff turns to me and he says, Tetty, he says, Tetty, my pet, I should very much like to invite Thompson, Cream and Colquhoun to help us eat the duck, if I felt sure you felt up to it. Why, my dear, says I, I never felt fitter in my life. Those were my words, were they not?

I believe they were, said Goff.

Well, said Tetty, when Thompson comes into the dining-room, followed by Cream and Berry (Coulquhoun I remember had a previous engagement), I was already seated at the table. There was nothing strange in that, seeing I was the only lady present. You did not find that strange, did you, my love?

Certainly not, said Goff, most natural.

The first mouthful of duck had barely passed my lips, said Tetty, when Larry leaped in my wom.

Your what? said Mr. Hackett.

My wom, said Tetty.

You know, said Goff, her wom.

How embarrassing for you, said Mr. Hackett.

I continued to eat, drink and make light conversation, said Tetty, and Larry to leap, like a salmon.

What an experience for you, said Mr. Hackett.

There were moments, I assure you, when I thought he would tumble out on the floor, at my feet.

Merciful heavens, you felt him slipping, said Mr. Hackett.

No trace of this dollar appeared on my face, said Tetty.

Did it, my dear?

Not a trace, said Goff.

Nor did my sense of humour desert me. What roly-poly, said Mr. Berry, I remember, turning to me with a smile, what delicious roly-poly, it melts in the mouth. Not only in the mouth, sir, I replied, without an instant's hesitation, not only in the mouth, my dear sir. Not too osy with the sweet, I thought.
Not too what? said Mr. Hackett.
Osy, said Goff. You know, not too osy.
With the coffee and liquors, labour was in full swing,
Mr. Hackett, I give you my solemn word, under the
groaning board.
Swing is the word, said Goff.
You knew she was pregnant, said Mr. Hackett.
Why er, said Goff, you see er, I er, we er—
Tetty’s hand fell heartily on Mr. Hackett’s thigh.
He thought I was coy, she cried. Hahahaha. Haha. Ha.
Haha, said Mr. Hackett.
I was greatly worried I admit, said Goff.
Finally they retired, did you not? said Tetty.
We did indeed, said Goff, we retired to the billiard-room,
for a game of slosh.
I went up those stairs, Mr. Hackett, said Tetty, on my
hands and knees, wringing the carpet-rods as though they
were made of raffia.
You were in such anguish, said Mr. Hackett.
Three minutes later I was a mother.
Unassisted, said Goff.
I did everything with my own hands, said Tetty, every-
thing.
She severed the cord with her teeth, said Goff, not having
a scissors to her hand. What do you think of that?
I would have snapped it across my knee, if necessary, said
Tetty.
That is a thing I often wondered, said Mr. Hackett, what
it feels like to have the string cut.
For the mother or the child? said Goff.
For the mother, said Mr. Hackett. I was not found under
a cabbage, I believe.
For the mother, said Tetty, the feeling is one of relief, of
great relief, as when the guests depart. All my subsequent
strings were severed by Professor Cooper, but the feeling
was always the same, one of riddance.
Then you dressed and came downstairs, said Mr. Hackett,
leading the infant by the hand.
We heard the cries, said Goff.
Judge of their surprise, said Tetty.
Cream’s potting had been extraordinary, extraordinary,
I remember, said Goff. I never saw anything like it. We
were watching breathless, as he set himself for a long thin
jenny, with the black of all balls.
What temerity, said Mr. Hackett.
A quite impossible stroke, in my opinion, said Goff. He drew back his queue to strike, when the wail was heard. He permitted himself an expression that I shall not repeat.

Poor little Larry, said Tetty, as though it were his fault. Tell me no more, said Mr. Hackett, it is useless.

These north-western skies are really extraordinary, said Goff, are they not.

So voluptuous, said Tetty. You think it is all over and then pop! up they flare, with augmented radiance.

Yes, said Mr. Hackett, there are protuberances and protuberances.

In All That Fall, a play much concerned with birth, Mrs. Rooney confesses that "I sometimes find my way of speaking very...bizarre" (CDW 173). Beckett’s way of writing, as evidenced in the play and here in Watt, is often at its most bizarre when he is writing about birth. Tetty is here both helped and hindered by the narrative midwifery of her interlocutors, whose interruptions attempt to clarify her bizarre diction: "'my wom' [...] 'You know [...] her woom'" (W 11); "'not too osy' [...] 'You know, not too osy'" (12) [!]. The bizarrerie here is quintessentially Irish. Watt, like All That Fall and "Sanies I", and also like Company which has a comparable passage about the "swing" of labour (NO 10) is written in a very bizarre Irish English.

It is notable that most of Beckett’s most memorable and bizarre birth passages are written in the language of his place of birth.

Movement and momentum, in the passage from Watt, are
also partly obstructed by constant narratorial intrusion - all those conspicuously flat "he said"s etc. Beckett doggedly eschews inelegant variation in favour of an even more inelegant repetition. And yet the breath-taking "temerity" (13) of this mechanical device is sometimes comically quickening. Though they clog up dialogue that would otherwise move briskly, these intrusions can also give the writing added life, for sometimes the stiltedness is itself surprising: "'Haha', said Mr Hackett" (12; my emphasis).

The passage is partly a fond pastiche of the nineteenth-century novel's squeamishness about birth. The comedy lies largely in the juxtaposition of the messy and visceral biological function that is birth with the delicacy and propriety of the dinner-party that happens to be its occasion. The delicacies are in full view - the duck and the delicious (as well as lewdly punning) roly-poly - whereas, like chronic indigestion, the clonic "labour was in full swing [...] under the groaning board" (12). Tetty soon retires from the table, and from the story, until such time as she returns "leading the [comically precocious] infant by the hand" (13)! Distasteful infantile behaviour like
crawling, breast-feeding, and incontinence, is wholly omitted. In the meantime the gentlemen have been playing "slosh" (12), a game that is thoroughly above-board, and one that distracts them from the sloshy business of birth. "I never saw anything like it" (13), says Goff, not of the really extraordinary events upstairs (which he did not, indeed, see), but of a particularly ambitious billiard stroke.

The misogynistic myopia of First Love, in which the mother's point of view will be almost entirely suppressed, is in Watt alluded to but not indulged. Tetty, who gave birth "unassisted" (12), also manages to tell her story in her own way, though it is a story of myopic males. Their behaviour reflects ancient taboos against women in labour, and there is something appropriately atavistic about the image of Tetty going "up those stairs [...] wringing the carpet-rods as though they were made of raffia" (12). Nevertheless the passage does not endorse this atavism, and it really does pay generous if comic tribute to - for despite its seeming callousness, it does not overlook or under-estimate - her indomitable independence, as well as her heroism and her resourcefulness. ("She severed the cord
with her teeth [...] not having a scissors to her hand" (12); this juxtaposes the self-inflicting violence of an animal with the grammatical punctilio of the neatly domestic.) The passage is also generous towards the men because their suppression of the real events of birth, which is in one sense barbarically cruel, is so evidently a result of their ignorance and embarrassment. We are indeed able to "Judge of their surprise" (13), as Tetty nicely puts it, when Larry appears, and though that remark is partly a sharp judgement on them, it has its generous comedy which registers their dismay as partially endearing.

The passage has great fun with male awkwardness in the face of matters gynaecological. Tetty's tale elicits from Hackett responses that might be described as callously perfunctory were it not for the palpable sense they give of the excruciating awkwardness of the situation for this reluctant audience. "How embarrassing for you, said Mr Hackett" (11); embarrassing for him too, one suspects. Hackett's "What an experience for you" (11) underlines, in its comic limpaness, the disparity of gender experiences and seems scarcely an adequate response to Tetty's extraordinary composure against the odds: "I continued to eat, drink, and
make light conversation [...] and Larry to leap, like a salmon." (11) Well, yes, that certainly must be 'an experience' for her. Hackett's third sympathetic intervention - "Merciful heavens, you felt him slipping" (11) - is less platitudinous, and more like a genuine attempt to sympathise. It has the effect, however, of highlighting the impossibility of Hackett's ever understanding the experiences of imminent motherhood - "slipping" is an approximation wildly hazarded - and the remark is defused by Beckett's "said Mr Hackett" which is more than usually stifling after the apparent exclamation.

Of course once Goff starts to talk about the male preserve of billiards, Hackett can intervene with genuine fellow-feeling, though his enthusiasm is properly couched in a formal Latinism: "What temerity" (13).

It is Tetty's bodily and linguistic temerity that is the passage's real marvel. Much of the comedy in the passage is about linguistic propriety. The gentlemen are first alerted to the existence of the child when its primal "wail" impinges on the "slosh" (13). The child's oral transgression is reiterated by Cream's subsequent expletive, but this is itself delicately suppressed in the telling by
Goff: "He permitted himself an expression that I shall not repeat." (13) Goff tries to sweep all improprieties under the carpet, whereas Tetty speaks and acts with carefree abandon: "I would have snapped [the cord] across my knee, if necessary" (12). There can be few things less brittle, and thus available for snapping across the knee, than an umbilical cord. Yet trying to imagine the unlikely act brings out the visceral nature of an umbilical cord far more effectively than a more credible description could ever do.

"The feeling was always the same, one of riddance" (13). It is not true then, that, as an earlier narrator had claimed, there is "No such thing, here below, as riddance, good, bad or indifferent" (DFMW 116). Tetty is not sentimental about giving birth, but nor is she cynical. The tone is not quite that of 'good riddance', even if that phrase contributes to the tone. She merely describes the mother's physical relief consequent upon the trauma of giving birth, a costly gift which is, after all - and without being derogatory about it - a painful expulsion. Tetty's description - parturition as departure - has a haunting beauty: "For the mother [...] the feeling is one of relief, of great relief, as when the guests depart." (12)
This is honest and not cynical about what it is to play host to an unborn child. Ordinarily guests are a pleasure (else why invite them?) and only become a burden if they outstay their welcome. The pains of labour are caused by a child who has overstayed his welcome. Of course the image is comically complicated by its topicality: if you happen to be giving birth at a dinner party, it must be a particular relief - a really good riddance - when the guests depart.

One of the passage's most felicitous phrases, however, and one of its sublimest ripostes, belongs to Hackett. He precipitates Tetty's remarks about "riddance" by wondering, in a rare moment of curiosity, "what it feels like to have the string cut":

For the mother or the child? said Goff.
For the mother, said Mr Hackett. I was not found under a cabbage, I believe. (12)

It is usual, I believe, to speak of being found (or not found) under a cabbage-leaf. To be found under a cabbage would be to be dug up from the soil: "That corpse you planted last year in your garden,/ Has it begun to sprout?". At any rate, Hackett's oddly phrased negative credo ("I was not...I believe") is comically telling partly because one's origins, even when one 'knows' the 'facts of
life', remain in some ways peculiarly matters of belief.
(There is a joke about the child who, not satisfied with the
story of the stork, nor with that of the cabbage-leaf,
finally elicits the truth from his parents and says "Now
you're pulling my leg".)

The passage, finally, is augmented by a brief coda
about augmented radiance.

These north-western skies are really
extraordinary, said Goff, are they not.
So voluptuous, said Tetty. You think it is all
over and then pop! up they flare, with augmented
radiance. (13)

You think it is all over - the talk about birth - but then
(born with a "pop!") up it flares in a late flourish. Goff
had sought to change the subject in the traditional way, by
talking about the weather, but Tetty's relishing delight
re-evokes the abrupt birth of Larry. The stiff Latinisms -
"voluptuous" and "augmented radiance" contrast powerfully
with the informal energy of that "pop!". Linguistic
propriety is transgressed by an abrupt "fizzle".

Hackett's final bizarre remark about "protuberances" is
a response both to Tetty's praise of the last-minute
incipience of the skies and to her remarkable story of the
incipient life of Larry; it takes us back to the passing
"belly [...] sticking out, like a balloon" that so gauchely heralded Tetty's narrative.

4.3 "First Love" and the Catastrophe of Birth

Wholly different in tone, First Love is written in the familiar style of the Trilogy - a first-person mode of self-protecting irony. Its narrator, who has previously spoken of his habit of "marking down likely cover" (CSP 7), and who cherished a bench because it was located "so that my rear was covered" (CSP 5), is always on the defensive. He is not entirely to be trusted, and his cynical account of events seems partly designed to deflect attention from (or at least refract) the failure in love which is the story's central confession. As he at one point tellingly admits; "I sometimes wonder if that is not all invention, if in reality things did not take quite a different course, one I had no choice but to forget" (CSP 7). First Love is about the partial repression of guilt, and this needs to be borne in mind when considering the conspicuous and cruel suppression of the woman's point of view in the nativity which comprises
One day she had the impudence to announce she was with child, and four or five months gone into the bargain, by me of all people! She offered me a side view of her belly. She even undressed, no doubt to prove she wasn't hiding a cushion under her skirt, and then of course for the pure pleasure of undressing. Perhaps it's just wind, I said, by way of consolation. She gazed at me with her big eyes whose colour I forget, with one big eye rather, for the other seemed riveted on the remains of the hyacinth. The more naked she was the more cross-eyed. Look, she said, stooping over her breasts, the haloes are darkening already. I summoned up my remaining strength and said, Abort, abort, and they'll blush like new. She had drawn back the curtain for a clear view of all her rotundities. I saw the mountain, impassible, cavernous, secret, where from morning till night I'd hear nothing but the wind, the curlews, the clink like distant silver of the stonecutters' hammers. I'd come out in the daytime to the heather and gorse, all warm and scent, and watch at night the distant city lights, the lighthouses and lightships my father had named for me, when I was small, and whose names I could find again in my memory, if I chose, that I knew. From that day forth things went from bad to worse, to worse and worse. Not that she neglected me, she could never have neglected me enough, but the way she kept plaguing me with our child, exhibiting her belly and breasts and saying it was due any moment, she could feel it lepping already. If it's lepping, I said, it's not mine. I might have been worse off than I was, in that house, that was certain, it fell short of my ideal, naturally, but I wasn't blind to its advantages. I hesitated to leave, the leaves were falling already, I dreaded the winter. One should not dread the winter, it too has its bounties, the snow gives warmth and deadens the tumult and its pale days are soon over. But I did not yet know, at that time, how tender the earth can be for those who have only her and how many graves in her giving, for the living. What finished me was the birth. It woke me up. What that infant must have been going through! I fancy she had a woman with her, I seemed to hear steps in the kitchen, on and off. It went to my
heart to leave a house without being put out. I crawled out over the back of the sofa, put on my coat, greatcoat and hat, I can think of nothing else, laced up my boots and opened the door to the corridor. A mass of junk barred my way, but I scrawled and barged my way through it in the end, regardless of the clatter. I used the word marriage, it was a kind of union in spite of all. Precautions would have been superfluous, there was no competing with those cries. It must have been her first. They pursued me down the stairs and out into the street. I stopped before the house door and listened. I could still hear them. If I had not known there was crying in the house I might not have heard them. But knowing it I did. I was not sure where I was. I looked among the stars for the Wains, but could not find them. And yet they must have been there. My father was the first to show them to me. He had shown me others, but alone, without him beside me, I could never find any but the Wains. I began playing with the cries, a little in the same way as I had played with the song, on, back, on, back, if that may be called playing. As long as I kept walking I didn't hear them, because of the footsteps. But as soon as I halted I heard them again, a little fainter each time, admittedly, but what does it matter, faint or loud, cry is cry, all that matters is that it should cease. For years I thought they would cease. Now I don't think so any more. I could have done with other loves perhaps. But there it is, either you love or you don't.

(CSP 17-19)

The narrator's misogyny is gratuitous and provocative. His remark, for instance, about "her big eyes whose colour I forget" seems meant as an insult; it is wilfully injurious though it parades as mere indifference, and with the inevitable echo of that earlier phrase - "I had no choice but to forget" - it suggests the deliberate suppression of painful memory.
The narrator's savage caricature of the woman's squint also reflects both badly and tellingly on him: "The more naked she was the more cross-eyed." In so far as irony - seeing things deliberately awry - may be thought a version of cross-eyedness, then this seems to describe him at least as well as her: the more vulnerable and exposed he feels, the more ironic and defensive is his tone. It is after all he - throughout the story, and especially with regard to childbirth - who is wilfully myopic; he continually and absurdly refuses to see things from her point of view - "Perhaps it's just wind, I said by way of consolation" - and as far as possible excludes her experience from the narrative altogether. "I wasn't blind to its advantages", he says of the woman's house, and the metaphor again draws attention to his conspicuous blindspots in other areas.

The woman's squint (which is rendered grotesquely literal: "She gazed at me with her big eyes [...], with one big eye rather, for the other seemed riveted on the remains of the hyacinth") is accordingly re-enacted by the narrator when he is asked to look at her pregnant body.

She had drawn back the curtain for a clear view of all her rotundities. I saw the mountain, impassible, cavernous, secret [...].
He seems to avert his eyes from the "side view of her belly" and gaze either out of the window - which offers "a view of the mountains" (CSP 13) - or at a projected memory of a childhood landscape: "I saw" is ambiguous.

Nevertheless, as Paul Lawley has pointed out, "the mountain, impassible, cavernous, secret" may, at least momentarily, be read figuratively as a description of the woman's gravid "rotundities". There is, then, what Lawley calls a "curious moment of doubleness in these sentences", and it is clearly a doubleness of vision: Lawley speaks of a "cinematic dissolve", and rightly connects it with another unstable image of pregnancy in Company: "Your gaze descends [...] To the abdomen [...] Dissolve to your father's straining against the unbuttoned waistband" (NO 34). It is, I would suggest, the double vision of the cross-eyed: the narrator has only one eye on the pregnant woman who constitutes his present predicament of imminent fatherhood, and one eye on lyrical memories of his own father and the security he bestowed.

The word "impassible" deserves comment. I have in fact silently emended the Calder text - which gives "impassable" - as well as Lawley, who follows Calder. The 1980 Penguin
edition gives "impassible", but is otherwise textually unreliable, and so scarcely an authority. The word is clearly something of a crux. "Impassable" is given plausibility by its echo of an earlier sentence, where the narrator had described the corridor in the flat as "impassable" (CSP 14), owing to the furniture he had deliberately stacked there. The corridor is explicitly analogous to the uterine passage through which the child at the end of the story must pass: "What that infant must have been going through", remarks the narrator, with cryptic slyness more than sympathy, before describing his own passage through the blocked corridor: "A mass of junk barred my way [...] but I barged my way through it in the end". Nevertheless the original Premier Amour gives "la montagne, impassible, caverneuse, secrète" (my emphasis); this might be translated as "impassive" - as in Beckett's own rendering of Rimbaud's "des Fleuves impassibles" as "impassive rivers" (CP 124,5) - but otherwise only "impassible" would do. For it is "impassible", and not (as Lawley has it) "impassable", that means "incapable of suffering injury or detriment", and this, in context, is the crucial point. 14

The narrator's moment of reverie over the woman's
"impassible" belly - a moment that is somewhat hallucinatory, and not especially focussed on the visceral realities of her pregnancy - is profoundly Rankian, and constitutes perhaps the climax of the narrator's thoroughly Rankian behaviour throughout the story.

For Rank "sexual love [...] proves to be the most sublime attempt to re-establish the primal situation between mother and child, which only finds its complete realisation in a new embryo" (43): not only is the act of sex (at least for the male) an Oedipal return to the womb and "the sublimest substitution for re-union with the mother" (19), but its goal or consequence - a new embryo - is a repetition of the original lost state of quiescence. For Rank, mankind is caught in an unending double bind: primal quiescence can only be recreated in another embryo, and this embryo must inevitably go on on to suffer the trauma of birth itself. This pattern exactly matches the structure of First Love, in which the narrator is ejected from the cosy security of one household (his family's) only to set up another (Anna/Lulu's), in which a child is engendered and a new birth-ejection precipitated.

The narrator's self-consciously Rankian behaviour - he
assiduously seeks an embryonic passivity with the woman, climbing behind the sofa, for instance, "like a dog into its basket" (CSP 14) - reaches its apogee with the imagined glimpse of her "impassible" belly; and the accompanying reverie about the security ("all warmth and scent") of the landscape associated with the protective parent (in this case the father) follows naturally enough.

The idyll is short-lived, however, and the situation quickly deteriorates - "from bad to worse, to worse and worse"; birth becomes imminent, and the narrator's ensuing departure from the house (despite his disclaimer, he is in more than one way "put out") in fact becomes a displaced description of that birth: "I barged my way through". The metaphorical connections between the birth of the child, the departure of the narrator, and the narrator's own birth are made wholly explicit: "What finished me was the birth. It woke me up." (Rank, of course, notes that "awakening [...] repeats the process of birth" [76].) "Birth", as Beckett puts it elsewhere, "was the death of him" (CDW 425), and the death of his relationship. But in attempting to flee the repetition, in the birth of the child, of an originary trauma, the narrator only succeeds in re-enacting it.
Clambering through a "mass of junk", he is reminded of "what that infant must have been going through".

What I have sketched out in the above paragraphs is a neat explanation or interpretation of Beckett's story based on Rankian theory, but it is one that fails to account for the tonal complexity of the writing. I have so far broadly followed Paul Lawley in decoding a cryptic text, but have not yet taken the measure of what might be called First Love's moral dimensions. To be sure, the story sets itself up as a puzzle to be untangled: its very opening statement is qualified by a remark that consciously invites interpretative speculation - "That other links exist, on other levels [...] is not impossible." (CSP 1) Such knowingness, however, might also invite suspicion: apparent candour - "I have enough trouble as it is in trying to say what I think I know" (CSP 1) - may conceal a fondness for indirections. Indeed the narrator is teasingly candid mainly about his obliquities: "I see no connexion between these remarks," he tells us elsewhere, "But that one exists, and even more than one, I have little doubt [...]"(CSP 9).

If we are merely being invited to spot the psychoanalytic theory behind the loaded puns with which
First Love is packed, then the story might justly be dismissed as merely gauche and heavy-handed. But Beckett is much more sophisticated than this. In a way the opening section of the story should alert us to the deliberately dead-end nature of the compulsive punning. The morbidity of the tone owes as much to a comedy that is dead on its feet as to the graveyard setting. Quite deliberately, some of the jokes are - like the feet described later (CSP 8) - "flat" and "corny", so that much of the humour is as distasteful as the eel-soup that "lay heavy on [the narrator's] stomach" (CSP 3). The puns are in every sense grim: "Personally I have no bone to pick with graveyards"; "the smell of corpses [...] I [...] find [...] a trifle heady"; "the date of my [...] birth [...] remains graven in my memory"; "I wander [...] among the slabs [...] culling the inscriptions" (CSP 1,2; my emphases). Like "the living", these moribund jokes "stink" (CSP 2); like the narrator's "corpse", they are "not [...] quite up to scratch" (CSP 5). "Droll" they may be, like the inscriptions (CSP 5), but scarcely quick-witted.

When the narrator apologises for the "limpness" of the second line of his cryptic epitaph - which, like his jokes, is over-determined - he remarks that "I'll be forgiven more
than that when I'm forgotten" (CSP 2). This is a crucial aside, implying, I would suggest, that the punning irony of the prose style - to be taken in earnest no more than the jokes - is in a way a deliberate distraction from the central theme of the failure to love for which the narrator is profoundly ashamed. (It is the centrality of this theme that lends force to the shocking equanimity of the final sentence: "But there it is, either you love, or you don't.")

At first sight it is tempting to regard the narrator's consistent editing out of the woman's point of view in the birth passage as simply a Rankian suppression of the birth trauma. On closer inspection, however, it seems that the assiduously self-conscious Rankian behaviour is a decoy deflecting attention from a more guilty sort of repression. He tries to blot her and the child's cries out, not because he is vicariously going through a second birth trauma, but because he knows he has shirked his responsibilities. There is an unmistakably guilty tone in his efforts to escape those unstillable and haunting cries which "pursue" him so relentlessly: "But as soon as I halted I heard them again, a little fainter, admittedly, but what does it matter, faint or loud, cry is cry, all that matters is that it should
cease. For years I thought they would cease. Now I don't think so any more." One recalls, at this point, an earlier remark that had momentarily offered a clue as to his current discomfort: "She disturbed me exceedingly, even absent. Indeed she still disturbs me [...]" (CSP 7; my emphasis). No wonder he finds, in subsequent years, the "bounties" of a forgetful winter which "deadens the tumult"; this is a lyrical paean as much to moral amnesia as to Rankian quiescence.

The narrator "began playing with the cries, a little in the same way as I had played with the song, on, back, on, back if that may be called playing." "If that may be called playing": this is not really a game. Earlier, when the woman had sung, he had retreated until he could no longer hear her, but then approached her again in order to ascertain whether she was out of earshot or had merely stopped singing or lowered her voice. This is represented as a frustrating epistemological game - one among what he elsewhere calls his "paltry perplexities" (CSP 17) - but the obsessive need to know that "it had really ceased" suggests that the episode is a dramatised representation within the story of his desire to still the haunting memory of the
woman. The trouble is that he has to keep returning to the memory in order to gauge his distance from it.

In a revealing remark about the publication of Premier Amour in 1970 after twenty-four years 'in the trunk', Beckett said it was because "the woman in question was dead at last" (my emphasis). Beckett would write in the subsequent Novella that "Memories are killing", especially of "things [...] that are dear to you", and that "you must think of them for a while, a good while, every day, until they sink forever in the mud" (CSP 21). First Love is an attempt to lay to rest the memory of a woman by dragging her name through the mud: "Would I have been tracing her name in old cowshit if my love had been pure and disinterested?" (CSP 9). The savage misogynistic abuse is an index of emotional involvement, not a sign of indifference.

What I am arguing, then, is that the curmudgeonly anti-life ethos that is cynically advocated by the narrator in the nativity scene is a defensive pose (complete with vulnerable cracks) and should not be assumed to be endorsed by its author. The story is a shameful confession of irresponsible selfishness thinly disguised behind a shockingly cynical facade.
There is indeed something wistful in the narrator's persistent memories of his father, twice returned to in this passage. The story had begun with Pip-like meditations over the parental grave, and though the rest of the narrator's family had been caricatured as "the usual pack" (CSP 4) callously hounding him out of the house, the father had been fondly remembered. Significantly, the affinity with the father had been expressed in terms of their mutual capacity for nurturing: "tending the tomatoes, hyacinths, pinks and seedlings. My father and I alone, in the household, understood tomatoes" (CSP 4). The hyacinth that is later cultivated unsuccessfully at Anna/Lulu's (CSP 16) thus stands as a token of the father, and of failed fatherhood. ("She wanted to get me another but I told her I didn't want another"; is that an indication of indifference to flowers, or of involvement with that particular flower?). At the end of the story, in the passage quoted above, memories of the father return with the possibility of imminent fatherhood. The first memory - about the night lights - seems to constitute a deliberate veering away from the contemplation of that possibility, and yet the potential repetition of paternal solicitude is tacitly admitted: "the lighthouses
and lightsips my father had named for me, when I was small, and whose names I could find again, in my memory, if I chose" (my emphasis). The narrator could repeat, if he chose, the nurturing activity - the first love - of his own father. But he chooses not to ("either you love or you don't"), and the story, behind its ironies, records his regret. Having abandoned an incipient life the narrator somehow loses touch with the spirit of the father and is finally "alone, without him beside me." Having put himself outside the structure of family continuity he is, among the "living", one of "those who have only her" (the earth), with nothing at all in his giving.
4.4 **An Imaginative Birth in "Company"**

Beckett's writing about birth is belatedly augmented by a sublime passage in *Company*. The passage is written in the limpid, translucent prose - "as if faintly luminous" (NO 15) - of Beckett's masterly late style. The notable absence of commas might be thought to lend the prose the quality ascribed to the voice that is heard in the dark: "No life. Same flat tone at all times." (NO 15) But there is surprising light and life, always subtle, in the austere cadences and composure of a syntax that renders *Company* a work of "unexpected grace" (NO 51). For Eric Griffiths this mature Beckettian voice "in its reticence, thrills with [...] life"; *Company* is a work of "unstillable" "stirrings still" (NO 18), and its near-stillness itself stirs:

You first saw the light in the room you most likely were conceived in. The big bow window looked west to the mountains. Mainly west. For being bow it looked also a little south and a little north. Necessarily. A little south to more mountain and a little north to foothill and plain. The mid-wife was none other than a Dr Hadden or Haddon. Straggling grey moustache and hunted look. It being a public holiday your father left the house soon after his breakfast with a flask and a packet of his favourite egg-sandwiches for a tramp in the mountains. There was nothing unusual in this. But on that particular morning his love of walking and wild scenery was not the only mover. But he was moved also to take himself off and
out of the way by his aversion to the pains and general unpleasantness of labour and delivery. Hence the sandwiches which he relished at noon looking out to sea from the lea of a great rock on the first summit scaled. You may imagine his thoughts before and after as he strode through the gorse and heather. When he returned at night all he learned to his dismay from the maid at the back door that labour was still in swing. Despite its having begun before he left the house full ten hours earlier. He at once hastened to the coachhouse some twenty yards distant where he housed his De Dion Bouton. He shut the doors behind him and climbed into the driver's seat. You may imagine his thoughts as he sat there in the dark not knowing what to think. Though footsore and weary he was on the point of setting out anew across the fields in the young moonlight when the maid came running to tell him it was over at last. Over!

This is a rewriting of the birth-scenario in a wholly different key, and is one of Beckett's most affecting renderings of the birth of a child. It depicts, of course, the father's conspicuous abstention from the event, but the tone is gently humorous, and generously forgiving.

The passage appears at first to occlude the mother's point of view, and to be as uninterested in what she was "going through" (CSP 18) as the passage from First Love had claimed to be. It might therefore be thought to collude with the father's desire to evade "the pains and general unpleasantness of labour and delivery". The mother's presence, however, is crucially evident in two ways.

Firstly, she haunts the narrative as a whole in so far
as she is throughout the implicit speaker. Although we know that the peculiar second-person narration is based on Company's premiss of "a voice" that "comes to one in the dark" - for all its narrative complications, the novel is about someone talking to himself - nevertheless with this passage it is impossible entirely to exclude the mother's voice. Out of context the passage makes absolute sense as a retrospective account of a child's birth as given by a mother. Even if one insists that the voice is another part of the "one" lying in the dark, the mother may still be indirectly present, for the voice is rehearsing a story presumably told by one or both parents. Something about the tone - in phrases like "his favourite egg sandwiches", and "there was nothing unusual in this" - suggest a speaker fondly familiar with the father's habits.

Secondly, the mother's pregnant body is powerfully evoked by the "big bow window". The first sentence has already suggested a parallel between room and womb: "You first saw the light in the room you most likely were conceived in." This early part of the passage constitutes a benignly revisionary reiteration of Beckett's early representations of birth. The early work - like "Sanies I" -
tended to depict a unidirectional trajectory from birth to death, but the bow window is a window of generous aspect, and it gives the passage latitude. It looks not only west, towards the decline of the sun (and, inevitably, the decline of life), but "also a little south and a little north". Thus the "big bow window" is a far more bountiful image of pregnancy than we have come to expect in Beckett. It is a graceful revision of the "belly [... ] sticking out, like a balloon" (10), that clumsy "protuberance[]" (W 13) that belonged to the woman in Watt whose passing prompted Tetty's story. As a window, a transparent medium, it also suggests something more communicative, something less hermetically sealed than the "impassible" mountain that represented the gravid body in First Love:

The big bow window looked west to the mountains. Mainly west. For being bow it looked also a little south and a little north. Necessarily. A little south to more mountain and a little north to foothill and plain.

The writing revises itself too. The bald "looked west" is only a provisional statement, subject to concessionary revision - "mainly west". The passage thus evinces a willingness to accommodate a wider perspective. The methodical correctness that is invoked with that
"necessarily" is a function of a logic that is not unbending or coercive. Necessity is here the mother of incremental expansion, letting in landscape and light: "a little south and a little north [...] a little south to more mountain and a little north to foothill and plain".

"They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more." (CDW 82). Pozzo's famous dictum has its cruel logic: any life can only be an instant compared to the eternity of darkness on either side so that, in Vladimir's extrapolation, "the gravedigger puts on the forceps" (83); the two ends of life are so close, from this perspective, that they are indistinguishable. The passage from Company offers a much more generous perspective on life. "You first saw the light [...]" implies that the light is of significant duration. More than an instant, then, and more than a gleam from that big bow window. To see the light is to be enlightened, and the religious connotations suggest it is a blessing bestowed. A flood of light heralding the beginning of a life. Such is the impression created by this splendid genesis. "You first saw the light [...]" is a benificently retrospective fiat; it creates an effulgent opening.
(To see the light is also to have an idea. Consonant with the novel's project to represent the subject's self-representation, his making up his own story by fabling to himself in the dark, the opening sentence is decidedly cerebral so that the room is an image, not only of the womb, but of the skull, where perhaps "you most likely were conceived". Even this evocation of mental 'conception' may indicate a mother speaking; a child might be conceived as an idea - a concept, and a gleam in the eye - before being conceived in the womb.)

At this point the narrative modulates into a homelier tone. There was something ethereal about the austere "mountain", "foothill", and "plain", as though they stood for a view of Heaven. The proper Irish names "Hadden" and "Haddon" re-envoke the circumstantial and contingent comic details of the passage from Watt. A landscape worthy of the Divine Comedy gives way to a personage from a comedy of manners. The narrative's revisionary principle is re-iterated in a more comic key: "none other than a Dr Hadden...or Haddon". We are, so to speak, being 'had on' here, for a flourish of truth-telling rhetoric culminates only in uncertainty. One verbless sentence sketches the
mid-wife - an incongruously moustached mid-wife - as if in notation preparatory for a novel: "Straggling grey moustache and hunted look". Bedraggled and bedevilled, he plies his unenviable trade.

A minimal sketch is followed by a lengthy sentence. "It being a public holiday your father left the house soon after his breakfast with a flask and a package of his favourite egg sandwiches for a tramp in the mountains."

This is comically studious in its desire to inform ("It being [...]"") "Holiday" offers a hint of celebration, a common element in Beckett's birth narratives, as we have seen. Nevertheless the myth that Beckett fostered about being born on Good Friday - "You first saw the light of day the day Christ died [...]" (NO 12) - casts a shadow over the festivities. In any case there is a gentle irony in the father's solitary occupation on this "public" day.

The description of the father is affectionate, his idiosyncrasies and habits fondly evoked; there is an especially intimate familial inflection - that of a mother describing her husband to her son - in "your father". Given the father's "aversion" to birth, it is apt that his favourite sandwiches should be "egg". The word order and
absence of punctuation allow a momentary misreading whereby the father, like an overgrown Pip, goes off benevolently to give food to a hungry vagabond: "[...] sandwiches for a tramp in the mountains". (The father will of course shortly be that "tramp in the mountains".)

That the events described are retrospectively remembered is highlighted by the gently comic effect by which a Poirot-like dénouement is suggested. "There was nothing unusual in that. But on that particular morning his love of walking and wild scenery was not the only mover.". "Wild scenery" seems exaggerated after the distinctly placid "mountain", "foothill", and "plain". "Mover" evokes the Prime Mover. It is of course an appropriate word in the light of the mother's convulsive movements in labour, which are here implicitly acknowledged. Those movements move the father to move. "But he was moved also to take himself off and out of the way by his aversion to the pains and general unpleasantness of labour and delivery". That second "but" ("But on that particular morning [...] But he was moved also [...]"") is odd; it seems grammatically redundant but conveys with extra force the father's objection. "He was moved [...] not to tears, but "to take himself off [...]", a
phrase that sounds decidedly suicidal. There's a comedy in the thoroughness of this self-removal: "moved I to take himself off I and out of the way". Beckett was always drawn to elaborately forceful dismissals, banishments and evictions, and here the comedy is in the father's being himself "moved" to give himself marching orders. "Out of the way" leaves room for a convenient justification - he'd only be in the way if he stayed. "Aversion" is primly euphemistic, the diction matching the evasive and prudish attitude being described, and "[...] the pains and general unpleasantness of labour and delivery" is coolly asinine. "General unpleasantness" signals a reluctance even to contemplate the details, and "unpleasantness" comically evokes the wrong criteria, as though all experiences could be simply divided into the agreeable and the disagreeable. Birth is not exactly "pleasant", but that is scarcely the point. What kind of birth would a "pleasant" one be?

Significantly, in this passage, the father's objections are founded on the messiness of "labour and delivery", and not, as First Love claimed, on new life as such. His foibles are rooted in squeamishness and not misanthropy. That squeamishness is as characteristic as his "favourite egg
sandwiches", and as fondly recalled. For the father, it is all a matter of taste: his "aversion" is matched by his "relish", and while his wife produces a child, he eats eggs. But importantly this gentle irony is the author's (or perhaps the speaker's); the father is innocent of it, and so it is not an indication of cynicism on his part, as it was in Whoroscope where the speaker knowingly and murderously set about eating his "abortion of a fledgling" (CP 4).

"Hence the sandwiches which he relished at noon looking out to sea from the lee of a great rock on the first summit scaled." To relish is an exotic way to enjoy a quotidian sandwich. (Food manufacturers know that a dull sandwich needs pepping up with 'relish'). This flavour of lunch and landscape is one that Beckett relished: "My sandwich, my banana, taste sweeter when I'm sitting on a tomb (CSP 2);"we are again on the summit [...] silent relishing of sea and isles [...] suddenly we are eating sandwiches" (HII 33).

There is a hint of humour in the father's alacrity, eat. He had already "left the house soon after his breakfast with a flask and a packet of his favourite egg sandwiches [...]"; there the syntactical proximity of breakfast to lunch seems significant. Now he eats avidly
"at noon" (an early lunch for a ten hour stint) "on the first summit scaled". Even the healthy appetite differentiates him from First Love's narrator, whose sickly "eel soup lay heavy on [his] stomach" (CSP 3) before he vomited in an act of expulsion that registers his supposed distaste for birth by offering a parodic parallel to it.

By "looking out to sea from the lea of a great rock" the father contemplates the oceanic origins of life while adopting a foetally protected position. It is the first suggestion of a wish to return to the womb, but importantly the father seems again unconscious of the irony. There's nothing knowing about his behaviour, whereas the foetal defensiveness of the narrator in First Love is wholly self-conscious: "Try and put me out now, I said" (CSP 15).

In the Divine Comedy, the slothful Belacqua waits purgatorially in the shadow of a rock until as many years have passed as he lived on earth. There is a suggestion, then, that the father's session of sweet silent thought is not without its "pains". (He will be dismayed to find labour continuing after ten hours, and without belittling the pains involved there, we may be legitimately dismayed by the Coleridgean pains taken to "tramp" for ten hours.)
We are invited to share, up to a point, in the father's thoughts. "You may imagine his thoughts before and after as he strode through the gorse and heather." Here the perspective of the passage widens after the manner of the bow window. There is a granting of permission here ("You may...") and, moreover, the reader feels included as an addressee. Where "You first saw the light [...]" spoke only to the hearer, "You may imagine [...]" reaches out to the reader too. Thus far the story about the father has been logically structured - "There was nothing unusual in this [...] But [...] But [...] Hence [...]" - so that his actions are being 'explained'. Now our attitude towards him becomes more imaginatively complicit. We are invited to sympathise in an active and creative way. (Compare Tetty's "Judge of their surprise", which is pointedly ironic - they oughtn't to have been surprised - but also an invitation to be genuinely sympathetic.) Here of course we are told nothing at all about his thoughts. We are simply to "imagine" them. The joke lies in the misplaced assumption of shared knowledge ("You may imagine [...]" can mean 'nothing more need be said'). On the other hand we may indeed imagine; we are able to speculate. That we can only imagine his
thoughts "before and after" his sojourn by the rock suggests either that his contemplative preoccupation there was so deep as to be wholly inaccessible, or that his experience was so womb-like as to be incommensurate with anything so structured as "thoughts". The parallelism of the "before" and "after" is nicely and inconspicuously caught in the mirroring effect of a succession of half-rhymes: "thoughts before and after! through the gorse and heather".

The sentence as a whole has its revisionary parallel in the beautiful refrain ten lines later. "You may imagine his thoughts as he sat there in the dark not knowing what to think". The father is now in the second womb-like environment; curled inside a car, itself inside a dark garage. It seems to explain why we were not asked to imagine his thoughts under the rock - because he had no thoughts as such - but now the narrator has found a way of inviting us in without making us intrusive. This is a generosity none the less for its knowledge that it can only give so much. The sentence may seem like a postmodern meta-fictional joke, hollow and self-cancelling, in which the reader is slapped in the face by a narrator who has flirted with giving something away and then at the last
minute withheld it. In fact it is not merely tautological, because the empty circularity recreates in the reader the experience of the father. We remain "in the dark", but without feeling duped, because that dark is a dim reflection of his dark. And "imagine", of course, echoes the novel's premiss: "A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine." (NO 5)

"When he returned at nightfall he learned to his dismay from the maid at the back door that labour was still in swing." The return "at nightfall" comes as an abrupt temporal surprise. This sentence follows immediately upon the invitation to "imagine his thoughts" as he "strode", so that we get a strong impression of the duration of his mental stravaging. "When he returned at nightfall" is a narrative cliché, as is "he learned to his dismay". Beckett's late prose assimilates flat cliché in a surprisingly bald but effective way. In the earlier work Beckett tended to adapt clichés, and to revivify them by giving them either an extra twist - "things went from bad to worse, to worse and worse" (CSP 18) - or an odd context: "I in her shoes would have tip-toed away" (CSP 15). In Company the narrative voice is less self-conscious, is unabashed about a plain style, and speaks on the whole with cool
Nevertheless the clichés in this sentence make way for the surprising life of "labour was still in swing". "Still in swing" is a restrained, gentler version of Tetty's "in full swing"; the swing is not so wild (not "full") and it is partly defused by its proximity to the always ambiguous "still". "Still in swing" is momentarily paradoxical, capturing the swing between contraction and relaxation, and "swing" here gets an added fillip from its proximity to "the back door". The sentence also contributes to the comedy of the passage on a more naturalistic level. The solitary wanderer of the mountains, tramping from noon to nightfall, has not the temerity to use the front door, and can confront the situation only indirectly via the cushioning "maid".

"Despite its having begun before he left the house full ten hours earlier." This is really a continuation of the previous sentence. The abrupt break, however, registers his dismay: "[...] labour was still in swing. Despite its having begun before he left the house [...]" Despite the apparent carelessness of "in swing", then, the passage does implicitly pay tribute to the full extent of the mother's labour pains.
"He at once hastened to the coachhouse some twenty yards distant where he housed his De Dion Bouton." There is a reiterative insistency about "at once hastened". If you hasten to do something don't you necessarily hasten at once? (Compare his initial alacrity to "take himself off and out of the way." Could you take yourself off and still be in the way?) The passage gives the father a comic excess of energy, and "some twenty yards distant" evokes an athletic sprint.

There is comedy, too, and of the kind that might be found in a naturalistic novel, in the male pride in motoring: to house a De Dion Bouton in the coachhouse is not the same as to keep a car in the garage. While it is certainly true that the father's position is womb-like - curled and doubly-housed in the dark - the symbolism is by no means heavy-handed. Again, he himself seems unconscious of his Rankian behaviour, and his actions need no dogmatic 'interpretation'. There is a straightforward naturalistic comedy in this seeking of sanctuary in the male domain of the garage; the father has at such a time lost his place in the house. In *First Love*, on the other hand, the narrator's behaviour - turning the furniture out and dragging the sofa
around to make a nest against the wall (CSP 14) - is self-consciously symbolic.

"He shut the doors behind him and climbed into the driver's seat." There is a charming irresponsibility about this childish behaviour. (It is children who ordinarily sit in the driver's seat of a static car). That the head of the family should be putting himself so ineffectually 'in the driving seat' is ironic. Truant all day, and absconding once again, he is scarcely in control. Yet all this is lovingly mocked, and the tone is sympathetic: "You may imagine his thoughts [...]

"Though footsore and weary he was on the point of setting out anew across the fields in the young moonlight when the maid came running to tell him it was over at last. Over!" "Footsore" is an archaic usage, and it recalls "footsore Achates" in 'Sanies I' (CP 18), where the archaism of the word matches the classical reference. (Achates is Aeneas' companion, proverbially a bosom friend, and in "Sanies I" it refers to a bosomy friend, the "ponderous fawn from the Liverpool London and Globe" (CP 17) with whom the narrator's father had absconded on the occasion of his son's birth.) The sentence contrasts age with youth. The father
is implicitly "footsore and weary", not only from the day's tramping, but from all the days' tramping that constitutes his life. The passage is thus more forgiving towards the father than "Sanies I", where "footsore" is really only an index of infidelity.

Despite being weary, his energy is unflagging. "On the point of setting out anew" is another phrase concerning his desire to escape that seems to utilise repetition in an energetic way. The phrase, like "moved [...] to take himself off and out of the way", runs on the spot: "on the point of setting out anew". (This is to be at the beginning of beginning a new beginning). The phrase crucially, and rather beautifully, recalls the child, for the new-born, or about-to-be-born, is also "on the point of setting out anew". "Young moonlight" is especially piercing, again bringing out what had been implicit but silent in the passage, the incipient life. "Young moonlight" conflates youth and age, since the moon, though young when it too is "starting out anew", is in another sense fundamentally old. (We speak of 'the old man in the moon'.) The moon - which, like so much in Company, "invariably waxes and wanes" (NO 48) - brings with it connotations of cyclical change and
renewal that inflect the rhythms of a passage about a father making way for a son. 23

The father is finally subject to an energetic and enthusiastic annunciation - "the maid came running to tell him" - and the passage ends with sublime ambivalence, by reiterating her tidings: "it was over at last. Over!". The final word may be the maid's excited repetition, or it may be the father's (private) remark, though it would be the first occasion on which we are privy to his thoughts. (Compare: "You may imagine [...]") The word may 'belong' to the speaker, who may be the child or the mother, and of course it may be an almost authorial intrusion, as in the sublimely impersonal omniscient voice that pronounces "It is not" (a quick death) at the end of "Dante and the Lobster" (MPTK 21).

"Over!" The exclamation mark implies irony, but this is not quite a weary recognition that the process of "labour and delivery" is not "over" but just beginning, according to the Beckettian dogma about life being an arduous passage into death: "I am being given, if I may venture the expression, birth to into death, such is my impression." (T 260) "Over!" may be ironical, but not cynical. (The passage
has at every turn eschewed cynicism.) The tone is in fact more welcoming; part elated relief, and part sober awe in face of a prospective life.

First Love ends with the cry of the new-born, and the narrator's bleak conviction that "all that matters is that it should cease" (CSP 19). Company, a work inflected with "unexpected grace" (NO 51), not only manifests forgiveness and sympathy (even for parents), but forward-looking thoughts for children. This passage has made room for family values other than narrowly misanthropic ones. "Over!", a word that implies repetition and continuity as well as an end - for to start anew is to start over\textsuperscript{24} - may be a more generous acknowledgement of the cycle in which humanity itself is always "all at once over and in train and to come." (NO 27)\textsuperscript{25}
Part III

Descendants

"Everyone is a parent, that is what keeps you from hoping." (CSP 26)
PART III: INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades an inordinate amount of critical attention has been lavished on Beckett's pre-occupation with the dying and the derelict, and on his protagonists' perilous, if tormentingly asymptotic, proximity to extinction. Titles of books on Beckett such as Michael Robinson's The Long Sonata of the Dead (1969), James Knowlson and John Pilling's Frescoes of the Skull (1979), and, more recently, Christopher Ricks' Beckett's Dying Words (1993) have tended to compound the popular notion that Beckett's name is synonymous with old men and their morbid meditations on the end of life. Of course many of Beckett's own titles invite just such an interpretation: Echo's Bones (1935), The End (1954), Malone Dies (1956), Endgame (1958), Krapp's Last Tape (1958), Embers (1959), Lessness (1970), For To End Yet Again, (1976), Old Earth, (1976), Six Residua (1978), Disjecta (1983), and Worstward Ho (1983) all invoke
- some explicitly, others implicitly - the dead or the dying.

Given all this, it is perhaps not surprising that the children who people Beckett's work - those figures "at the mouth of life" (CSP 40), at the other end of its "little trajectory" (MPTK 40) - have remained relatively under-represented in the critical writings on Beckett. The Journal of Beckett Studies recently published an article asserting (albeit in passing) that "children appear only rarely in Beckett's work". Silence from the majority of critics would suggest that they concur, for no study of Beckett's writing has given any sustained attention to this subject, nor discerned its real importance. In reality the oeuvre is "crawling with them" (CDW 125); they form a prominent feature of both his fictional and dramatic worlds, and are a surprisingly rich source for the metaphorical life of his writing.

A preliminary list of Beckett's most conspicuous children might include the boy who is "A Case In a Thousand"; the boy whom Celia observes at the end of Murphy; the hand-holding pair who accost Mercier in Mercier and Camier; the glazier's son in "Eleutheria"; Godot's
messenger(s); the boy Clov claims to have sighted in Endgame; Jacques Moran Jnr in Molloy; Sapo in Malone Dies; Mildred in Happy Days; Jerry and "little Minnie" in All That Fall; Addie in Embers; the boy who is one of the Ghost Trio; and the child evoked in Worstward Ho. This is not to mention the numerous urchin-like figures encountered by Belacqua, by Molloy and by the narrators of many of the poems and novellas - nor the children evoked by the lyrical memories in the novellas, the Texts for Nothing and the Trilogy, in How It Is, That Time, and Company. (The prominence given to those children whose presence is felt most strongly at the ends of particular works is especially notable: Waiting for Godot, Endgame, All That Fall, Ghost Trio - all exploit the dramatic potential inherent in the late appearance of a child.) Beckett confers an enormous amount of creative energy on his children and, as I aim to show in this part of the thesis, they constitute the focus for many of his most important aesthetic, ethical, and quasi-theological concerns.

In the first chapter of this section I consider the child's equivocal status as an object of both scorn and tenderness, and its role throughout the oeuvre as an image
for humanity at large. In the second I discuss a number of important encounters between adults and children in which the latter are generally seen to be exemplary figures from whom the former have much to learn. The next chapter focusses on All That Fall and its precursors, and considers the absent child, the child as a figure of loss. The thesis ends with some concluding remarks about the overall direction of Beckett's changing attitude towards the child, and some observations about the relations in Beckett between childhood and adulthood in the development of the individual.
CHAPTER FIVE

LOVING AND LOATHING CHILDREN

Given the high incidence of children in Beckett's oeuvre, this chapter explores the sentiments habitually evinced in association with them.

In an early review of a book on Beckett's beloved Dante Beckett chastises the author - Papini - for focussing on Dante's life at the expense of his art. Among the biographical "marginalia" of which it is, in Beckett's phrase, "pleasant to be reminded [...] but beside the point", are the facts that Dante "loathed children" and at the same time "hungered all his life long to be called 'son'".¹ Beckett curtly dismisses these facts as unimportant details, and yet, like one of Papini's other facts - that Dante "introjected certain forms of suffering like a neurotic" - they seem peculiarly apposite to Beckett in the light of his subsequent work. "I loathe children", remarks one of his narrators (CSP 26), summing up a strong
current of feeling in the writing; but the animus breathed against children is partly mitigated by the identification with them implied in an often thwarted desire to be acknowledged as a son: "I was with my father [...] I would have liked him to draw me close with a gesture of protective love, but his mind was on other things." (CSP 69)

Beckett's treatment of children continually fluctuates between extreme poles of repudiation and identification, and as this chapter will show, the child's condition— as (variously) innocent, malign, diminutive, vulnerable, lowly, verminous—is the focus of much attention. Indeed children, and a child-like humanity, often become quite literally the objects of ambivalent authorial scrutiny. Some of Beckett's most important theological, ethical and aesthetic concerns will be seen to be crucially grounded in a hypersensitivity to children and the child-like.

5.1 Puritan and Rousseauvian Children

With regard to children, as with so many other matters, Beckett's writing makes profitable use of available clichés
by both exploiting and exploding them. As Peter Coveney has shown in his valuable study *The Image of Childhood*, the child has become, since its rise to literary prominence at the end of the eighteenth century, the focus of competing ideologies. In this and in later sections I will be borrowing a number of Coveney's useful definitions and criteria in order to examine the multivalent and iconic nature of the child in Beckett.

Coveney sketches the transition from Enlightenment to Romantic thinking about the child. The rationalist school, born of Locke, whose *Thoughts Concerning Education* "informed a whole tradition of educational theory", "seldom considered the nature of the child as child":

Treated as a small adult, the child was to be trained out of his childish ways into the moral and rational perfection of regulated manhood. The child was the *tabula rasa* upon which, through education, sensation could work its benificent influence.(40-41)

For Rousseau, however, and the cult of sensibility he set in train, "the child is important in himself, and not as a diminutive adult":

For him the child was not the passive creature of external perception, but a self-active soul, endowed with natural tendencies to virtue from birth, which in a state of nature could be developed [...](41-3)
Thus, in the ground-breaking *Émile* Rousseau argues that

Nature wants children to be children before they are men [...] Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling peculiar to itself; nothing can be more foolish than to substitute our ways for them.

Beckett, I think, can be seen to make use of these contradictory ideologies. Take, for example, the Trilogy, which contains his two most extended treatments of single children. In *Molloy* we have a child as if seen by an Enlightenment educationalist. Jacques Moran (Jnr.) is presented only through the wary and contemptuous eyes of his narrating father, ever suspicious of what his son may be up to. The child is habitually "reprimanded" by an obsessively pedagogic disciplinarian who, remembering how he was insufficiently "chastened" out of "bad habits" as a child, hopes "to spare my son this misfortune by giving him a good clout from time to time together with my reasons for doing so." (T 88) The child's name, of course, implies that he is regarded by his father not as a child in his own right but as a potential copy of his father. In *Malone Dies*, on the other hand, we have something more like a Rousseauvian child of Nature. Sapo's misdemeanours are described by Malone, his (father-like) author, with a more imaginative sympathy so
that we seem to see the confrontation with the adult world through the child's eyes: "Pestered with questions one day he cried, Haven't I told you I don't know!" (T 174) His lack of hard knowledge and Gradgrindian facts is presented as a virtue; close to the "strange things" of nature, "from his ignorance of them he drew a kind of joy" (T 176).

The Christian doctrine of original sin blighted the child with a fallen nature - "All the elect are born into this world, sinful and miserable"; but for Rousseau "there is no original sin in the human heart; the how and the why of the entrance of every vice can be traced". Coveney argues that although "a long tradition of Hebrew and Christian literature postulated the uncorrupted nature of the child" so that "the first impact on the strongholds of original sin were made on behalf of original innocence before Rousseau's Émile", nevertheless it was Rousseau's theories which most effectively "removed the natural behaviour of children from an atmosphere of religious abomination and sin" (44,45).

In broad ideological terms, then, there is a kind of Christian fundamentalism - often Puritan or Jansenist in orientation - according to which the child is hopelessly
blighted by original sin, fallen, necessarily evil, and liable to diabolical ways. It must be kept in check and if possible reformed, and accordingly parental priorities lie with surveillance, discipline, punishment, and correction. This mentality is often in danger of becoming a mere cover for the cynical and neurotic hatred of children - as evidenced in some of the Puritan tracts quoted by Coveney. On the other hand there is an extreme Rousseauvianism which entails the belief that the child is originally innocent, a manifestation of unspoiled Nature, as yet blissfully untouched by the corrupting hand of man but highly vulnerable to it. The child must be protected, not punished; encouraged, not corrected; learned from and not dictated to. The danger here - the potential decadence - is sentimentality, an over-protectiveness towards the child dictating that it must be hidden away from the world or even prevented from coming into it.

At both extremes the child takes on an iconic status, becoming a picture of in the one case unfettered egoism and malice, and in the other, naked vulnerability.

Beckett - time and again, as will be seen - consciously draws on both traditions and often exploits the comic effect
of switching unexpectedly from one extreme point of view to the other.

You go and lie down, I said, I'll bring you something nice and light in bed, you'll have a little sleep and then we'll leave together. I drew him to me. What do you say to that? I said. He said to it, Yes papa. Did he love me then as much as I loved him? You could never be sure with that little hypocrite. (T 110)

Whom did you call when you were a tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark? Your mother? No. Me. We let you cry. Then we moved you out of earshot, so that we might sleep. (CDW 119)

I had to fling myself to the ground to avoid crushing a child. He was wearing a little harness I remember, with little bells, he must have taken himself for a pony, or a Clydesdale, why not. I would have crushed him gladly, I loathe children, but I was afraid of reprisals. (CSP 26)

The ground around each child is prepared with saccharine sentimentality before the whole area is blasted with cynicism. It is perhaps not so surprising to find the cynical and the sentimental in such close proximity for they are in a way natural allies, mutually exclusive but at the same time the obverse of one another - two sides of the same coin - and Beckett habitually trades on this currency of the frustrated idealist. To regard children as either inherently innocent or inherently evil is equally idealistic; to swing erratically from one view to the other
indicates an idealism that is stubborn but ill at ease with itself. Brilliantly executed though it is, the rather broad comedy of these passages is founded on a complete (and unexpected) reversal of point of view - the coin can only be one way up or the other - so that we are required, at the moment of the 'punchline', completely to revise our repertoire of prejudices. Angelic little creatures become malign little devils.

It might be argued that all of the above examples show us more about the splenetic character of the adults than about the children themselves. Sometimes, however, Beckett focusses not so much on ambivalent feelings about a child, as on a fundamental ambiguity in the status of the child itself. It is at one and the same time victim and perpetrator of the "sin of being born" (P 67).

5.2 Original Sin

In Proust Beckett endorses the lines he quotes - almost certainly via The World as Will and Representation, where they are cited three times - from Calderón's play La Vida es
Beckett calls it "the original and eternal sin [...] the sin of having been born" (P 67) and thus follows Schopenhauer's claim that "in that verse Calderón has merely expressed the Christian dogma of original sin" (I.355). This is too straightforward an equation, however, for Calderón's lines are a consciously blasphemous rewriting of orthodoxy. The paradox lies in the notion that a passive condition can be an offence or act of sin. A standard definition of 'original sin' is "the corruption which is born with us, and is the inheritance of all the offspring of Adam." This itself is paradoxical, suggesting that sin is something both innate and yet external. "Born with" implies both inseparability and separability, since "with" can mean either "including" or "alongside". (A baby could be born with a hole in its heart, or with a twin sister; you could inherit a heart-disease, which is intrinsic to you, or a fortune, which is not.) Beckett follows Calderón in making the act of being born the sin itself rather than merely the
occasion of sin's inception. This is clearly blasphemous since it denies the sanctity of birth. But being born can scarcely be described as an act, as the passive construction indicates; rather it is something perpetrated by one's parents. The trope is a rhetorical manoeuvre and it makes explicit the sense only latent in the Christian dogma that a baby is somehow at one and the same both passively sinned against and actively sinning. Schopenhauer, too, teases out this latent sense when he refers to Augustine's teaching "that original sin is sin and punishment at the same time" (I.405). The two notions of sin and punishment are fused in his conception of the Will, constantly striving, and constantly suffering. As one commentator puts it:

Our experience is, therefore, a crime. But who commits this crime? The Will, which produces us and which is each one of us, according to our inner nature. Similarly the Will, in and through us, pays for its crime by suffering.

For Beckett, following Schopenhauer, life is "the expiation of [...] the original sin of having been born" (P 67) so that the child is its own victim and its own punishment. Hence his exploitation of the myth that he was born on Good Friday, the day when the Deity was most divided against Himself, sacrificial Lamb and judging Father.
This quasi-theology means that the child's status is not only determined by a combination of Christian and Romantic ideologies, but by a combination of them in particularly extreme forms. In so far as the child is vulnerable it is vulnerable not only to the corrupting hands of men, but to the corruption that is life itself; in so far as the child is guilty its guilt is essential and unredeemable - not an accidental part of its nature.

5.3 "Not I" and the Theology of Childbirth

The play Not I stages a kind of birth; its parting lips are an image of verbal and gynaecological delivery. Like life it begins in medias res: "...out... into this world... this world... tiny little thing..." (CDW 376). "This world" has a distinctly religious connotation; it is this world we know all too well rather than that unimaginable 'other world' above. In the bible "world" is all too often synonymous with sin, "worldliness" being opposed to righteousness and spirituality. But in these opening words the child is very much in the world but not of
it, and this is indicated by the clash of antithetical registers: "this world" is ecclesiastic, preachy, ascetic; "tiny little thing" is homely, affectionate, motherly. The implicit ideology is a blend of Christian suspicion about the nature of the world and Romantic pathos about the vulnerability of the child. In alternately disdainful and loving gestures - reminiscent of the tailor's in Nagg's joke (CDW 103) - we are invited to compare (and implicitly to contrast) "this world" with a "tiny little thing". The first item needs no adjectival commentary; merely being "this" (the known) is enough to condemn it. The second, being simply a "thing", is identified only by its tautological double adjective; it is, so to speak, mere helplessness, "some infinitely gentle/Infinitely suffering thing". ¹⁰

"Out of the dark past/ A child is born"¹¹ - ecce puella - but this child is out of the frying pan into the fire. For the pleading pathos of "tiny little thing" is here subject to a "cutting retort" (NO 8): this "tiny little thing" is, in the words of one seventeenth century Puritan manual on the strict education of children, "not too little to die, not too little to go to hell"¹². For "tiny little
thing" also describes the tiny flickering mouth that is almost all that can be discerned in the surrounding darkness comprising the hellish "this world" of the theatre, and from which it strives in vain to be properly delivered.

Although the woman described in *Not I* lived "on and on to be seventy" (CDW 381) she implicitly remains a "tiny little thing" lost in the "middle of the throng" (379) in life as was, and in the world of "buzzing" (238, 379, 380, 381, 382) confusion that is her present hellish condition. As so often in Beckett the conditions of childhood pertain to adult life too, and beyond.

It is worth noting in closing that the essentially child-like nature of the protagonist stems partly from *Not I* 's provenance: the play has a source in an incident involving a child - the belated delivery of a child. Deirdre Bair has written of Beckett's inspiration for the relationship between the mouth and the only other discernible presence in the play - the tall, hooded "auditor" (376) whose "gestures of helpless compassion"(375) punctuate the text. In 1972 Beckett was in Morocco, sitting in a sunny cafe one afternoon quietly observing the human traffic on the street in front of him [...] An Arab woman shrouded in a *jellaba* was hunkered down on the edge of the sidewalk - in Beckett's words,
"crouched in an attitude of intense waiting." Every so often, she would straighten and peer intently into the distance. Then she would flap her arms aimlessly against her sides and hunker down once again. Beckett was puzzled by the woman's anxiety and tension. Finally, a vehicle best described as a Moroccan schoolbus drove up and deposited a child, whom the woman swept into her arms and showered with endearments before disappearing into the throng.

5.4 Littleness

Beckett's preoccupation with tiny little things is much in evidence. There is a way in which all things in Beckett tend to the condition of children; he has a habit of infantilising his subjects. In Ill Seen Ill Said an old woman is followed on her evening walk by a lamb. As in the nursery rhyme, it is a little lamb, with "little shanks" - what another narrator calls a "lambkinette" (T 290). "Rather than walk", we are told, "it seems to glide like a toy in tow" (NO 79). At the moment when woman and lamb simultaneously pause for rest the narrator makes a telling remark:

It is now her puniness leaps to the eye. Thanks it would seem to the lowly creature next to her. Brief paradox. (NO 79)

If the lamb is like a "toy in tow", the old woman's puniness
which depends upon the visual relationship between her and the lamb - is the puniness of a child. The paradox lies for the narrator in the fact that the woman-child seems the more puny because accompanied by something tinier than her, but really there is no paradox at all; the woman is infantilised because visually the difference in scale between her and the lamb mirrors that between a child and its toy. The composite image is a diminutive one, and one invested with suitable pathos.

In Beckett's writing puniness continually leaps to the reader's eye merely because of the high incidence of diminutives in the diction. His writing is at times clotted with words that speak of the meagre and the exiguous. The most obvious example is the word "little", one of the commonest words in Beckett. In the four stories that comprise the Novellas, to take a sample of reasonable size, the word appears more than eighty times:

- the latter line limps a little (CSP 2)
- with a little luck (2)
- their little gimmick (2)
- the little odd maintenance jobs (3)
- a little heap (4)
- that little heap (4)
- a little way (5)
- it matters...so little (7)
- I have little doubt (9)
- a little girl (11)
a little way (12)
a little clearer (12)
a little nearer (12)
little by little (13)
her little finger (14)
a little later (16)
I would care as little (17)
a little in the same way (19)
a little fainter (19)
little by little (21)
a little comfort (22)
its little flight of stairs (23)
I went out so little! (24)
a little before my time (25)
wearing a little harness (26)
with little bells (26)
nasty little creatures (26)
all their foul little happiness (26)
a little later (27)
I still had a little (29)
Very little (29)
a little laid up (30)
snug in its little house (31)
this little wood (36)
a little (36)
little by little (36)
my little fist (37)
or so little (37)
little stiff steps (38)
little bruised stems (38)
a little encounter (39)
a little unfortunate at the mouth of life (40)
his little person (40)
my little man (40)
his little guttersnipe's eye (39)
each little step (41)
a little girl (42)
little dome (42)
little by little (47)
the little girl (48)
a little more clearly (48)
her little face (48)
little by little (48)
little by little (48)
a little shorter (51)
a little thinner (51)
little stars (52)
a little longer (52)
a little longer (53)
a little longer (53)
a little girl (57)
unless it was a little boy (57)
a little girl or a little boy (57)
a little girl (57)
little tracks (59)
a little money (59)
the little boys (60)
a little boy (65)
a little on the red side (66)
I managed to put a little aside (66)
little odd jobs (67)
little odd jobs (67)
a little towards the stern (67)
I slept very little (67)
these little odds and ends (67)
that noone came distressed me but little (68)

Beckett is clearly not over-anxious to avoid the word. In fact he goes out of his way to use it as often as possible. In some cases where it is used as a straightforward adjective ("a little child") it does seem the most obvious word, though even here it could be argued that to use the word at all courts tautology. (Let us assume, however, that a 'little child' is one aged between, say, four and nine, rather than between ten and thirteen.) Synonyms like "small" and "tiny", which Beckett does in fact employ as well (CSP 59,67), obviously have very similar meanings, though, for reasons which will become clearer
below, Beckett's pronounced preference is for "little". This preference is more obvious in cases where an alternative formulation could be found in which diminutive connotations were less evident or altogether avoided. Beckett might have written "the latter line limps somewhat"; or "the occasional odd maintenance job"; or "I went out so rarely"; or "a brief encounter" (though there might be good reasons for avoiding this); or "rather more clearly"; or "that noone came distressed me only mildly". (In this last case other alternatives like "slightly" or "a bit" would at least have lessened the intensity of the diminutive ethos.) He could have used negative formulations: not "I have little doubt", but "I haven't much doubt"; not "I slept very little", but "I didn't sleep very much". Perhaps most obviously Beckett could have used the adverb "gradually" instead of the habitual "little by little".

When Hugh Kenner rendered portions of Comment C'est into English prior to Beckett's own translation, he at one point changed the French phrase "petit espace" into "short space" because the passage in question seemed to have to do with time. Beckett wrote "little space", however, and Kenner conceded the felicity of this when he realised that,
in this odd novel, "the spaces are [...] seen, not traversed, not even mentally traversed: this is a diagram." The incident is instructive not only because it shows Beckett's determination to cling to his "little", but also because of the link Kenner makes between that particular word and the visual sense that is very predominant in Beckett. "Puniness" - even in works less assuredly diagrammatic than How It Is - "leaps to the eye".

A glance at the incidence of the word in the Novellas shows that, although the distribution is fairly even, there is occasional bunching (especially on pages 48 and 67). There are a lot of children in these stories (some of whom I will discuss below) and the word as adjective tends to stick to them somewhat; but frequently the word is used in other avoidable ways, and these too crop up in groups. For Beckett one little thing leads to another - by little and little - so that like children his diminutives multiply. His children often come in pairs, and so do their adjectives: "a little girl, unless it was a little boy" (CSP 57); "a little boy and a little girl" (MC 31). The phrase "little by little", something of a Beckettian signature, is a visually
doubled or twinned diminutive. It is "like the solitary child who turns himself into children" (CDW 126). Beckett was always seduced by multiples and two can easily become three: thus with a childish gracelessness Malone writes that "little by little my little pencil dwindles" (T 204).

Some things are little in Beckett that one wouldn't ordinarily expect to be little. The "little oaktree" in Old Earth (CSP 201) is perfectly feasible, but the adjective works against the usual connotations of "oak". The phrase "all his little strength" in For To End Yet Again (CSP 181) seems momentarily at odds with itself.

Often describing a thing as little renders it subject to the pathos of nostalgia. When the narrator of From An Abandoned Work describes the house he has just left (with his mother waving from the window) as "all small because of the distance, very pretty really" (CSP 130), the "distance" is implicitly temporal as well as spatial. "Very pretty really" archly acknowledges the quaintly picturesque quality that backward glances bestow on things, and that glances in general bestow on things that are intricately miniature. In "Serena II" a distant town seen from a hill is described by its "kindergartens of steeples" (CP 24); associated with the
narrator's childhood the town resembles the toy-land it evokes.

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary notes that the word "little" is used "often with emotional implications not given by small". The word can of course evoke tenderness: discussing Georgian poetry T.S. Eliot noticed how often the word 'little' occurs; and how this word is used, not merely as a piece of information, but with a caress, a conscious delight.

For the Georgians the word contributed, as Tony Pinkney has argued, to an ethos of "modesty". But it can be far less unobtrusive. Disparaging George Eliot's sentimental and "quaint" treatment of children in her early novels Peter Coveney remarks that her habitual "use of 'little' is never merely factual, but serves to add an emotional sweetening".

According to Deirdre Bair, Beckett read The Mill On The Floss in 1935 when he "thought Eliot's treatment of infancy commendable and was struck by how much Dickens took from her". One thing that Dickens has in common with Eliot (though who took from whom it might be harder to ascertain) is the habit of sentimentalising some of his children with a
liberal deployment of the word "little". In *Dombey and Son*, for instance, the pathos surrounding Paul Dombey is heightened by repeated references to his "little" stature, and every diminutive adjective intensifies the reader's presentiment of his ultimate doom. Beckett often exploits this studied vulnerability that the word confers on its nouns, and in some cases the effect is one of pastiche. Beckett mimics an idiom that Pinkney describes as "homely" and "English" as though in an attempt to distance himself from the classics of nineteenth century fiction while paying some sort of homage to them. In his discussion of George Eliot's early writing, in which he deplores the "babytalk" and the children for whom "quaintness is all", Coveney quotes a description from *Adam Bede* that typifies this idiom: two boys are dressed in "little fustian tailed coats and knee breeches, relieved by rosy cheeks and black eyes." This is the sort of description that Beckett intensifies to the point of absurdity:

he saw two children, a little boy and a little girl, standing gazing at him. They wore little black oilskins with hoods, identical, and the the boy had a little satchel on his back.

[...] they [...] stood their ground, their little clasped hands lightly swinging back and forth. Finally the little girl drew hers away and advanced towards
him, as if to invite a kiss, or at least a caress. The little boy followed suit [...] (MC 31)

The repetition of the word in the first line could have been avoided ("he saw two little children, a boy and a girl"), but "a little boy and a little girl", reminiscent of Blake's Songs of Innocence, has the sing-song quality of a nursery rhyme. It not only emphasises the way the children mirror one another but is itself "babytalk". Subsequent "little"s are used only for their "emotional sweetening" - "as if to invite a kiss, or at least a caress" ("this word is used [...] with a caress", said T.S.Eliot). They are factually redundant either because they repeat information already given ("little girl", "little boy") or give information which would in any case be inferred. (Little children are, after all, likely to have little clothes and little hands.)

In this passage Beckett is clearly seeking to exaggerate pathos to comic effect, preparing the ground for the moment of repudiation when Mercier tells the children to "Fuck off out of here!" (MC 31). "Little" is a particularly useful word for Beckett in this respect, since it encompasses both the sentimental and the cynical. The sense in which it is used "as of a child, evoking tenderness", can easily modulate into the sense used to evoke
"condescension"; from there it is a short step to its sense implying "mean, paltry, contemptible" (Concise O.E.D.):

He was wearing a little harness, I remember, with little bells [...] One should reserve [...] special tracks for these nasty little creatures, their prams, hoops, sweets, scooters, skates, grandpas, grandmas, nannies, balloons and balls, all their foul little happiness in a word. (CSP 26)

The pivotal moment there is "little bells", which is poised between the tenderness of "little harness" and the condescension implicit in an incipient sense of the ridiculous.

In the last example, the disgusted "nasty little creatures" brings with it the idea of multitudes.

There are days, said Mercier, one is born every minute. Then the world is full of shitty little Merciers. (MC 32)

Because one is literally born every minute, the world is full - and implicitly full of idiots because, colloquially, "there's one born every minute". Such a world is likely to be "peopled with [...] decorticated multiparas" (D 87). Frequently utilised by Beckett this is the Swiftian mode of misanthropic disgust, according to which humans swarm like insects:
the most pernicious race of odious little vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.

Procreation in Beckett is frequently analogous to infestation: in *Watt* the earth is "lousy" (W 45); in *Endgame* a flea gives rise to the fear that "humanity might start [...] all over" (CDW 108). In *Happy Days* an emmet carrying an egg provokes Willie's pedantic but significant pun "formication" (CDW 149,150) which combines the notion of sexual activity in its near-homophone - fornication - with the word's literal meaning: "sensation as of ants crawling over the skin" (Concise O.E.D.).

Being little often involves crawling. Babies and insects both crawl, though the former tend to elicit tenderness, and the latter disgust. The colloquial "creepy crawly" (CSP 86) - derived from the biblical tautology "every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth" - cringes with alliteration; it also acknowledges, in its doubling, the tendency among insects to multiply. When, in *Endgame*, Hamm thinks of "all those I might have helped" he remarks that "the place was crawling with them!" (CDW 125). "Crawling" here underlines the disgust of the pitiless passer-by as well as the verminous and multitudinous nature
of the helpless. To crawl is also to be obsequious and insidious like a serpent; the additional horror this elicits is registered in Hamm's description of the beggar who "comes crawling on his belly" (CDW 121). Hamm's earlier exclamation "Ah the creatures, the creatures, everything has to be explained to them" (CDW 113) is instead poised between tenderness and contempt. "Creatures" can be a fond name for children, emphasising, for instance, their vulnerable dependence on those who have created them. (And of course everything, in one sense, has to be explained to children.) On the other hand "creatures" often implies created things that are non-human - "animal (often as distinct from man)" (Concise O.E.D.). There can be "horrid [...] creature[s]" like insects and like Henry's daughter in Embers (CDW 256), or "lovely creatures" like the "dream-animals" in From An Abandoned Work (CSP 132), but "the creatures" is undecided.

To speak of creatures necessarily implies a creator. Relations between possible creators and their impossible creatures - Malone wonders "how such creatures are possible" (T 183) - much preoccupied Beckett: "Can the crawling creator crawling in the same create dark as his creature create while crawling?" (NO 43). Many of the above examples
clearly betray a theological anxiety about the contempt with which a Deity might consider mankind. Men might be to Him what Beckett's children are to his adults, and some of the implications of this will be examined in the remainder of the chapter.

5.5 Stooping to the Prone: 
The Scrutiny a Child-like Humanity

Peter Murphy has rightly brought to our attention the important ways in which Beckett's oeuvre quarries - or rather preys upon - images from the early poem "The Vulture". There the notion of "stooping" is highly ambiguous:

stooping to the prone who must soon take up their life and walk (CP 9)

The stooping is both a rapacious attack and - because of the allusion to Christ's ministration to the palsied ("take up thy bed and walk") - a compassionate act of sympathy. (The woman addressed in "Alba" "stoop[es] with fingers of compassion/ to endorse the dust" (CP 15) and thereby evokes the Christ who twice "stooped down" to write in the sand
At one point Molloy remembers having "stooped and picked up [a] marble" belonging to an "urchin"; the child's response was memorably equivocal: "Thanks I suppose" (T 47). The stoop that is a help is easily confused with the stoop that is an attack, something Molloy himself had earlier implied when he remarked that "against the charitable gesture there is no defence" (T 24). Beckett's characters are often wary of those, like Christ, who would stoop to help them. "Left in peace they would have been as happy as Larry, short for Lazarus, whose raising seemed to Murphy perhaps the one occasion on which the Messiah had overstepped the mark" (M 102). Lazarus, of course, was not left in peace: one can imagine his "Thanks I suppose".

In Beckett children epitomise the vulnerable ("the prone"), to whom (lovingly) or upon whom (savagely) adults often stoop; and stooping in Beckett is - to borrow a phrase from Watt - "less a gesture than an attitude" (W 212). Relations between adults and children are repeatedly represented in Beckett by the former's often ambiguous stooping over the latter, and this mirrors the ambiguous relationship between creator and creature. In Company, for
instance, a mother is imagined "stooping over cradle from behind [...] No trace of love" (NO 38); explicit theology follows shortly after - "God is love. Yes or no? No." (NO 42). 31

In How It Is the theological implications are again very clear when another mother stoops over her child. A voice speaks of an image of "me and my mother's face I see it from below":

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

in a word bolt upright on a cushion on my knees whelmed in a nightshirt I pray according to her instructions

that's not all she closes her eyes and drones a snatch of the so-called Apostles Creed I steal a look at her lips

she stops her eyes burn down on me again I cast up mine in haste and repeat awry (HII 16-7) 32

"The eyes burn with severe love"; the child is the object of ambiguous scrutiny here, feeling both cared for and oppressed. The scene will be re-presented in much of Beckett's drama, and especially in Happy Days.

Happy Days can be seen partly to endorse Gaston
Bachelard's observation that

the man with the magnifying glass takes the world as though it were quite new to him... It gives him back the enlarging gaze of a child.

When Winnie bends over and peers at the emmet through her "magnifying glass" she remarks that it "[h]as like a little white ball in its arms" (CDW 149) and the odd locution seems more a child-like solecism than a conscious anthropomorphism. Given the "blazing light" (CDW 139) above her she must be assumed to be in danger of roasting the creature (her eyes burning down on it), and this latent cruelty is a second, less endearing aspect of her momentary childishness. It gives rise to a bitter theological joke:

How can one better magnify the almighty than by sniggering with him at his little jokes, particularly the poorer ones? (CDW 150)

As with so much of Beckett's drama, the play as a whole is about scrutiny. Like the emmet, Winnie is literally and metaphorically under the spotlight. In this very self-referential play Winnie is subject to a blazing light that is not merely represented but actually constituted by the hot stage-light above her. This light is, like the one in Play, an "inquisitor" (CDW 318). The audience are
inquisitors too (or at the very least inquisitive), and like
the man called "Shower - or Cooker" whom Winnie describes,
they are "gaping" at her and asking "what are you meant to
mean?" (CDW 156). (Shower and Cooker are "from the German
schauen, to look, and gucken, to look or peep (a Zuschauer
is a theatrical spectator)". Winnie is under intense
scrutiny - like the emmet, and like the verminous human race
for whom the procreating emmet is an analogy. ("The only way
one can speak of man", an earlier novel had suggested, "is
to speak of him as though he were a termite" [W 74]).

Paul Davies is right recently to argue that "Beckett
does not shy away from asking" questions about "what we
are". Nevertheless Beckett not only asks the question "What
is man?"38, he also implicitly imagines what it would be
for a Deity so to ask. Man is constantly represented as the
object of the scrutiny of some higher being.

Imagine if a rational being came back to earth,
wouldn't he be liable to get ideas into his head if he
observed us long enough. (CDW 108)

Scrutinising often involves bending or stooping over
the object of attention. With her magnifying-glass Winnie
"bends" over the emmet the better to "inspect" it (CDW 149),
and the moment recalls her intense "examination", also
with the magnifying-glass (CDW 143), of the toothbrush handle in Act 1. Then she could only make out the words "fully guaranteed...genuine pure", and asked (insistently) "genuine...pure...what?" (CDW 140). This might be a dramatisation of the "pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric" by which Beckett defined art in his 1938 review of Devlin's poems (D 91). The object of Winnie's curiosity is both comically mundane and tantalisingly elusive, like the visit of the Galls which Watt decided was "nothing [...] with all the clarity and solidity of something" (W 73). When the 'answer' finally emerges it is suitably obscure - "hog's...setae" (CDW 143) - and by no means the "solution clapped on problem like a snuffer on a candle" (D 92) which Beckett so disdained.

Many of Beckett's dramatic characters feel cruelly interrogated and scrutinized, and yet their uncanny sense of being watched is not always so tormenting. Winnie's remark "Someone is looking at me still [...] Caring for me still" (CDW 160) is not necessarily spoken with bitter irony. Film is undoubtedly about the terror of being watched - in this case by oneself - but if the aphorism upon which it is founded - Berkeley's "esse est percipi" (CDW 323) - is true,
then being watched might feasibly feel like being cared for and protected, at least from "inexistence" (T 316; NO 93). In Play the terror caused by the interrogating "mere eye" is explicit: "Get off me" (CDW 317). And yet a worse fear seems evident in these "poor creatures" (CDW 316), the fear of being overlooked: "am I as much as...being seen?" (CDW 317).

Beckett's writing is in more than one way "a long gaze" (CDW 201), and a gaze can be cruel or tender. It can be the act of an unwelcome voyeur or that of a lover; it can lead to exposure or to intimacy. To be "the object of [...] scrutiny" (CSP 172) may be excruciating; and yet the intense observation of minutiae may indicate heightened sensitivity rather than cruelty, and certainly not indifference. Much of Beckett's writing is about looking intently at little things, and though cruelty is sometimes a facet of this, there is a sense in which even at its most coldly scientific, precise monitoring is a sign of concern. It takes the trouble to notice what might otherwise be "lost for tininess" (T 277).

"If one is missed, the whole world is unpeopled"; such is the line that inspired Beckett's French title Le Dépeupleur. Beckett alludes satirically - in All That Fall
to the biblical promise that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered [...] ye are of more value than many sparrows"; and yet his work not only cries out for, but in part provides, "an ear a mind to understand a means of noting a care for us the wish to note the curiosity to understand" (HII 147).

Many of the short prose pieces from the sixties and seventies - Imagination Dead Imagine, Ping, Lessness, The Lost Ones, Still - describe and perform versions of quasi-scientific monitoring that are compassionate as well as cruel:

Quite still again then at open window facing south over the valley in this wicker chair though actually close inspection not still at all but trembling all over. Close inspection namely detail by detail all over to add up finally to this whole not still at all but but trembling all over. But casually in this failing light impression dead still [...] (CSP 183)

The subjects of such monitoring are almost always rendered vulnerable with emotionally sweetening diminutives. The "little fabric" in Imagination Dead Imagine is an egg-like "rotunda" comprising two foetally-placed figures (CSP 145). The "little body" in Lessness (CSP 153,4,5,6,7); "this little people" (CSP 178) in The Lost Ones - complete with "sucklings", "mite[s] (167) and "nurselings" (168); the
"little body" in *For To End Yet Again* (CSP 179) - carried by "dwarfs"(180), and with eyes that invoke a "doll's"(181): all accentuate the diminutive child-like nature of humanity. In each case, except perhaps in *Lessness*, the observing eye is what *Imagination Dead Imagine* calls an "eye of prey"(CSP 147), a "relentless eye" like that of *Ill Seen Ill Said* (NO 74); but as *For To End Yet Again* acknowledges in a revivified cliché, the eye that preys also notices: "Eagle the eye that shall discern him [...]" (CSP 181).

George Steiner has written that for Malebranche - a writer whom Beckett much admired - "rigorous attention is 'the natural piety of the soul'"41, and such a sentiment might describe Beckett's working ethic. Like Watt's in Knott's household, it is an ethic that is doggedly diligent about not overlooking anything: "every now and then he did forget something, some tiny little thing, so that he was obliged to return and fetch it, for he could not have got on [...] without it" (W115; my emphasis).

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, one of Beckett's least self-referential plays, the protagonist has no sense of the audience watching him, but Beckett's "Suggestions for TV Krapp" reveal the author's sense of the work as a
scrutinising of Krapp's behaviour. He posits two cameras; one is a "mere eye" which sees "the total situation" from a distance; the other "investigates" more intrusively and sometimes "fiercely". Though this camera is partly a "savage eye", it is also much more than that: "this camera listens" says Beckett, oddly, at once suggesting its synaesthetic hypersensitivity and its role as sympathetic ear. (Being a good listener, it is "affected by words spoken".) This camera is "a means to distinguish [...] those moments which matter little or nothing to Krapp from those which matter much or extremely"; it gauges his "levels of attention", his "levels of intentness". The play is an acutely attentive and minutely detailed study of the act of paying attention.42

In Happy Days it is Winnie's attention to the little things around her (minute things, that is, as well as seemingly unimportant ones) that gets her through her day and lends her a dogged sort of dignity. Her magnifying glass and her spectacles are the instruments of an attitude. For Gaston Bachelard:

To use a magnifying glass is to pay attention, but isn't paying attention already having a magnifying glass? Attention by itself is an enlarging glass. (158)
In Beckett the quality of attention is often indicated by the use of diminutives which underline the tininess of the details that are recorded. The "eye of prey" in *Imagination Dead Imagine* is alive to "a thousand little signs" and to "the infinitesimal" (CSP 147) and the Unnamable is both ready to detect "a little stir [...] some tiny subsidence" (T 353) and conscious of "that tiny blur" (T 329) that is his surrogate, Worm. The familiar phrase "little by little" is so useful for Beckett because it exploits the emotional connotations of "little", evoking vulnerability, and suggests an attention capable of registering minute incremental shifts. Malone has "a thousand little things to report" (T 238), and in *Watt* Arsene registers a "change" when "some little thing slipped, some little tiny thing" (W 41). It almost sounds as though he were talking about a child, like the "tiny little thing" that slipped into the world in *Not I* (CSP 376). For Beckett, monitoring the world can indeed demand a diligence comparable to that of a mother tending a child:

Breath itself sigh it all out through the mouth that sound then fill again hold and out again so often once sigh upon sigh no question now some time past but quiet as when even the mother can't hear, stooped over the crib but has to feel pulse or heart.
Beckett is frequently described as a minimalist, but I would like to suggest in closing that miniaturist might be a more appropriate term.

Like his Parisian friend and fellow-artist Giacometti, Beckett tends to see his subjects as small and child-like, especially in relation to the space around them. This is Giacometti:

If I look at a woman on the opposite pavement and see her as small, I feel the wonder of a small figure walking in space, and then, seeing her still smaller, my field of vision becomes much larger. I see a vast space above and around that is almost limitless.

The "wonder of a small figure [...] in space" might be a another useful description of Beckett's aesthetic, which focusses repeatedly on the relationship between bodies and their immediate environment: "A place, then someone in it, that again" (CSP 117). In much of the later short drama and prose the "place" is a "closed place" (CSP 199), an area geometrically marked off from implicitly limitless space above and around. Whether it be a "rotunda" (CSP 145), a "cylinder" (CSP 159), or a minute piece of stage-space isolated from the surrounding darkness, each place - perhaps
modelled on Giacometti's framing plinths - is a microcosm; each contains a miniature world.

Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological discussion of scale in *The Poetics of Space* has some enlightening remarks about the miniature that are pertinent to Beckett's enterprise. He argues that the imagination is always susceptible to the miniature, that the miniature precipitates a proliferating imaginative world, and that the miniature is rarely neutral and possesses values that are connected with a sense of intimacy rooted in childhood:

In looking at a miniature, unflagging attention is required to integrate all the detail. (159)

The miniature deploys to the dimensions of a universe. (157)

One could say, in the manner of Schopenhauer: "The world is my imagination." The cleverer I am at miniaturising the world, the better I possess it. But in doing this, it must be understood that values become condensed and enriched in miniature. (150)

The tiny things we imagine simply take us back to childhood, to familiarity with toys and the reality of toys. (149)

In evidence of these claims Bachelard cites an entry from an encyclopaedia of botany in which an initially objective scientific description of a tiny flower gives way to a poetic fantasy in which the flower becomes an imagined home,
the seeds, for instance, being likened to "children swing[ing] in a hammock". Bachelard remarks that

our learned botanist has found wedded life in miniature [...] From the harmony of the forms he has deduced the well-being of the home [...] The gentle warmth of enclosed regions is the first indication of intimacy [...] No observer could see the slightest real feature that would justify the psychological images [...] We are inclined to think that the narrator would have been more cautious had he had to describe an object with ordinary dimensions. But he entered into a miniature world and right away images began to abound, then grow, then escape. (154)

This might partly serve to describe the workings of some of Beckett's more 'minimalist' (or miniaturist) texts, like All Strange Away, Imagination Dead Imagine, and The Lost Ones: in each case an unprepossessingly small and bleak area is marked off for examination at the beginning, only to develop into an imaginatively rich and surprisingly humanised field of enquiry. In The Lost Ones an abstract "cylinder" (CSP 159) becomes a "teeming precinct" (166) thronged with "families" (168) - "man and wife" (169) as well as "nurserings" (168) and "sucklings" (167). In Imagination Dead Imagine the space seems at first only claustrophobic and imprisoning, having "no way in" (CSP 145) or out. But once the imagination has (paradoxically) "go[ne] in" (145), once a miniature world has been imaginatively entered into,
the place - with the ongoing reciprocal human contact of its incumbent "partner[s]" - takes on a more cosy and nest-like quality.

For Bachelard the miniature is inherently a source of pathos because much of it will inevitably be missed:

we haven't time, in this world of ours, to love things and see them at close range, in the plenitude of their smallness.(163)

Miniature worlds are easily forsaken. "Leave them", Imagination Dead Imagine suggests, "there is better elsewhere" (CSP 147); but once passed over, once overlooked, there is "no question now of ever finding again that white speck lost in whiteness" (CSP 147).

Finally, for Beckett as for Bachelard, small spaces are accommodating. Bachelard claims to "feel more at home in miniature worlds",

for miniature rests us without ever putting us to sleep. Here the imagination is both vigilant and content [...P]aradoxically, it seems that by living in a world of miniature, one relaxes in a small space.(161-2) 

Beckett relaxed in a small space too, but remained supremely vigilant in it, and attentive to detail. The short prose, partly because of its limited size, is generally of a
calmer nature than the often frenzied expanses of the Trilogy, and the theatre is congenial because "we are dealing with a given space and with people in that space. That is relaxing."46

Indeed Beckett's short plays, too - those intimate pieces for "the familiar chamber" (CDW 308) - are not merely minimalist, but miniature, and instinct with miniature's intimate values. For one of his most miniature plays Beckett coined the term "dramaticule" (CDW 351), a formal description that is not emotionally uninflected. As a contemptuous diminutive "dramaticule" - like "precipitate", "residua", "fizzle", and "disjecta" - is another of Beckett's comically pejorative generic titles. Nevertheless it is no coincidence that these titles are very much of a kind with some of the more disparaging circumlocutions for children to be found in Beckett: "by-blows" (M 95; D 87), "off-scourings" (MC 38), "waste-product[s]" (M 47). Literary works and babies are implicitly analogous47, and the ambivalence towards children already outlined in this chapter can be detected in Beckett's attitude to his own literary works too. "Dramaticule" differs from, say, "residua", in being a term of endearment as much as one of
disdainful contempt, and might indicate a desire to nurture comparable with Malone's "want of a homuncule [...] a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image" (T 207). Beckett's paternal solicitude and vigilance in respect of his own works is well documented.48
CHAPTER SIX

ENCOUNTERING CHILDREN

This chapter sets out to look more closely at particular manifestations of the child in the oeuvre, and especially at those occasions when an adult is confronted with the marginal figure of a child whose status is ambiguous. Beckett's adults are often on the lookout for "a little encounter that would calm me a little" (CSP 39), and for "possible deliverance by means of encounter" (T 275). Encounters in Beckett are surprisingly often encounters with children, and though they do not always produce calm or deliverance (sometimes quite the opposite) they do constitute important moments of revaluation, negotiation and exchange.

The children examined in this chapter might be described as what David Trotter calls "silent monitors", marginal figures of vagabondage who are comparable to the itinerant beggars with whom Wordsworth was so preoccupied,
and who, often in a less than obvious way, have something to offer (usually by way of example) to the adults whom they meet. 1

6.1 The Preoccupied Child: Rilke, Rimbaud, and "Murphy"

Beckett's 1934 review of J.B.Leishman's Rilke translations ends with a quotation which is intended to illustrate Leishman's shortcomings and which happens to be about children:

[T]he competent hysteria of

'Männer und Frauen; Männer, Männer, Frauen
Und Kinder...

[is] made presentable as

Men, women, women, men in blacks and greys
And children in their bright diversity... (D 67)

The poem from which these lines are taken is called "Childhood" (1902), and it is a poem that closes with a poignant image of a preoccupied child:

[...] hour on hour by the gray pondside kneeling
With little sailing boat and shoulders bare;
Forgetting yours because you see them stealing,
Those other vessels, through the ripples there,
And as you watch them pass, you can't help feeling
They see your small, pale face and tousled hair -
0 childhood, images like sea-gulls wheeling,
0 where? 0 where? 2

The poem had begun in a more Wordsworthian mode, celebrating the moment of ecstatic release from the cramped claustrophobia of the school-room: the child is "out at last" and free to walk colourfully through the world, "brushing against the grown-ups without staying/ Whan ball or hoop their alien walks invade". 3 But this expansiveness quickly modulates into the more sombre mood of the final stanza quoted above. The child is strangely absorbed in the shadowy and forebodingly unspecified reflections in the water. He is a solemn little Narcissus, self-communing but otherwise opaque and incommunicado. The late Romanticism of the poem has rendered the child numinous, but melancholy and inaccessible too.

A strikingly similar image of a child comes near the end of "Drunken Boat", Beckett's early translation of Rimbaud's "Le Bateau Ivre" (1871). In the penultimate stanza the narrator evokes a melancholy child - an image of his own childhood - whose toy boat "is in ironic contrast to [...] the drunken boat of poetry" 4:

I want none of Europe's waters unless it be
The cold black puddle where a child, full of sadness,
Squatting, looses a boat as frail
As a moth into the fragrant evening. (CP 137)

Both of these children, Rilke's and Rimbaud's, have a cousin in Beckett's *Murphy*. Celia twice encounters him in the park where, instead of sailing a boat, he flies a kite. He appears once in chapter 8, and again in chapter 13 where he plays an important part in the beautiful (and, sadly, never to be repeated) naturalistic prose that ends the novel so magnificently. Beckett may have learnt from Rilke and from Rimbaud the power of ending a work with an enigmatic image of a child, and the child in *Murphy* is in an inconspicuous way - understatement being crucial to the effect in that novel - the first in a long line of works (including *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *All That Fall*, and *Ghost Trio*) that end with the late appearance of a child.

The child is related to the children in Rilke and Rimbaud in terms of his frail toy, his hermetic isolation, and his absorbed, preoccupied melancholy:

The flyers were some old men, most of whom she recognised from the days when she had come regularly with Mr. Kelly every Saturday afternoon, and one child. A number of the kites falter, "writhing and plunging", and "only two rode steadily, a tandem, coupled abreast [...]"
The child from a double winch.

The wrack broke behind them as she watched, for a moment they stood out motionless and black, in a glade of limpid viridescent sky.
She grew more and more impatient for Mr. Kelly to come and show his skill as the chances of his doing so diminished. She sat on till it was nearly dark and all the flyers, except the child, had gone. At last he also began to wind in and Celia watched for the kites to appear. When they did their contortions surprised her, she could hardly believe it was the same pair that had ridden so serenely on a full line. The child was expert, he played them with a finesse worthy of Mr. Kelly himself. In the end they came quietly, hung low in the murk almost directly overhead, then settled gently. The child knelt down in the rain, dismantled them, wrapped the tails and sticks in the sails and went away, singing. As he passed the shelter Celia called good night. He did not hear her, he was singing.

Soon the gates would close, all over the gardens the rangers crying their cry: *All out.*

(M 87-88)

The child is strangely solemn, his play - as so often in Beckett - a serious business. Managing the "contortions" he manifests a surprisingly diligent and graceful capability; "expert" is a slightly strange thing for a child to be, "finesse" an odd quality for him to possess. (He is to be differentiated, for instance, from the loutish children in *The Expelled*, who "have no finesse" [CSP 23]). Flying the kite is a matter of grace and of poise on the part of kite and child in tandem, and the relationship looks forward to *Malone Dies* and the otherwise ungainly Sapo's affinity with
the neo-Yeatsian flight of the hawk:

He would stand rapt, gazing at the long pernings, the quivering poise, the wings lifted for the plummet drop, the wild reascent, fascinated by such extremes of need, of pride, of patience, and solitude. (T 176)

In both cases the child's graceful finesse is partly a matter of his absorbed - "rapt" - preoccupation with the matter in hand, and his consequent lack of self-consciousness. James Knowlson has written about Beckett's professed admiration for Heinrich von Kleist's essay on marionettes:

According to Kleist's speaker, puppets possess [...] a mobility, a symmetry, a harmony and a grace greater than any human dancer can ever have. For, inevitably, they are totally lacking in self-awareness, hence affectation, which destroys natural grace and charm in man.

Much of Beckett's writing corroborates Kleist's sense that only the child can manifest this sort of grace.

The child in Murphy is a kind of miracle worker, the best of a group of magical "flyers", the word suggesting it is they who have been aloft. He has a peculiar authority: "in the end they came quietly", like so many outlaws surrendering. The child is single-minded, concentrated, kneeling in the rain and heedless of the wet. The tidy
proficiency of his reeling-in and putting-away is a long way from the disinterested carelessness often attributed to children. Like his kite the child stands out darkly opaque against a limpid background. He seems to stand for a kind of diligent steadfastness, keeping his kite serenely aloft when others fail, staying persistently in the encroaching darkness when others have gone home. Above all he is incommunicado, his singing rendering him self-absorbed and inaccessible to Celia's call.

The child returns at the close of the novel, but he does not sing again.

Gradually she saw other kites, but above all the tandem of the child that had not answered her good night, because he had been singing. She recognised the unusual coupling, not in file but abreast.

The ludicrous fever of toys struggling skyward, the sky itself more and more remote, the wind tearing the awning of cloud to tatters, pale limitless blue and green recessions laced with strands of scud, the light failing - once she would have noticed these things. She watched the tandem coming shakily down from the turmoil, the child running forward to break its fall, his trouble when he failed, his absorbed kneeling over the damage. He did not sing as he departed, nor did she hail him.

The wail of the rangers came faintly out of the east against the wind. All out. All out. All out.

(M 157-8)

Much of the serenity has gone from the flying, the child's previous control being usurped by "struggle", "turmoil" and
"ludicrous fever". The emphasis now is on the pathos of the child whose capabilities have been pushed to the limit and beyond. His preoccupation is now that of mourning - "his absorbed kneeling over the damage" - upon which Celia dare not intrude. The expulsion from the park - an Edenic park that is the scene of a "fall" - is a more gloomy one, crepuscular and sad. In the end the child is a figure of pathos and loss, a diminutive figure struggling with the elements, and set off against an enormous sky. There are barely repressed maternal feelings in Celia's observation of "his running forward to break its fall, his trouble when he failed, his absorbed kneeling over the damage". It's as if she instinctively stoops forward to break his fall, soften his failure. (She will shortly run off to catch Mr. Kelly as he careers down the hill.) The child's trouble, failure and damage mirror Celia's condition at the end of the novel; she too is picking up the pieces.

She and the child form an "unusual coupling" of their own then, not quite in touch but strangely in "tandem". (And together with Mr. Kelly, they comprise a vestigial family group.) Nevertheless the child remains oddly independent and detached from all around him, a sort of orphan. He does
not go home, he merely "departed", like an elusive vision, 
just as previously he simply "went away".

Formally distinct but subliminally linked; Celia's 
relationship with this opaque and incommunicative child is 
analogous to Murphy's own perceived affinity with the 
equally incommunicative (and child-like) Mr. Endon. With him, 
Murphy feels a "kinship" (M 106), but they "remained to one 
another, even when most profoundly one in spirit, as it 
seemed to Murphy, Mr Murphy and Mr Endon"(104).

Wholly inaccessible - his name deriving appropriately 
from the Greek for "within" - the catatonic Endon is 
terminally self-enclosed, dead to the world, willess, and as 
such an embodiment of the kind of acute mental condition 
that fascinated the young Beckett. Like Celia's child, 
Murphy's Endon is characterised by a preoccupied absorbtion 
that has both music and grace, harmony and finesse:

His inner voice did not harangue him, it was unobtrusive 
and melodious, a gentle continuo in the whole consort of 
his hallucinations. The bizarrie of his attitudes 
never exceeded a stress laid on their grace. In short, a 
psychosis so limpid and imperturbable that Murphy felt 
drawn to it as Narcissus to his fountain. (M 105)

In one of the novel's most exquisitely shaped sentences, 
"the relation between Mr. Murphy and Mr. Endon could not
have been better summed up than by the former's sorrow at seeing himself in the latter's immunity from seeing anything but himself." (140) Murphy is merely "a speck in Mr Endon's unseen" (140).

Beckett's adults are continually made to feel like specks in a child's self-communing unseen. Throughout the Novellas, for instance, the narrators are confronted by children who might be redemptive presences but who finally remain incommunicado. When a "little girl" - perhaps the same little girl who "sang every evening" - visits the narrator in The End, "she lingered a while in the room, then went away without a word." (CSP 57) In The Calmative:

I succeeded [...] in fastening briefly on the little girl, long enough to see her a little more clearly than before, so that she wore a kind of bonnet and clasped in her hand a book, of common prayer perhaps, and to try and have her smile, but she did not smile, but vanished down the staircase without having yielded me her little face. (CSP 48, my emphasis)

Recalcitrant opacity becomes one of the most distinctive characteristics of Beckett's children, and this will be discussed further in the next section.
6.2 Little Strangers

The child at the end of *Murphy* becomes the model for a succession of numinous and unyielding children in Beckett. Near the end of the much less naturalistic *Fin de partie* Clov claims to see a child similarly preoccupied and incommunicative. Hamm pictures the child giving them a significant and longing look - "Il regarde la maison sans doute, avec les yeux de Moïse mourant" (FP 104) - but Clov describes him as wrapped up in himself, navel-gazing:

Je ne sais pas ce qu'il fait! Ce que faisaient les mômes [...] Il a l'air assis par terre, adossé à quelque chose. [...] Je ne sais pas ce qu'il regarde! [...] Son nombril. Enfin par là. (FP 104)

This child is perhaps the most elusive in the Beckett oeuvre, not only because Clov may be making him up, but because his existence is even more tenuous in the English in which the above description is omitted; characteristically the child is all but "nip[ped] in the bud" (CDW 191) in translation. Like many of Beckett's children, this one has the opaque, unconfiding and recalcitrant characteristics that Rilke, in an essay from 1914, attributes to the doll:

It was silent [...] not deliberately, it was silent because that was its constant mode of evasion, because
it was made of useless and entirely irresponsible material, was silent, and the idea did not occur to it to take some credit to itself on that score, although it could not but gain great importance thereby in a world in which Destiny, and even God himself, have become famous above all because they answer us with silence. At a time when everyone was still intent on giving us a quick and reassuring answer, the doll was the first to inflict on us that tremendous silence (larger than life) which was later to come to us repeatedly out of space, whenever we approached the frontiers of our existence at any point.

Pascal’s anxiety induced by the infinite emptiness of the universe - "the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me" - is for Rilke pre-empted by the diminutive doll. In Beckett too, it is a diminutive figure - this time the child - that inflicts a discomforting and metaphysical silence on his adults. Encounters between adults and children in Beckett often comprise the vain interrogation of an infuriating and unyielding ingenuousness. "[T]he idea not occurring] to [them] to take some great credit" for their silence, Beckett’s children, as in Waiting for Godot, are innocent even of the effect of their taciturn innocence.

In his essay, Rilke remembers how his dolls were "impenetrable and incapable of absorbing, at any point, even a drop of water in their state of well-enough known solidity", and how he felt "confronted and almost
overwhelmed by their waxen nature." The wax doll's impermeability is weirdly shared by three of Beckett's children: the little boy and girl who materialise as if from thin air in Mercier and Camier "wore little black oilskins with hoods, identical" (MC 31); and the boy who appears ambiguously at the end of Ghost Trio faintly shaking his head is strangely "dressed in black oilskin with hood glistening with rain" (CDW 413). In this last play the protagonist, like the audience, is confronted by the impenetrable, impermeable child, shaking its head in unspecified but overwhelming refusal. It is a typical Beckettian engagement: as a later prose piece would put it, "how I gaze on you, and what refusal, how you refuse me, you so refused." (CSP 201).

The end of Ghost Trio thus dramatises Beckett's 1938 description of art as "pure interrogation, rhetorical question less the rhetoric" (D 91). If for Rilke the face to face confrontation with a doll becomes an archetype of a metaphysical crisis habitually encountered at the "frontiers of existence", so in Beckett, I would argue, the encounter with the child similarly functions as a model for the sort of confrontation or stand-off that is the condition of art,
what Beckett calls the "rupture of the lines of communication" (D 70) or "la crise sujet-objet" (D 146). Beckett's criticism often couches its discussion of art in terms of a difficult but abiding personal "rapport[]" (D 135) and the relationship between adult and child in the prose and drama is strikingly similar "relationship, once started not likely to fail, between such a knower and such an unknown" (D 95).  

In 1931 Beckett asserted that experience is inherently prophylactic:

> Reality, whether approached imaginatively or empirically, remains a surface, hermetic [...] Nor is any direct and purely experimental contact possible between subject and object [...] (P 74)

By 1967 the same situation is described, only with much more passion and far less objective resignation, the unprepossessing abstractions giving way to more compellingly dramatic and urgently intimate expression:

> Siege laid again to the impregnable without. Eye and hand fevering after the unself. By the hand it unceasingly changes the eye unceasingly changed. Back and forth the eye beating against the unseeable unmakable. Truce for a space and the marks of what it is to be and be in face of. Those deep marks to show [...] (D 152)

Feverish attempts to communicate across the space
intervening between self and unself are precisely what occur when Beckettian characters stumble across children. Much of Beckett's work examines what it is to be in face of a child, intimately in relation to and yet at odds with something disconcertingly hermetic, impregnable and impermeable.

Again and again child-adult relations constitute at the same time both a profound conjunction and an unassailable opposition.

All the time he told this story he kept his eyes fixed on his son. There they sat, the table between them, in the gloom, one speaking, the other listening, and far removed, the one from what he said, the other from what he heard, and far from each other. (T 195) Not I, as we have seen, was partly inspired by Beckett's observation of an Arabic mother waiting for, and finally embracing, her child; it is characteristic that in dramatising that situation Beckett should turn it into a static but intense face to face stand-off, rendering the space between 'child' (mouth) and 'mother' (auditor) an unbridgeable gulf.

In what seems a more intimate scenario, the image of adult and child holding hands as they walk is repeated a number of times in the oeuvre, and in Company and Worstward Ho it takes on an almost iconic status. And yet even here
the reciprocation implied by the image is always offset by a sense of separation:

we walked together hand in hand, silent, sunk in our worlds, each in his worlds, the hands forgotten in each other. (CSP 74; my emphasis)

In *Enough* the holding hands are "ill-fitted for intimacy", and even deliberately separated by a prophylactic "pair of gloves" (CSP 140).

Children, it might be said in conclusion, are for Beckett always aptly described by that colloquial euphemism for new-born infants: "little strangers". The following sections will focus on those occasions when Beckett's adults endeavour to become better acquainted by speaking to them.

6.3 **Talking to Children: "Enueg I", "Eleutheria" and "Waiting for Godot"**

In the early poem "Enueg I" the narrator, wandering aimlessly, does his best to help a child whom he meets outside a "field" where a game is in progress. The encounter turns out to be a baffling one, the child typically enigmatic:

A child fidgeting at the gate called up: "Would we be let in Mister?"
"Certainly" I said "you would."
But, afraid, he set off down the road.
"Well" I called after him "why wouldn't you go in?"
"Oh" he said, knowingly,
"I was in that field before and got put out."  (CP 11)

The child's fidgeting mirrors the restless exile of the other creatures in the poem - the hens "trembling [...] against the closed door of a shed" and the "small malevolent goat, exiled on the road,/ remotely pucking the gate of his field" (CP 12) - and foreshadows the hen in Malone Dies, whom Sapo watches with sympathetic fascination: "poised irresolute on the bright threshold [...] fidgeting her atrophied wings" (T 187). Suggesting a child less self-assured than those we have previously discussed, the fidgets here seem to elicit the narrator's sympathy: he has himself been "put out" of the nursing home where his "darling" lays dying, and his exile is implicitly representative of the post-natal condition. ("Exeo in a spasm", the poem begins.) He is therefore sympathetic to these restless creatures who have been ejected from their respective Edens or wombs.12

Sympathy remains understated, however, and the whole episode is narrated with cool objectivity. The narrator keeps his distance from the child who, described generically, remains sexless and impersonal, and whose
diminutive stature, a long way down, is emphasised by "called up". The child, apparently alone, couches his question in terms that partly reach out to the narrator - "Would we be let in, Mister?" - but the narrator does not reciprocate the mutuality implied by this: "Certainly you would".

Nevertheless the narrator is kindly and offers to help the child, but he is baffled in the attempt. The child, who seemed at first a transparently ingenuous creature, turns out to be a frustratingly opaque and "knowing" one. Its initial vulnerability is typically transposed into something not exactly malign or cunning, but faintly duplicitous. (Molloy too will be taunted by "the innocent, the knowing, laughter of children" [T 63].) Lawrence Harvey describes the child as "fearful, and already experienced"¹³, but to be "knowing" is more than to know. It suggests something wilfully elusive and teasing. Thus the pathos of the child's exile is offset by a hint of artful guile.

The child's "Mister" is a form of address now more or less obsolete which has about it a curious blend of the respectful and the insouciant, and this gives a social nuance to the child's ambiguous status. Although Beckett's
adults' perceived relations with children often have a theoretical underpinning, as we saw in the last section, they are also sometimes comically grounded in social discomfort. In another early poem the defensive narrator is discomfitted by a child who accosts him noisily and disturbs his sensitivities about both his class and his bachelor status:

then I hug me below among the canaille until a guttersnipe blast his cernèd eyes demanding 'ave I done with Mirror I stump off in a fearful rage under Married Men's Quarters (CP 22)

Children may engender a peculiar nervousness in adults who often do not know whether or not they are being "cheeked". As Philip Larkin remarked of the child, "life hasn't yet cut it down to size"^{14}, and this can lead to some over-compensatory gestures from adults keen to establish their superiority. Happening upon a child "it befitted me as the elder to speak first" (CSP 39), reports one of Beckett's other narrators, with the pompous authority of the nervously insecure.

Vladimir and Estragon tend to take that tone too, in perhaps the most familiar encounters with children in the Beckett oeuvre, and ones that are full of awkwardness and
discomfort on the part of the adults concerned. Before looking at those scenes more closely, I want to trace a line from their possible provenance in nineteenth-century sources, through Beckett’s early play *Eleuthéria*.

The following is from a Law Report from 1850, quoted in Peter Coveney’s book on *The Image of Childhood*:

Alderman Humphrey: Do you know what an oath is?  
Boy: No.  
Alderman: Can you read?  
Boy: No.  
Alderman: Do you ever say your prayers?  
Boy: No.  
Do you know what prayers are?  
Boy: No.  
Alderman: Do you know what God is?  
Boy: No...  
Alderman: What do you know?  
Boy: I knows how to sweep a crossing.  
Alderman: And that’s all?  
Boy: That’s all. I sweeps a crossing.  

As Coveney remarks, "the scene is given almost verbatim in the novel [Bleak House]". The concession in "almost" acknowledges that Jo knows one thing that this boy does not know, and that is how to be a winningly winsome cockney. He in fact knows so much more than he thinks he knows, possessing a kind of natural morality that is able to dissect at a stroke the hypocrisy of the adult world. He is something of a sage fool:
'Is this place of abomination, consecrated
ground?'
'I don't know nothing of consequential ground, '
says Jo, still staring.
'Is it blessed?'
'WHICH?' says Jo, in the last degree amazed.
'Is it blessed?'
'I'm blest if I know', says Jo, staring more than
ever; 'but I shouldn't think it warn't. Blest?' repeats
Jo, something troubled in his mind. 'It an't done it
much good if it is. Blest? I should think it was
t'othered myself. But I don't know nothink!'"'

Dickens makes great use of this effect, whereby the
simplicity and innocence of a child's remarks render them
not only profoundly truthful but intellectually challenging.
Paul Dombey's ingenuous questions to his father about the
nature of money "after all" turn out to be uncomfortably
probing, and quasi-theological: "If it's a good thing, and
can do anything [...] I wonder why it didn't save me my
mamma". An innocent question turns out to have initiated
a catechism. This scene (too long to quote here) is a fine
set piece, the dialogue modelled on the pedagogic dialogues
of Plato. The disciple, here a child, sets the dialectical
thinking in motion by asking a simple question - "What's
money?" - but Dickens turns the tables by having the child
prove himself the really wise one without compromising his
innocence. Mr. Dombey, his authority undermined, is made to
feel persecuted by a child whose supposedly harmless
diminutive stature is continually emphasised.

Beckett, too, was drawn to the dialogue between demure and laconic child and uncomprehending, increasingly frustrated adult. The second act of Eleuthéria ends with the following scene between the Glazier (Vitrier) and his son Michel:

V: How old are you?
M: Ten years old, papa.
V: Ten years old. (*silence*) And you don't know what it means to be happy?
M: No, Papa.
V: You know when something gives you pleasure? You feel good, right?
M: Yes, papa.
V: Good, it's a lot like that. (*silence*) Well, are you happy?
M: No, papa.
V: Why not?
M: I don't know, papa.
V: Is it because you haven't been to school enough?
M: No, papa, I don't like school.
V: Don't you want to play with your little friends?
M: No papa, I don't like to play.
V: I'm not mean to you?
M: Oh no, papa.
V: What is it you like to do?
M: I don't know.
V: Why don't you know? There must be something.
M: (*after reflecting*) I like it when I am in my bed, before I go to sleep.
V: Why is that?
M: I don't know, papa. (*silence*)
V: Make the most of it.
M: Yes, papa.
V: Come here, let me give you a kiss, (*Michael goes to him. The Glazier kisses him.*) Do you like it when I kiss you?
M: Not very much, papa.
V. Why?
M. It's prickly, papa.
V. You see, you know why you don't like it when I kiss you.
M. Yes, papa.
V. Well then, tell me why you like it when you are in your bed.
M. (after reflecting) I don't know papa. (silence)
V. Are you still hungry?
M. Yes, papa.
V. (handing him a sandwich) Here, eat this.
M. (hesitating) But that's for you, papa.
V. (forcefully) Eat!
(silence)
M. Are you still hungry, papa?
V. No.
(silence)
M. Why not?
(silence)
V. I don't know, Michel.
(silence)
CURTAIN [End of Act II]

The conversation begins in the mode of interrogation, but the adult, instead of gleaning the required information, is taught a lesson by the boy's taciturn responses. The glazier not only fails to provoke the child, but has his own confidence in an economy of velleities shattered by the child's listlessness. He has tried to teach the child the rudiments about the pleasures of satisfaction, but is in the end given a Schopenhaurean and Rankian lesson in the ablation of desire; the child has no faith in positive satisfactions, a state of complete womb-like lassitude and
passivity being for him the closest thing to pleasure. The child's "I don't knows" signify not ignorance so much as indifference and insentience, and his filial compliance is so extreme as to come across as a kind of recalcitrance. Mischievous insubordination is suggested by the Dickensian 'papa's, which are so numerous as to register neither endearment nor respect. ("My son had a way of saying papa, when he wanted to hurt me, that was very special", remarks Moran [T 94].) Hence the comic pathos of the father's uncertain attempts at rapprochement: "I'm not mean to you?", "Come here, let me give you a kiss." The father, who began speaking with a confident and patronising pedagogic tone, ends up bemusedly adopting his son's words: "I don't know". He has lost, not so much his appetite, as the belief in appetite as a simple prelude to satisfaction.

In Waiting for Godot, as in Eleuthéria, the exchange between child and adult occurs at the end of an act. Here, though, there are two adults and two exchanges at the end of the play's two acts.

When the boy appears in the first act there is a comic contrast between the method each employs to induce him to come and speak to them. It is a typical example of
Beckett's exploitation of ambivalent attitudes to children. One character treats the child as though he were angelic (and the child is after all a messenger), the other as though he were a proverbial 'little devil'. Vladimir's gambit is to play the gentle patriarch: "Approach, my child". Estragon, characteristically, is more reluctant to suffer the children to come unto him, but recognises that needs must since they require information about Godot. He therefore mimics Vladimir's words, but with irritation instead of solemn indulgence: "Approach when you're told can't you? [...] Will you approach!" (CDW 46)²⁰ As so often in Beckett the child is received with a mixture of awe and frustrated intolerance. Throughout the scene Vladimir is protectively indulgent towards the child - guessing for instance, that he was reluctant to make his presence known because of his fear of Pozzo and Lucky - while Estragon is aggressively accusatory.

Again the child is taciturn and monosyllabic, his responses preponderantly consisting of "Yes, sir"s and "No, sir"s. After a series of these laconic remarks Estragon accuses the child of having given them "a pack of lies" (CDW 47). This is a comically incongruous response to the child
whose limpid simplicity suggests none of the guile necessary for a web of deceit such as is implied by Estragon's phrase. And yet Estragon's mistrust is not wholly unfounded, since the messenger is woefully ill-provided with message, and painfully slow to deliver what he has. Once again ingenuousness invites a suspicion of mischief. Like the child at the gate in "Enueg I" he uses the term "Mister" a lot, in which cheekiness is disguised as respect, and like him this one is both innocent and "knowing" (CP 11).

When Vladimir asks Estragon what is the matter with him to treat the boy so roughly, Estragon explains that he is unhappy (CDW 47). Vladimir dismisses this with withering irony ("Not really"), but he later asks the boy about his happiness (in his life with Godot), just as the Glazier had asked Michel in Eleuthéria. Like Michel, the boy says, after some hesitation, "I don't know" (CDW 49). Vladimir is more familiar with this attitude than the Glazier, however, and merely remarks, "You're as bad as myself". Like Michel the boy is generally non-committal: asked if Godot feeds him well, he replies, "fairly well" (CDW 48).

What we learn through painfully slow interrogation is freighted with pseudo-theology: the boy works for "Mr.
Godot"; he minds the goats; Godot is good to him and doesn't beat him; Godot beats his brother, however, who minds the sheep. The boy doesn't know why Godot doesn't beat him, nor if he is fond of him. He sleeps, with his brother, in the hay in the loft. All this renders Godot as ambiguous as ever and the child remains ambiguous too - both a repository of privileged knowledge and the innocent purveyor of worthless cliches (his description of Godot eliciting an image of him as the white-haired caricature of Christian children's tradition).

Typically the adults try in vain to maintain their sense of superiority and control, but are undermined with surprising ease by their diminutive and timid interlocutor. The boy is initially commanded to "approach", and is finally dismissed in a similarly peremptory manner: "All right, you may go" (CDW 49). But Vladimir's authority is illusory. He had only encouraged the boy after he had already appeared and had no power to summon him. Moreover, the reality of the situation is that Vladimir and Estragon are wholly dependant on the boy, not only for such information as they have of Godot, but also to convey a message to Godot and finally in order actually to validate their existence:
Vladimir: I've seen you before, haven't I?
Boy: I don't know, sir.
Vladimir: You don't know me?
Boy: No, sir.
Vladimir: It wasn't you came yesterday?
Boy: No, sir.
Vladimir: This is your first time?
Boy: Yes, sir.

Boy: What am I to say to Mr. Godot, sir?
Vladimir: Tell him...(he hesitates)...tell him you saw us. (Pause.) You did see us, didn't you?
Boy: Yes, sir.

He steps back, hesitates, turns and exit running.
The light suddenly fails. In a moment it is night.

That the boy's exit should be simultaneous with the sudden fading of the light emphasises his numinous status. Although the boy is given no angelic raiments in the rubric - and that he should appear basically prosaic is important - his departure and the darkness that ensues seemingly as a consequence lend him, retrospectively, a luminous aura.

In the second act the scene is more or less repeated, though with much more brevity. An identical boy appears who denies having seen the pair before and denies having come yesterday. He is, then, either another manifestation of innocence - this being his "first time" (CDW 84), as though he were virgin - or the same boy being (like Michel and Jacques Moran Jnr.) either heartlessly duplicitous or frankly half-witted. The interrogation is much shorter,
mainly because Vladimir guesses what the boy will say and is less probing and persistent. Once again the boy comes to say that Godot will not come today, but surely tomorrow. Vladimir learns that Godot has a white beard, and that he "does nothing". (In this last respect this God-like figure, seems to want to encourage in his wards the supreme lassitude manifested by Michel in Eleuthéria.) The boy reports that his brother is "sick", innocence inducing morbidity. This time Vladimir is more desperate in his attitude to the child, saying "with sudden violence", "You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!" He then leaps towards the boy, who, without replying, runs away as the light again fades.

Vladimir and Estragon turn out to be as childishly dependent on the child as the child is on Godot. Indeed the play continually emphasises their own child-like condition: "the childishness of their attitude is prominently implied", argues Eric Levy, pointing, for instance, to the occasion when Pozzo asks Estragon "What age would you say he [Vladimir] was?" and Estragon answers, "Eleven" (CDW 27).

All this is in many respects very familiar territory. The scenes discussed from Godot are among the best known in
Beckett. Nevertheless it is reasonable, I think, to draw attention to them once again in order to affirm the fundamental importance for Beckett of children as the focus for some of his main concerns.

6.4 Imaginative Transactions

In each of the conversational exchanges discussed in the previous section the adults were left feeling short-changed. In this section I will look at some other encounters between adults and children in which the give and take of dialogue is either complemented or substituted by other kinds of exchange.

Often it is coins which change hands, or some other minor token, but beyond the material *quid pro quo* these are "imaginative transactions" (D 90)\(^{24}\), which - not always wholly successful - represent important exchanges of values and moments of baffled rapport. In Beckett, an adult's commerce with a child often represents a difficult occasion of negotiation and revaluation, the adult often coming away - as in the examples discussed in the last section - with
little more than a new-found indifference to an economy of supply and demand and a recognition that "needs that can be satisfied, questions that can be answered [...] are not genuine needs and questions". 

In 1949, in the "Three Dialogues with George Duthuit", Beckett described

> my dream of an art unresentful of its insuperable indigence and too proud for the farce of giving and receiving. (P 141)

In Beckett's fiction it is often a child who embodies such a dream. Malone, for instance, must become as a child again, living by proxy through the impoverished Sapo, to recognise an affinity with the incommunicative hawk, above and beyond the earth's commerce: "such extremes of need, of pride, of patience, and solitude." (T 176)

Time and again the ethics, the etiquette, and the mere logistics of giving and receiving prove especially problematic for Beckett's perhaps over-sensitive narrators. "How can you help people", asks the narrator of Dream of Fair to Middling Women, in a memorable phrase about giving, "unless it be on with their corsets or to a second and third helping?" (DFMW 124); and Molloy registers similar dismay at what he has received from a passing social worker when he
affirms that "against the charitable gesture there is no defence, that I know of" (T 24). If giving and receiving are mere matters of practicality - "solution clapped on problem like a snuffer on a candle" (D 92) - then they are relatively worthless.

The narrator's charitable gesture of opening the gate for the "fidgeting" child in "Enueg I" goes unrewarded by the satisfaction of efficacy. "How can you help people?", he might well ask. It takes a child to help someone effectually - perhaps because unselfconsciously and for no practical or rational end: in Company, written some fifty years later, the vignette from "Enueg I" is oddly mirrored when a tiny child opens a gate for a mad, half blind beggarwoman helplessly "fumbling" at it (NO 13).

In the early fiction transactions and exchanges are generally grounded in social embarrassment. Belacqua drifts about bestowing coins on unfortunates in a bohemian game of superiority and Ascendancy hauteur that in fact betrays an awkwardness rooted in class-conscious insecurity. When approached by a proprietorial wharfinger, for instance, Belacqua not only apologises for his trespass, but offers the "rough gritty man" a coin - "twopence" being all he can
come up with. "It was a very embarrassing moment", because Belacqua recognises his patronising behaviour only when it is too late to rescind (DFMW 7-8). His embarrassment at giving makes him sympathetic to those who are embarrassed to receive: he later "felt drawn to the plump little washerwoman when she blushed over the tip he gave her." (DFMW 29).

Throughout Dream of Fair to Middling Women and More Pricks Than Kicks Belacqua has enormous difficulty with the giving and receiving of the commercial world, whether he is buying lunch (MPTK 14), a lobster (MPTK 17), a "seat in heaven" (MPTK 46-8), a pair of shoes (DFMW 130-2), or provisions for his family (DFMW 146-8).

The purchase of a stamp or a book of tram-tickets or a book on the quay or in a shop entailed without fail, notwithstanding the humility, the timorousness, almost the tenderness, of his approach, a disagreeable passage of arms with the vendor. (DFMW 127)

Later in the novel Belacqua is to be found sitting on a "high" stool (204) in a "lowly public" (203) in splendid isolation from the "rough, gritty men" (201) who discomfittingly frequent such places:

He bought a paper from a charming little sloven, no, but a positively exquisite little Stoebli, he would not menace him, a freelance clearly, he slipped in on
his dirty bare feet with only three or four under his arm for sale. Belacqua gave him a threepenny bit and a cigarette picture. (DFMW 204)

Here at last is a creature upon whom Belacqua can bestow a coin and a gift without too much embarrassment or difficulty. "He" - this impoverished, picturesque and Dodgsonian waif - "would not menace him".

Such children are not always harmless - "what lacerated me most was the din of the newspaper boys" (CSP 57), remarks a later narrator - but being "freelance", a child is likely to gain sympathy from Beckett's vagabond adults. Most of the children whom they encounter - the boy(s) in *Godot* being the important exception - are unattached to parents or to other figures of authority; generally speaking the child in Beckett is "with himself on behalf of himself" (D 91). Stray "orphan[s]" (CDW 180), "urchin[s]" (CSP 58; MC 78; T 84), "guttersnipe[s]" (CP 22; CSP 39,64) and "waifs" (CDW 377) represent no third party, are in the pay of noone; they stand in direct contrast to the numerous authority-wielding policemen whom Beckett's characters also constantly run into, often immediately before or after encountering a child. Beckett's children are impoverished beggars mostly but, generally unresentful of their indigence, they
are rarely out to make a sale.

Although, in later works, children will continue to be bought off with little sums - in both *The End* and *All That Fall*, for instance, children are offered "a penny for [their] pains" (CSP 65; CDW 198) - nevertheless subsequent transactions and exchanges with children tend to become more complicated affairs. Later Beckettian characters find it more difficult than Belacqua to be so effortlessly condescending to the children they encounter, and they are more inclined than he to regard them as equals.

*The Calmative* offers a substantial example. The wandering narrator hopes to "achieve a little encounter that would calm me a little, or exchange a few words" (CSP 39), and soon he has an encounter and an exchange (of sorts) with a child on the dockside:

> When with a thrust of both hands against the rim of the capstan I heaved myself up I found facing me a young boy holding a goat by the horn. I sat down again. He stood there silent looking at me without fear or revulsion. Admittedly the light was poor. His silence seemed natural to me, it befitted me as the elder to speak first. He was barefoot and in rags. Haunter of the waterfront he had stepped aside to see what the dark hulk could be abandoned on the quayside. Such was my train of thought. Close up to me now with his little guttersnipe's eye there could be no doubt left in his mind. And yet he stayed. Can this base thought be mine? Moved, for after all that is what I must have come out for, in a way, and with little expectation of
advantage from what might follow, I resolved to speak to him. So I marshalled the words and opened my mouth, thinking I would hear them. But all I heard was a kind of rattle, unintelligible even to me who knew what was intended. But it was nothing, mere speechlessness due to long silence, as in the wood that darkens the mouth of hell, do you remember, I only just. Without letting go of his goat he moved right up against me and offered me a sweet out of a twist of paper such as you could buy for a penny. I hadn't been offered a sweet for eighty years at least, but I took it easily and put it in my mouth, the old gesture came back to me, more and more moved since that is what I wanted. The sweets were stuck together and I had my work cut out to separate the top one, a green one, from the others, but he helped me and his hand brushed mine. And a moment later as he made to move away, hauling his goat after him, with a great gesticulation of my whole body I motioned him to stay and I said, in an impetuous murmur, Where are you off to, my little man, with your nanny? The words were hardly out of my mouth when for shame I covered my face. And yet they were the same I had tried to utter but a moment before. Where are you off to, my little man, with your nanny! If I could have blushed I would have, but there was not enough blood left in my extremities. If I had had a penny in my pocket I would have given it to him, for him to forgive me, but I did not have a penny in my pocket, nor anything resembling it. Nothing that could give pleasure to a little unfortunate at the mouth of life. I suspect I had nothing with me but my stone, that day, having gone out, as it were, without pre-meditation. Of his little person I was fated to see no more than the black curly hair and the pretty curve of the long bare legs all muscle and dirt. And the hand, so fresh and keen, I would not forget in a hurry either. I looked for better words to say to him, but I found them too late, he was gone, oh not far, but far. Out of my life too he went without a care, not one of his thoughts would ever be for me again, unless perhaps when he was old and, delving in his boyhood, would come upon that gallows night, and hold the goat by the horn again and linger again a moment by my side, with who knows perhaps a touch of tenderness, even of envy, but I have my doubts. Poor dear dumb beasts, how you will
have helped me. What does your daddy do? that's what I would have said to him if he had given me the chance. Soon they were no more than a single blur which if I hadn't known I might have taken for a young centaur.

(CSP 39-41)

The boy, a standard Beckettian waif or urchin, "barefoot and in rags", is also typically silent, eerie and elusive. He is inseparably linked with his goat, whom he minds like the boy in Godot. The narrator sees boy and goat as a composite and evokes the image of a centaur; the pair seem like a hallucination and resemble the white horse and boy who are analogous to "dream animals" in From An Abandoned Work. This "abandoned" narrator suddenly "found [the boy] facing me", as though he were an apparition, and "[h]aunter of the waterfronts" lends him a further ghostly quality. Indeed the narrator's odd remarks about "what I must have come out for" and "what I wanted", suggest that the boy, like the one in Endgame, may be an imaginary figment.28

The meeting has an air of the "close encounter", a tentative exchange between mutual aliens. "Close up to me with his little guttersnipe's eye" suggests tentacular and exploratory probings of the narrator's "dark hulk". "I resolved to speak to him" sounds like the benignly naive scientist or anthropologist assuming the superior role: "it
befitted me as the elder to speak first." For the narrator this little stranger is an emissary from another world, and that may be either a planetary or a heavenly one; the child is both extra-terrestrial and angelic.\(^{29}\)

Despite the mutual wariness, there is also fearlessness and trust — "he stood there [...] looking at me without visible fear or revulsion" — and, despite the nervous joke about the light being bad, an odd sense of subliminal consensus: "His silence seemed natural to me".

On the other hand communication at the level of speech is, as so often for Beckett's characters, an arduous business. It is as at first, in fact, mere rattle. The narrator's voice is, as he is at pains to point out, like Virgil's in the first canto of the *Inferno*: "weak [...] from long silence"\(^{30}\). His mouth, like the mouth of hell, is obscured. In the end it is the boy who initiates real intimacy, and without speaking at all: "he moved right up against me and offered me a sweet". The narrator is familiar with the child's world, the sweets in a twist of paper "such as you could buy for a penny". "I hadn't been offered a sweet for eighty years" makes clear the temporal distance between child and narrator, but also indicates a
fleettlingly shared experience. The child has a momentarily renovative effect - "the old gesture came back to me" - and the moment is one of treasured tenderness: "he helped me and his hand brushed mine".

When the child finally "made to move away", the narrator's description of his response articulates his cumbersome and mute desperation. A "great gesticulation of my whole body" and an "impetuous murmur" are as awkward as they are urgent, and contrast with the child's assured and serene self-possession, his unself-conscious grace of movement, and his calm silence. The boy undoubtedly manifests "that wide-gazing calm which makes us older human beings, with our inward turmoil, feel a certain awe in the presence of a little child." 31

The narrator's words, when they finally come, seem curiously at odds with the situation as described. "Where are you off to, my little man, with your nanny?"; the patronising question destroys the parity established between the parties. Why must "boy" and "goat" become "my little man" and "nanny" when the boy is addressed? At a stroke the narrator cancels the sense of shared experience. A meeting of equals becomes an adult talking down to a child, as if
the child were necessarily "off" somewhere, unlike the typical Beckett narrator who is not "on my way anywhere, but simply on my way" (CSP 129). The numinous goat has been either domesticated into a pet, or turned into a surrogate parent - a nanny. The narrator's *esprit de l'escalier* produces little improvement: "What does your daddy do? that's what I would have said to him [...]" Again it reduces the strange boy to a conventional role, implying that the facts are potentially available with which to explain him. But questions that can be answered, as the Glazier learnt from his son in Eleuthéria, are not genuine questions.

In order to compensate for his *faux pas*, the embarrassed narrator's immediate reaction is to reach for a penny and thus clap a financial solution on this particular problem, but unlike Belacqua who could buy off a child with "a threepenny bit and a cigarette picture", he is penniless. Indeed he has "nothing that could give pleasure to a little unfortunate at the mouth of life" (the wretchedness of that condition being implied by the proximity of the analogous "mouth of hell"). Again, he is doing his best to aestheticise the boy, turning him into a picturesque pauper child with "black curly hair and the pretty curve of the
long bare legs all muscle and dirt".32

In the end the child is gone, "not far, but far", as the narrator puts it in a compressed paradox that well describes many of the children in Beckett, with their strained proximity to adults, and remote affinities with them.

"Poor dear dumb beasts, how you will have helped me"; but how has this particular child helped this narrator, who set out "with little expectation of advantage from what might follow"? He has helped him by setting an example of unfretful grace and poise which more convincingly expects no advantage, asks for no return.33 The child is exemplary in being truly "without a care": not callously indifferent, but calmly "incurious" in the manner advocated by Molloy and Malone (T 59; T 166).

It is with Molloy's strange recollection of an encounter with a child that I want to end. Twice in his narrative Molloy recalls, virtually in parenthesis, a seemingly insignificant though memorable occasion when he stooped in a charitable gesture to a child:

I thought almost without stopping. I did not dare stop. Perhaps that was the cause of my innocence. It was a little the worse for wear, a little threadbare perhaps, but I was glad to have it, yes, I suppose. Thanks I
I heard a voice telling me not to fret, that help was coming. Literally. These words struck it is not too much to say as clearly on my ear, and on my understanding, as the urchin's thanks I suppose when I stooped and picked up his marble.

"Yes, I suppose", "Thanks, I suppose": the child-like words of non-committal, equivocal assent (not cynical; the phrase is without sarcasm) are instantly understood by Molloy and serve him well. Unresentful of insuperable indigence, too proud for the farce of giving and taking, they register calm acceptance of the situation; just short of gratitude, though not quite ungrateful either, they constitute a just and unruffled response to the contingencies of an unsolicited life.
6.5 A Note on Child's Play

Child's play, as this chapter has indicated, caught Beckett's authorial eye. The oeuvre abounds with examples of apparently simple childish games: kite-flying in *Murphy* (88, 157), "marbles" in *Mercier and Camier* (78) and *Molloy* (T 47,84) "knucklebones and other games" in *The Expelled* (CSP 22); "hoops" in "Arenès de Lutèce" (CP 52), *The Expelled* (CSP 26), the *Texts for Nothing* (CSP 81), and *How It Is* (HII 95). Then there is Mercier's childhood game with the chained fence (MC 78), and the game remembered from childhood in *The Expelled* of counting the steps in a flight of stairs (CSP 21-2). The Unnamable, who at one point glimpses "children on their way to and from their playgrounds [...] all out for a bit of fun" (T 313) describes his head, in allusion to another childhood game, and one that plays upon frustration, as "like the ball of the cup-and-ball in its cup at the end of the stick" (T 279). He also mentions "billy in the bowl" (T 289) and "jack-in-the-box" (T 304).

In a post-Freudian age such games can scarcely be considered insignificant, and in *First Love* the narrator's
habit of "playing" (CSP 19) with a woman’s song, and with a
baby’s cries, seems explicitly to allude to the infant’s
"game" that Freud called fort/da. According to Freud,
such a game constitutes the child’s attempt to master the
situation of loss presented by the mother’s absence.

Thus Molloy aptly remarks that thinking exclusively of
his mother, for whom he is searching, "was child’s play for
me, the play of an only child" (T 16). "Child’s play" is
ordinarily a clichéd euphemism for something easily
accomplished but here the cliché is given a new gloss both
by the context and the qualifying remark. A terminally
frustrated search for a mother is made no easier by the
recognition that it is in a sense analogous to, and perhaps
derived from, the urgent play of an infant whose cravings
have never been properly appeased. Moreover a child’s play,
and particularly "the play of an only child", can often be a
peculiarly serious matter. An only child is by implication
a lonely child - "craving", like Molloy, "a fellow" (T 16) -
and in English the rhyme endorses the equation.

If, as I have argued in this chapter, children are in
one sense exemplary in their condition of calm detachment
from the world, they also represent archetypes of feverish
need, and their games are often manifestations of this.

In conversation with Lawrence Harvey in 1961, Beckett illustrated his own artistic dilemma thus:

What complicates it all is the need to make. Like a child in mud but no mud. And no child. Only need.

The swift cancellation there is characteristic. "First dirty, then make clean" (T 275). Like the one in Endgame, this child in mud is only momentarily posited; he is another "young doom" "nip[ped] in the bud" (CDW 191). Nonetheless, this image of the child is central to Beckett's aesthetic, and more than an arbitrary figure; this is corroborated by a passage in How It Is - the French original of which was written in the same year as the interview with Harvey - where the speaker compares his situation in the mud to that of children at play: "draw the mud about your face children do it in the sand at the sea-shore in the country in the sandpits the humbler / all about pressed tight as a child you would have done it in the sandpits" (HII 95-6).

Throughout the oeuvre "child's play" (CDW 78) is a central metaphor: "like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark." (CDW 126). With That Time, Beckett
constructs a whole drama around this compulsive and solitary sort of play: "making up talk breaking up two or more talking to himself being together that way where noone ever came" (CDW 393).

Hide and seek, which for Otto Rank, is a way of coping with and mastering the trauma of birth, has a particular significance in Beckett's work. From Whoroscope's

My squinty doaty!
I hid and you sook (CP 2)

to Company's bleak "Nowhere to be found. Nowhere to be sought." (NO 19), this 'game' resonates through Beckett's work. In That Time a voice recalls "that time you went back that last time to look was the ruin still there where you hid as a child" (CDW 388, my emphasis), and the implication is clearly that memory is itself a peculiarly unending game of hide and seek between divided selves.

Thus, more cryptically, in I Gave Up before Birth, "I was inside [...] perhaps they will bury him, if they find him, I'll be inside [...] I'll be inside [...] he didn't want them to find him [...] he usen't to want them to find him" (CSP 197). The activity of dividing into selves is an almost pathological game of narratorial hide and seek in The
Unnamable and the Texts for Nothing. "I am far [...] I'm far"; "I wait for me afar" (CSP 71, 73, 84).

Child's play, in the Trilogy, is thus a matter of some urgency. If to be child-like is in one sense to be simple, it is not to be complacent. For Malone, who constantly evokes the image of the child in order to explain himself, "it is playtime now" (T 167); but far from relaxing he constantly worries about his capacity for play. It is not exactly 'child's play', in the sense of something easy, for him to play like a child: "I never knew how to play, till now" (T 166); "I shall play with all the more ardour afterwards" (T 167); "And I call that playing. I wonder if I am not yet again talking about myself." (T 174); "I couldn't play [...]"

Then suddenly I threw myself on the playthings, if there were any, or on a child, to change his joy to howling, or I fled, to hiding. The grown-ups pursued me, the just, caught me, beat me, hounded me back into the round, the game, the jollity. (T 179)

Anxious about these matters Malone is like the speaker in the first of the Texts for Nothing, "tired out with [...] so much toil and play." (CSP 74) - the two activities being implicitly synonymous.
Children in Beckett have a way of making their absence, as well as their presence, intensely felt; and this absence can be a matter for profound regret. An important Beckettian strain of feeling regarding the child, then - and one that has not so far been fully discussed - has to do with loss: Beckett's children are often missing, and sometimes much missed. In both the early poem Whoroscope and the early story "A Case In A Thousand", as well as in the much later and important play All That Fall, children function as the objective correlatives of a mournfulness and a morbidity that is otherwise difficult to define. Beckett, in this respect, can be seen to draw from post-Romantic literary tradition, as this chapter will endeavour to show.
7.1 The Death of Children: Pathos and Morbidity

In *The Image of Childhood*, Peter Coveney argues that it is in Dickens that the child starts to become associated with early death.

Dickens's introduction of morbidity - which was only one aspect, though a significant one, of his own image of the child - became the central focus of the popular idea of Dickens' children. Paul Dombey *dying*, not *why* he died, became the focus of interest. (161)

Increasingly thereafter, argues Coveney, a "decadence of the romantic idea of innocence" (192) begins to set in. The Victorian child is irretrievably associated with death, innocence being now only a sign of unfitness for the world. Many children die instead of growing up, and gradually this is regarded not as contingent upon the injustice of social circumstance but as a destined fate. Another critic, William Empson, has described the late Victorian treatment of the child as

depending] on a feeling [...] that no way of building up character, no intellectual system, can bring out all that is inherent in the human spirit, and therefore that there is more in the child than any man has been able to keep."

If children do not die, their transition into adulthood is
at any rate no longer a natural growth but a withering away,
not a development but a degeneration. "From the middle of
the century", writes Coveney, 

the emphasis shifts towards the state of innocence
itself, not as a resilient expression of man's
potential integrity, but as something statically
juxtaposed to experience, and, ultimately, indeed
quite quickly, something not so much static as in
retreat. (192-3)

The late Victorian and Edwardian cult of the child regards
the world of childhood not as a gateway to adulthood, but
merely in opposition to it. What had been the means of a
positive assertion of life becomes the focus only of a
negative assertion of withdrawal and death. For Wordworth
the child had been the occasion of "forward-looking
thoughts"; for many of those who came after it was only a
reason for cloying nostalgia and regret. Remembered
childhoods are no longer revitalising resources but escapist
fantasies.

Coveney discusses the "death-haunted" (244) Alice
novels of Lewis Carroll, for whom
to grow up is no more than to become "feeble and
gray-headed, creeping wearily". The "fresh" innocence
of the child is not something, as it was for Wordsworth
and Coleridge, to conserve, in order to nourish the
fulfillment of the adult; its evocation merely serves
to create a sense of poignant contrast. (245)
As an example of extreme Edwardian decadence Coveney offers what he calls the "devastating lunacy" (191) of Marie Corelli's authorial intrusion in her novel *Boy* (1900):

We may ask whether for many a child it would not have been happiest never to have grown up at all. Honestly speaking, we cannot grieve for the fair legions of beloved children who have passed away in their childhood - we know, even without the aid of Gospel comfort, that it is 'far better' with them so.

According to this ethos adulthood - any conceivable adulthood - is regarded not as the fulfillment of the child's potential, but as a sort of monstrous perversion. With similar distaste Coveney describes J.M.Barrie's *Margaret Ogilvy* (1896) as

not even so much the tale of a boy who didn't want to grow up, but, carrying the sentiment to its deadly conclusion, of the boy who wishes so powerfully that he had never been born. (251)

That has a Beckettian ring, and indeed the iconic figure of the child who had "never been really born" (CDW 196) can be seen to draw partly on this extravagant strain of sentimentality. Beckett's morbidity though, as a close reading of *All That Fall* will demonstrate, is not complacent; his best work evinces something other than a grimly satisfied piety about the children whom it mourns.
All That Fall is remarkable not least because its comfortably grim and constantly reiterated proposition that children are better off dead is put under continuous pressure, both from the wildly grisly and murderous humour and from the plangent tone of real regret that is never quite silenced. Before looking at that play in detail, I will briefly discuss two of its precursors.

7.2 Mourning and Murdering: Losing Children in "Whoroscope"

Beckett's first writing about lost children comes in Whoroscope (1930) where the speaker - Descartes - fondly remembers a long-lost childhood playmate and mourns the subsequent death of his daughter.

My squinty doaty!
I hid and you sook.
And Francine my precious fruit of a house-and-parlour foetus!

What an exfoliation!
Her little grey flayed epidermis and scarlet tonsils!

My one child
scourged by a fever to stagnant murky blood-blood! (CP 2)

Beckett's lapidary note tells us that "His daughter died of
scarlet fever at the age of six." (CP 5) This is severely reductive, but the poem is painfully eloquent. The exclamations are important. (Exclamation marks are relatively rare in Beckett, but this poem positively bristles with them: there are fourteen in its ninety-eight lines.) In the first three exclamations about Francine the syntax lacks verbs, as if simply laying down the fact of her existence. In the fourth the line-break after "My one child" has a similar effect, leaving the child in splendid isolation on the page: 'behold, my one child'.

As with the cross-eyed girl, Francine is fondly thought of as belonging to the narrator: "my squinty doaty", "my one child". Nevertheless the question of the girl's origin is oddly articulated: "my precious fruit of a house-and-parlour foetus". Here half of the phrase seems to embrace the child ("my precious fruit") and half seems to palm her off as the product of an impersonal - and indefinitely articulated - other ("fruit of a house-and-parlour foetus"). In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* a notional child is callously described as "the fruit of a collision" (DFMW 117), and Francine's probable illegitimacy - the fruit of a collision with a house-and-parlour maid - is being indicated here in
Whoroscope. The contrast between cherishing affection and callous repudiation - here compacted into one ambivalent syntax - is wholly characteristic of Beckett's later writing about children.

"Fruit of a [...] foetus" is an odd locution too, a rewriting of the cliched "fruit of the womb" which endeavours to sever the link between girl and mother by editing the latter out of the equation altogether: "fruit of [...] a foetus" suggests something growing out of itself, self-born.³

This is confirmed in the next line since one meaning of "to exfoliate" is "to open out, develop" (O.E.D.). "What an exfoliation!" registers wonder at the flourishing child, but also horror at the disease which then destroys her. For the more usual meaning of "to exfoliate" is "to shed layers" (O.E.D.) - often layers of leaves or bark, but in this case layers of skin. Hence the "flayed epidermis" in which (after Swift) the coolly scientific diction underlines the chasm between disinterested intellectual curiosity - Descartes' stock-in-trade - and actual human suffering.⁴ The cruel exfoliation of the fever has turned the girl's "scarlet tonsils" into exfoliated fleurs du mal, and the
emphasis on the painful red inflammation of her cruelly
exposed flesh is full of pathos, highlighting the inherently
soft and vulnerable nature of the child. Like the innocent
girl with the squint she is ill-equipped for survival in a
harsh world.

Before the poem ends one more 'lost' girl is mentioned:

Anna Maria!
She reads Moses and says her love is crucified.
Leider! Leider! she bloomed and withered,
a pale abusive parakeet in a mainstreet window. (CP 3)

Anna Maria Schurmann was, as Beckett's note explains, "the
Dutch blue-stocking, a pious pupil of Voet, the adversary of
Descartes" (CP 6). Lawrence Harvey describes how Descartes
regretted Schurmann's decision to forego her supposed
womanly vocation in favour of a secluded life of
intellectual pursuits - both scientific and theological. The speaker thus mourns the exfoliation - both the
intellectual blooming and the maternal withering - of
another, this time surrogate, daughter.

Despite its intimidating intellectualism the poem is a
classical study of unfulfilled potential and failed
ambition. Descartes, the intellectual hero, is reduced to
the voice of a dying man vainly recalling fragments of the
past while indulging in a pathetic addiction, and he is as particular about the "ripeness" of his eggs as Krapp will be about his bananas. "The shuttle of a ripening egg combs the warp of his days", as Beckett puts it in a poignant addendum (CP 5), and the egg - an "abortion of a fledgling" - represents the curtailment of life's potential. Such an egg is a self-enclosed world, containing the beginnings of a being who never sees the light of day, and it foreshadows Beckett's preoccupation with the little girl whom Jung said "had never been really born".

At the end of the poem, when the egg is finally ripe, the speaker for the first time not only addresses it, but claims it as his own; he also feminises it so that it seems to stand as a surrogate for the fledgling Francine.

Are you ripe at last,
my slim pale double-breasted turd?
How rich she smells,
this abortion of a fledgling!
I will eat it with a fish fork.
White and yolk and feathers. (CP 4)

This perverse relish for an egg that has been carefully nurtured seems almost cannibalistic, and Descartes' murderous appetite is in fact an inversion or sublimation of his hopeless regret about lost children. A similar
combination of the mournful and the murderous will govern the tone of the treatment of children in both “A Case In A Thousand” and, some twenty-six years later, All That Fall.

7.3 Mourning and Melancholy: “A Case In A Thousand”

With the subdued and melancholy story “A Case In A Thousand”, quite different in tone from Beckett’s other early stories, a child for the first time assumes a central role—though here a peculiarly absent one. This enigmatic story has an oddly hollow feeling about it, and this is partly because the child at its centre is hardly described at all.

After an only temporarily successful operation by Surgeon Bor the nameless child in question, who suffers from tubercular inflammations, is put in the care of Bor’s physician Dr. Nye. From the hospital window Dr. Nye sees the boy’s mother, Mrs. Bray, who, he learns, has maintained a daily vigil by the canal during her son’s illness. Dr. Nye comes to recognise Mrs. Bray as his old childhood nurse. When they speak she reminds him that “you were in a great hurry
to grow up so's you could marry me" but "she did not disclose the trauma at the root of his attachment". Dr. Nye decides, finally, that Bor should operate again, but "the boy's lung collapsed, and he died." Strangely Mrs. Bray continues her vigil outside the hospital and it becomes clear that her concern is now for Dr. Nye. Just before the story ends they speak again and, before parting, "she related a matter connected with his earliest years", though we are not told what the matter is.

Rubin Rabinovitz rightly argues that the story offers a critique of the Freudian idea of curing a psychological malaise by talking through a childhood trauma. Dr. Nye is described as "belong[ing] to the sad men, but not to the extent of accepting, in the blank way the most of them do, this condition as natural and proper. He looked upon it as a disorder." The story implies that (in spite of the admission "Myself I cannot save") Nye mistakenly believes that his disorder might be cured by Mrs. Bray's revelations about his apparently Oedipal childhood trauma, whereas in fact his condition is like the child's — hopelessly incurable. "Poor juvenile solutions, explaining nothing [...] we may reason to our heart's content, the fog won't lift" (CSP 25).
Rabinovitz is right, then, to emphasise the fact that "the boy's physical condition and the physician's emotional condition are in some ways analogous" (64): for neither is there a known cure; Mrs Bray's concern is easily displaced from the one to the other; "each of them is a case in a thousand" (65), neither "properly known to the medical profession". Moreover the boy is described as having "an unfathomable tendency to sink", suggesting a link not only with Nye's low-spirits, but with the inexplicable nature of these. Nye's method of deciding whether or not to operate on the boy is unconventional: "he took hold of the boy's wrist, stretched himself all along the edge of the bed and entered the kind of therapeutic trance that he reserved for such happily rare dilemmas." This clearly underlines Nye's affinity for the child, and their parallel situations.

Despite the scepticism about Freud, Mrs. Bray and Dr. Nye appear loosely to represent mourning and melancholia, according to Freud's definition in his essay of that name. Mrs Bray's sadness, like mourning, is focussed on a particular loss; Dr. Nye's sadness is like melancholia in being over-determined, having no obvious cause.8

The child who dies, since he never speaks and is
scarcely even described, has in narrative terms "never been really born" or been given fictional life; he is used in the story as a kind of objective correlative of the narrator's own lost self, whelmed in the sadness that is implicitly intrinsic to adulthood. The story thus exploits something of the Edwardian sentimentality about the child, the idea that, in Empson's words, "there is more in the child than any man has been able to keep". Fittingly, the other children mentioned in Beckett's story are synonymous with suffering, unfulfilled potential, and pent-up energy: Nye at one point hears "the distant furious crying of a child", and it is noted that "children throughout the locality had been waiting angrily for the rain to stop, so that they might go out to play". Nye again shares something of this fidgeting restlessness, more than once being described looking out of a window, as if himself pent-up.

One of the things he sees through the window is the passage of a barge through a lock, and the seemingly tangential and absent-minded description of this manoeuvre provides one of the main 'events' in this strange story - the barge gradually and with some difficulty "working clear of the dock". This is clearly a displaced image of life's
passage, implying both a difficult birth and a final release into death: the barge finally "passed on its way", just as the boy passes quietly away in hospital. 9

In many of its concerns, as well as in its peculiar tone - both deeply mournful and awkwardly comic - the story looks forward to All That Fall. Mrs. Bray - in her profound mourning, her enduring persistence, and her comic physicality - is an early version of Mrs. Rooney. The dead child is analogous to "Little Minnie" (CDW 174), and Nye's fixation with buttocks even foreshadows Mrs. Rooney's significant preoccupation with horses' buttocks. Above all the punning allusion to difficult passages prefigures the complex punning in the later play. At one point Nye recalls his feelings when, as a medical student, "a baby died under his hand, just as he had it nicely spitted for a lumbar puncture". The odd mixture there of regret about a lost child, together with hints of a slightly grisly murderoussness make "A Case In A Thousand" an important link between Whoroscope and All That Fall.

In the following section I will discuss All That Fall at some considerable length, partly because only in this way
can its complex subliminal plots be properly traced, and partly because the play seems to have received less detailed attention than its quality and importance in the Beckett oeuvre merits. Even those critics most alive to its punning indirections have been strangely deaf to the play's plangent tone of remorseful longing and regret. The play is sometimes dismissed as a frivolous piece, quaintly brilliant, but ultimately light-weight. I will attempt to show how important the work is for a full understanding of Beckett's treatment of children. The reading that follows, then, brings together many of the themes not only from this chapter, but from the thesis as a whole.

7.4 Nipping Young Dooms In The Bud: "All That Fall"

It was a little child fell out of the carriage, Ma'am. [Pause.] On to the line, Ma'am. [Pause.] Under the wheels, Ma'am." (CDW 199)

All That Fall (1957) ends with this dramatic annunciation about the loss of a child. A number of clues, well documented by critics, lead us to suspect that Mr Rooney is at least indirectly - and certainly obscurely - responsible for the death of the child. Chief among these
are his general reluctance to discuss events on the train,
and his memorably macabre outburst apparently provoked by
"the Lynch twins jeering at us" (191):

Did you ever wish to kill a child? [Pause.] Nip some young doom in the bud. [Pause.] Many a time at night, in winter, on the black road home, I nearly attacked the boy. [Pause.] Poor Jerry! [Pause.] What restrained me then? (191)

That final "then", if it is not logical but temporal, implies that the case was different with the child on the train, and indeed Mr Rooney later remarks chillingly that, thinking himself alone in the compartment, "I made no attempt to restrain myself" (192). Perhaps, like Henri Krap, "Believing he is doomed, he no longer restrains himself" (E 33).

Even by Beckett's standards the play is macabre, and though it is one of Beckett's most comic pieces - its "wild laughter" (CDW 198) also unrestrained - the infanticidal implications give a grim edge to the tone. Indeed not least among the macabre aspects of the play is the way it tells a tale of possible child-killing in a tone more suited to a child's book; there are the stylised farmyard animal noises, for instance, and the action based on a linear and episodic trip to the quaint train-station where we meet the
station-staff and various village characters. The grimness seems to have been there at the play's inception; Beckett wrote to Nancy Cunard in 1956, having been asked for a radio play by John Gielgud at the BBC:

Never thought about a radio play technique but in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something.

An idea nice and gruesome thought of in the dead of night; the play is something of a gothic horror - though, as the word 't'other' perhaps indicates, its horrors are couched in homely Irish inflections. Objecting to a staged version of the play Beckett said in 1957, in a letter to his American publisher, "Whatever quality it may have [...] depends upon the whole thing's coming out of the dark." That remark has a suggestiveness that goes beyond formal considerations; the black humour of All That Fall has a malevolent quality about it; it articulates some very dark thoughts indeed.

In terms of genre alone the play is unusual for Beckett. It is, as many critics have noted, a kind of melodramatic 'whodunnit' (and, so to speak, a 'who-done-precisely-what'), with a twist at the end more or less in the form of a punchline. John Pilling notes that
the suspense element provided by the uncertainty about the train's late arrival "gives the work an end-directed quality that is uncharacteristic." He also finds "an extension of the technique, found even in Henry James, that concentrates attention on what turns out ultimately to be enigmatic."^{12}

As one early reviewer remarks, "what actually must have happened [on the train] Mr.Beckett leaves, like Henry James in "The Turn of the Screw", to our own sense of evil".^{13}

Evil is not a very Beckettian word. It is often implicitly ascribed to an intermittently malign or negligent deity - but not usually to humans, since they are generally represented as the victims and not as the perpetrators of it.

*All That Fall* on one level evinces just this point of view. Mrs Rooney's "dragging feet" and her journey to the "station" (172) evoke, as so often in Beckett, the archetype of the passion at Calvary. Her painful progress partly alludes to the suffering of the incarnate, and all too human, Christ. It is the type of all human being: "Are you going in my direction?", asks Mr Slocum; "We all are", she replies. It is appropriate, then, that Mr Slocum should be described as "crucifying his gearbox" (180). The play is an
ironic commentary on the biblical verse that Mrs Rooney quotes (198) and from which it takes its title: "The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down." Mr and Mrs Rooney greet this with the "wild laughter" of blasphemous derision (198). She, "so bowed and bent" (183) and he, also "bowed down" (196), represent a fallen humanity with no faith in the uplifting power of the Lord; they are even afraid to sit for fear that (unlike the crucified Christ) "we should never rise again" (192). The presiding deity is as unreliable as the weather, which is indeed "divine" (174) only in so far as it ceases to be "nice" (172,179) and "lovely" (184) and instead turns decidedly inclement - "Soon the rain will begin to fall, and go on falling, all afternoon" (181). The weather conspicuously fails to "hold up" (172) just as the Lord fails, it seems, to "upholdeth all that fall", including the child who "fell out of the carriage" (199).

Yet the play very strongly implies that the child was not merely allowed to fall by a criminally negligent deity, but killed (somehow) as the result of Mr Rooney's lack of restraint. For John and Beryl Fletcher, in Beckett's writings people are represented as being victims of an impersonal and completely
depersonalised fate and are not responsible for other people's woes. The suggestion, therefore, that Mr Rooney might deliberately have caused the child to fall out of the railway carriage raises all sorts of questions that Beckett leaves himself no time to answer in this play. Mr Rooney might certainly have allowed the child to die but if he pushes him out of the train, then he dethrones fate, a thing nobody is allowed to do in Beckett's world since it runs counter to his quietist ethic.

In fact All That Fall is ethical in its concerns to a far greater extent than most Beckett works; it considers, as a real moral dilemma, the case for and against killing (and killing may mean aborting) as opposed to "raising", children. In this sense it stands as a summation of Beckett's thoughts about procreation and 'family values'.

The following passage gives a possible motive for Mr Rooney's actions:

Mr Slocum: May I offer you a lift, Mrs Rooney? Are you going in my direction?

Mrs Rooney: I am, Mr Slocum, we all are. (Pause.) How is your poor mother?

Mr Slocum: Thank you, she is fairly comfortable. We manage to keep her out of pain. that is the great thing, Mrs Rooney, is it not?

Mrs Rooney: Yes, indeed, Mr Slocum, that is the great thing, I don't know how you do it. (Pause. She slaps her cheek violently.) Ah these wasps!

The passage is typical of the play's method, in which apparent non-sequiturs in fact indicate a precise sequence
of thought. Here that sequence sets out a characteristic piece of Beckettian dogma. We are all going in the same direction because all subject to time, all travelling on the same implacable trajectory from birth to death. That trajectory of course constitutes a decline into old age and ill-health, and hence Mrs Rooney's enquiry about Mr Slocum's mother.

Enquiries of this nature form, with remarks about the weather, one of the patterns of motifs that structure the play. As in the episode of the Lynch family in Watt, family relatives are synonymous with ill-health; thus, in addition to Mr. Slocum's "poor mother" (177), Christy has a "poor wife" who is "no better", as well as a "daughter" who is "no worse" (172); Mr. Tyler has a "poor daughter" whose condition, apparently after a hysterectomy, is described as "fair, fair" (174); Mr. Barrell has a "poor Pappy" who "didn't live long to enjoy his ease" (181); Jerry has a "poor father" who has been taken "away" (188); Mrs Tully even has a "poor husband" whose "constant pain" causes him to "beat[ ] her unmercifully" (193).

Mr. Slocum's mother, being "fairly comfortable" and "out of pain", is doing remarkably well for a Beckett character,
and Mrs Rooney acknowledges this by marvelling at Mr Slocum's anaesthetising powers: "I don't know how you do it". Those words, however, as well as being an admiring tribute, are an admission of defeat. She does not know how to avoid pain. The answer, of course, comes with her reaction to the intrusive wasp. She exterminates it; that's "how you do it".

It is the grim logic of this dogma, the same dogma advocated by Hamm via the flea and child in Endgame, that the play sets out partly to challenge and revise. The same argument might be applied to the child, and Mr Rooney's apparent crime thus interpreted as an act of mercy. The play, however, exposes this too-easy nihilism, and the deed in question thus remains - as it does not in Endgame - stubbornly grisly. If All That Fall seems partly (and sometimes comically) to espouse violence towards children, it also persuasively mourns their absence.

* Paul Lawley makes sense of Mr Rooney's apparently unhelpful and uninformative narrative about his journey by interpreting it as "an underlying birth-scenario". The evidence marshalled by Lawley is persuasive. To summarize
briefly: Mr Rooney's description of his "silent, backstreet, basement office, with its obliterated plate, rest-couch and velvet hangings" (CDW 193) suggests a typically Beckettian image of a "wombtomb, a womb after life rather than before it" (Lawley, 7). "Nothing, I said, not even fully certified death, can ever take the place of that" (CDW 194). Lawley remarks that "the office is like a womb in that it encloses life and like a tomb in that the state seems terminal" (Lawley, 7) He then points out that the "limbo" of the office is "displaced to or reproduced in the compartment of the static train" (Lawley, 7) in which Mr Rooney sat contemplating the office. Mr Rooney "just sat on, saying, If this train were never to move again I should not greatly mind." (CDW 195) His ensuing desire to urinate is articulated, crucially for Lawley, in terms that imply a pressing need for utterance and for birth:

Then gradually a - how shall I say - a growing desire to - er - you know - welled up within me. Nervous probably. In fact now I am sure. You know, the feeling of being confined. (CDW 195)

Lawley explains:

First of all there is the problem of utterance ("how shall I say"). On the literal level, of course, this is merely a matter of social delicacy ("er"), but followed as it is by figures of containment within ("welled up within me") and of being contained ("the feeling of
being confined"), it offers another inflection of meaning. "Confined" is the key word, for the person who both confines and is confined (*in confinement*) is the bearer of a child ("[y]es yes, I have been through that", comments Maddy on Dan's feeling.) [...] Dan is giving himself birth. "Where was I in my composition?" he asks Maddy: the pun is vital, for the making up (?) of his narrative is also a *self-production*, both in its function and in the process it describes. (Lawley,8)

Lawley further adds that "Dan's mysteriously delayed issuing forth" on the train's eventual arrival "involves a naming" (Lawley, 8) - when Mr Barrell calls out the name of the station (CDW 187); "and a kind of sexing" - when Jerry takes him, as we later learn, "to the men's" (195). Moreover the climactic arrival of the train had is couched in sexual puns: "The up-mail!", "She's coming!", *"clashing of couplings"* (187). To clinch the argument for "an underlying birth-scenario", Lawley reminds us that "when Dan finally emerges [...] Maddy tells him that it is his birthday" (Lawley 8; CDW 188). On the basis of this argument, Mrs Rooney's apparently tangential interpolation about the little girl who "had never been really born" (196) is thus, for Lawley, "a response to Dan's attempt to compose himself, to formulate a birth-scenario for himself." (Lawley, 9)

Botched and blocked birth, the condition of being not properly born, is common to all humanity, to "ALL That Fall,
all mortals" (Lawley, 9). The child that falls onto the track, then, "is being given 'birth to into death'" (Lawley, 10; T 260), and thus, it is implied, delivered from an excruciating condition.

Lawley's argument is persuasive and enlightening, although not exactly satisfying in so far as it omits any discussion of the play's tone. Quite brilliant as exegesis, it somehow fails to account for the character of the piece at all. It treats the play as though it were a gigantic crossword puzzle - intricate and ingenious in construction, but ethically neutral, almost wholly without feeling. He states that in his remarks on the play "I have been concerned speculatively to suggest and to exploit the centrality [...] of pun and wordplay" (Lawley, 10). It is a matter of some debate among critics of the play just how central those elements are.

In his early review of the play, for instance, Donald Davie urges readers to resist the temptation to pay too much attention to Beckett's "symbolic puns" (Davie, 158), because, he argues, "once started on this, where do we stop?" (157). Davie disapproves of what he sees as a mischievous and Joycean tendency in Beckett to "throw the
exegete a red herring to keep him quiet, and then on with
the motley." (157) "Common sense demands that we ignore the
lure [...]" (157) of this, and of the "ambiguities flying
off in all directions" (157). Davie makes it clear that he
admires Beckett's comic writing, the particular tone of his
humour; but as for exegesis, he thinks the game not worth
the candle.

Davie particularly enjoys the comic linguistic
self-consciousness of a play which is among a group of works
- with From An Abandoned Work (1956), Krapp's Last Tape
(1958), and Embers (1959) - in which Beckett wrote in
English for the first time in well over a decade.

Mrs. Rooney, as is well known, detects with uneasiness
something "bizarre about my way of speaking" (CDW 173). Her
husband later remarks that "sometimes one would think you
were struggling with a dead language"(194). Davie quotes the
well-known passage that follows:

Mrs Rooney: Yes, indeed, Dan, I know full well what you
mean, I often have that feeling, it is
unspeakably excruciating.
Mr Rooney: I confess I have it sometimes myself, when
I happen to overhear what I am saying.
Mrs Rooney: Well, you know, it will be dead in time,
just like our own poor dear Gaelic, there
is that to be said. (194)

Davie's commentary is astute and suggestive:
"I know full well...," the very expression by which Mrs. Rooney admits herself at the mercy of cliches is itself a cliche. And in this state, the language can express the speaker only by betraying him, as in "there is that to be said,", the hopeful and consolatory cliche here applied to the chance of death.

(Davie,154-5)

[...S]he speaks by formula, but she does not live and feel by formula - or she strives not to, though her language continually traps her into it. From this point of view there is more hope for her, and it may be quite true that the hope will indeed be consummated when her language is as dead as "our own poor dear Gaelic", that is to say, without the sort of zombie-life it now has, which suffices to thwart her feelings while good for nothing else. "There is that to be said." (155)

In highlighting the play's emphasis on the painful nature of the half-alive, and the consolatory cliche made available by complete extinction, Davie is touching on the matters dealt with in a very different key by Lawley. In fact Davie's approach and Lawley's are mutually enlightening. Could it be that Davie's emphasis on the play's self-consciousness about the difficulty of speaking explains the cryptic nature of the play so evidently "central" to a critic like Lawley? Like the little girl who, with her own "sort of zombie life", has "never been really born", the meaning of the play is never wholly delivered, but remains "buried there alive" under a clutter of ossified cliches and puns. Davie objects to the play's ending, which he finds too ambiguous, with its
"tediously insoluble whodunnit question-mark over whatever it was unspeakable that the blind Mr Rooney did to a child in the train" (157). Here he is unwittingly providing an opportunity for the kind of wordplay he abhors, for the point about Mr Rooney's actions is precisely that they are "unspeakable" - and the play is cryptic because it is about the "tediously insoluble" and the "unspeakably excruciating".

Mr Rooney's shocking sentiments about the wish to nip young dooms in the bud constitute the focus of a murderous attitude to the young that is at least implicit throughout the play.

Tommy, the porter, is probably an adolescent, but since he is "an orphan" (CDW 180) he seems characterised by the kind of vulnerability typical of Beckett's children; and he seems to form a natural pair with the other child "all alone" (188) in the world who works as Mr Rooney's "escort" (193) - thus Tom(my) and Jerry. (Beckett, as we know, was fond of comic duos.) Tommy is treated roughly by his master Mr Barrell:
Mr Barrell is merely chastising Tommy for not sticking to the job in hand, but his words are reminiscent of those advocating "special tracks for these nasty little creatures" (CSP 26). In that earlier story there had also been a proposal to "lynch children" (CSP 26) and in All That Fall the "Lynch twins" (CDW 191) provoke Mr Rooney's confession about the urge to "kill a child". Tommy in fact becomes the target of a great deal of violence. "Tommy! Blast your bleeding bloody -" (180) shouts Mr Barrell, "roaring" with unfocussed rage. Soon he adds, "violently", "Get on with you now before I report you!"(180). His next threat is more sinister: "Do you want me to come down to you with the shovel?" (180) Here the most famous attempted murder in Irish theatre - a young man's attack, in The Playboy of the Western World, on his father with a "loy" - is recalled with the roles crucially reversed. Mr Barrell significantly adds a remark of apparent regret. "Ah God forgive me, it's a hard life" (180). The play continually asks the question whether the fact that life is hard is a reason for caring for children or for eliminating them.

Later a stage direction announces: "[l]oud titter from
TOMMY cut short by MR BARRELL with backhanded blow in the stomach."(184) "Cut short" is sinister in a play about the premature death of children. Violence against Tommy is carefully orchestrated, forming part of the pattern of the play's repetitions; soon there is another "(loud titter from TOMMY, checked as before by MR BARRELL."(186) The station-master adds insult to injury: "That's enough old guff out of you". The chastisement is followed by the order to "nip up to the box"(186), just as the earlier telling off had been followed by the order to "nip up there on the platform"(180), and one cannot help feeling that there is some obscure joke in the connection between twice telling a nipper to "nip", and the phrase "nip some young doom in the bud".

Implicit violence is directed at Jerry too. As escort he becomes superfluous to requirements when Mrs Rooney comes to fetch her husband and Mr Rooney asks her with some irritation "Why did you not cancel the boy?" (188) "Cancel" has, in the context of the play as a whole, considerable force. She makes good by buying the child off with "a penny" instead of the usual "sixpence" (188), and tells him with apparent solicitude, to "run along now and buy yourself
a nice gobstopper" (188), but the choice of sweetie - a potentially asphyxiating one - is pointed. Tommy is "checked" with a "blow" that presumably winds him; Jerry finally "cancel[led]" with a "gobstopper". The penny he is given is quite literally, then, "a penny for your pains" (198).

Punning allusion to asphyxiation has already featured in the play. Mr Slocum's car, like everything else, is in a bad way: "she is dead" (178). In a sense, however, she is not dead enough, since he proposes to fix her in a way that suggests strangulation: "perhaps if I were to choke her" (178). "She was getting too much air!" (179), he remarks, before, as the sinister stage direction puts it, "he throttles down" (179). (In Eh Joe Joe will be described as "throttling the dead in his head" by means of "mental thuggee" [CDW 363]). He then proceeds to run over a hen, which Mrs Rooney regrets before pointing out that "they would have slit her weasand in any case" (179) and thus given her little chance of getting too much air.

The play is evidently much preoccupied with the forcible suppression and stifling of new life, and as Donald Davie points out in the review already cited, there is a
disturbing passage in *Malone Dies* that not only contemplates the strangulation of a child, but offers a clue about the fate of the child on the train in *All That Fall*:

Or I might be able to catch one, a little girl for example, and half strangle her, three quarters, until she promises to give me my stick, give me my soup, empty my pots, kiss me, fondle me, smile to me, give me my hat, stay with me, follow the hearse weeping into her hankerchief, that would be nice. I am such a good man at bottom, such a good man, how is it nobody ever noticed it? A little girl would be into my barrow, she would undress before me, sleep beside me, have nobody but me, I would jam the bed against the door to prevent her running away, but then she would throw herself out of the window [...]  

(T 250-1)

* 

Leslie Hill has noted that the fate of the child in *All That Fall* is part of a network of references to similar motifs throughout the Beckett oeuvre.

These recurring motifs seem to be hardly coincidental. But they work like so many cryptic clues which remain out of reach of the text and the reader. What they do establish, though, from text to text, is a disturbing law of mutually contaminating equivalences, according to which, at differing moments, a woman, a child, or a dog are all run down with mysterious, and often deadly consequences. Beckett produces four (?) accounts which, though they seem to tell a similar story, rather like Vladimir's Gospels, fail to agree on significant points. Thus, one might ask, who was it that was run over? An old woman (*Mercier and Camier*, L'Expulsion), a dog (*Molloy, All That Fall*) or a child (*All That
It should be noted, however, that with regard to the motif in question there is "a disturbing law of mutually contaminating equivalences" within All That Fall itself. Hill points out the parallel between the child who falls on the line and the "dead dog" Mr Rooney imagines in the "ditch" by the road (196). There is also the wasp dealt with so effectively by Mrs Rooney (177), and more obviously the hen - not quite a sitting duck, but certainly an easy target - "squashed" (179) by Mr Slocum's car: "one minute [...] on the road [...] and then - bang! - all her troubles over. [...] Just one great squawk and then...peace." (179) Parallel with this is the "narrow squeak" (175) - almost a last "great squawk" - when Mrs Rooney and Mr Tyler are almost run down by "Connolly's van". That experience in turn lies behind Mrs. Rooney's vision of "some great roaring machine" (176) which will come and "whirl" the dust "skyhigh".

The play's stylised sound-effects - "exaggerated station sounds. Falling signals. Bells. Whistles. Crescendo of train whistle approaching. Sound of train rushing through station." (187) - ensure that the listener experiences "some
great roaring machine" too. This justifies the menace implicit in the way in which the characters describe the train as bearing down on them: it will "soon be upon us" (181), and "on top of us before we can turn round" (180). "A Female Voice" ominously warns her young daughter as they stand on the platform that "one can be sucked under" (185).

Tension is created in the early part of the play partly by Mrs Rooney's twice (172,174) thinking she is late because she thinks she hears the "up-mail" already. When she arrives at the station she thinks she may have missed it after all because "there was a moment there, I remember now, I was so plunged in sorrow I wouldn't have heard a steam-roller go over me" (181). Here, then, is yet another instance of the motif - this a comically visual image, given her visceral shapelessness, "quivering like a blancmange" (189).

Here the subliminal links or "mutually contaminating equivalences" become very complex. The "moment" she refers to is the occasion when, in her own words - words that give a different account of "be[ing] sucked under" - "it all came over me again, like a flood". In Footfalls, a play about a dead mother and a daughter who is "not there" (CDW 403), the
phrase "It all" becomes synonymous with personal grief and unspeakable suffering: "Will you never have done...revolving it all? [...] It all. [...] In your poor mind." (CDW 400). What exactly Mrs. Rooney's phrase "it all" refers to is not explicit, though it seems likely that it points to her unspeakable grief over her dead daughter whom she mentions in her next speech: "Can't you see I'm in trouble? [...] Have you no respect for misery? [...] Minnie! Little Minnie!" (176). Being "in trouble" on account of her offspring connects Mrs Rooney with the hen who is squashed "bang! - all her troubles over [...] All the laying and the hatching." (179) Moreover, the "moment" when "it all came over me again" (176) is itself seemingly provoked by Mrs Rooney's image of "some great roaring machine". This, she predicts, "will come and whirl it all [that is "the dust" which "will not settle in our time"] skyhigh again" (176, my emphasis). That image, as we have seen, is itself provoked by the "narrow squeak" with Connolly's van which has rendered Mrs Rooney "white with dust from head to foot" (175), thus, again, resembling the hen whom she imagines having "now and then a dust bath" before being run over, and whose sisters are later described as "sprawl[ing] torpid in
the dust" (192).

What are we to make of all this? Is it possible to plot a subliminal narrative beneath these cryptic co-ordinates? Could it be supposed that "little Minnie" was run over, and that the event is so "unspeakably excruciating" to Mrs Rooney that she can only articulate it in these indirect ways? That would explain why Mr Rooney is so anxious to avoid the subject of what happened to the child on the train. Dust is of course an image of human mortality, and the dust raised by roaring machines reminds Mrs Rooney of the death of her child. Memories, like the dust on the road, are painfully dislodged and "it all" is whirled skyhigh, till it floods over her again. For as an earlier narrator had put it:

Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things, of those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them, for if you don't there is the danger of finding them, in your mind, little by little. That is to say, you must think of them for a while, a good while, every day several times a day, until they sink forever in the mud. (CSP 21)

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Like Watt and Endgame, All That Fall has an obsessive
preoccupation with parents and children. Almost every one of its numerous characters is spoken of explicitly in relation to a parent or child. Thus Christy has a "daughter" (172), Mr Tyler a "daughter" (174), Mr Slocum a "mother" (177), Mr Barrell a "Pappy" (181), Miss Fitt a "mother" (184), Dolly a "Mamma" (184) Jerry an absent "father" (188). Even a passing donkey has a "father and mother" (190), and when Mrs Rooney observes of "the pretty little woolly lamb, crying to suck its mother", that "[t]heirs has not changed since Arcady" (194), it is clear that the mutuality of the parent-child relation stands as an (ironised) ideal.

Being childless parents, Mr and Mrs Rooney are a paradoxical couple (mirroring the "orphan" (180) Tommy, a parentless child). Their very names convey their status as parent figures; Maddy and Dan are a Beckettian 'Ma and Da'22.

Like the day's weather, however - "the best of it is past" (189) - Mr and Mrs Rooney are in deep decline. Maddy is "née Dunne", or born done. The Rooneys are implicitly 'ruiny', and like the old woman "in that ruinous old house" (172) who listens to "the same old record" (197) of
Schubert's significantly titled "Death and the Maiden" (172) - a record that makes Dan cry (197) - their ruin is partly a matter of being bereft of a child. Mrs Rooney is "a hysterical old hag [...] destroyed with sorrow and pining and gentility and church-going and fat and rheumatism and childlessness" (174). The "childlessness" that Mrs Rooney rues may imply the loss of a child, as the first two listed items - "sorrow and pining" - indicate; or, the inability to have another child, since "gentility and churchgoing and fat and rheumatism" might all be thought to mitigate against sexual indulgence.

Mrs Rooney twice exclaims, as if in mourning, "Minnie! Little Minnie!" (174,176). On the second occasion she is more explicit about Minnie, evoking her as a real presence, herself approaching the ruin of childlessness: "In her forties now she'd be, I don't know, fifty, girding up her little loins, getting ready for the change..." (176) The implication is that the daughter died as a child, but perhaps the child was, like the "little girl" (195) described by the "mind doctor" (195) in Mrs Rooney's peculiar story, "never [...] really born" (196); perhaps "little Minnie" is merely the ghostly residue of a phantom
or aborted pregnancy.

There are a couple of occasions when Mrs Rooney's motherly instincts seem to betray themselves in suggestive ways. On both occasions her irritation with a younger character met with on the way to the station - she will later speak of "such nasty horrid people" (188) - gives way to a sort of motherly solicitude.

Thus she chastises Mr Tyler for "molesting me" (176), but as he prepares to cycle away with his punctured tyre she exclaims "Heavens you're not going to ride her flat! [...] You'll tear your tube to ribbons!" (176-7) as though she were speaking with caring admonishment to a misguided child.

Tyler disappears and Mrs Rooney hears "Venus birds! Billing in the woods all the summer long." (177) She then invites Tyler to "come back and unlace me behind the hedge" (177).

It is important to recognise that the innuendo is not merely evidence of Mrs Rooney's "indomitable carnality", as Donald Davie suggests (Davie,160), but of her irrepressible desire to procreate. It is as if her concern for Tyler has reminded her once more of her childlessness.

Miss Fitt is among the "nasty" (CDW 188) people, partly because of her reluctance to "give [...her] arm"
She is like the weather which is in the end not "nice" (172,179) because it will not "hold up" (172). She provokes two outbursts of misanthropic rage from Mrs Rooney:

Your arm! Any arm! A helping hand! For five seconds! Christ what a planet! (183)

Pismires do it for one another. (Pause.) I have seen slugs do it. (183)

Birds and bees may just feasibly do it, and even educated fleas, but when it comes to the lending of an arm, there's an extravagant Irish bull involved in the image of a slug doing it. This does not distract from the attitudinising pessimism evoked here, a pessimism more appropriate in its universalising tone to *Endgame* than to the more localised milieu of *All That Fall*. Characteristically *Endgame* envisioned the end of "humanity" (CDW 108); Mrs Rooney contemplates mass extinction in the more localised form of the "Titanic" and the "Lusitania" (184) - the latter, of course, sunk off the Irish coast. The speeches constitute an allusion to that earlier play, and to one of its sources, *King Lear*. Like *Endgame*, this play features a blind man; and Mr Rooney, as if conscious of the fate of his precursor Gloucester, is suspicious of being made to fall "into the ditch" (189) by one not "in a condition to lead me" (189).
That important scene from *King Lear* seems particularly to be evoked when Mrs Rooney specifies that she wants Miss Fitt's arm in order "to help me up the face of this cliff" (183); she refers, of course, to the more prosaic station steps.

Mrs Rooney's complaint that people behave worse than animals is reminiscent of Lear's rantings. (The "tempest of wind and rain" (199) will come later.) Moreover, she too is provoked by the disrespectful behaviour of a daughter, albeit not her own. Nevertheless, in an important modulation of tone, Mrs Rooney's curses turn suddenly, upon Miss Fitt's finally lending her arm, to maternal solicitude: "Heavens, child, you're just a bag of bones, you need building up." (184) Then, as after her parallel remark to Tyler, her thoughts turn, in what at first seems a non-sequitur, to idealised thoughts of married - and therefore, to her, potentially procreative - love. The steps remind her of "the Matterhorn" which is a "great honeymoon resort" (184).

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The play is as preoccupied with abortion and sterility as it is with living off-spring. When Mrs Rooney asks after Mr Tyler's daughter he answers her with a grimly comic
euphemism: "Fair, fair. They removed everything, you know, the whole...er...bag of tricks. Now I am grandchildless." (174) It is not clear whether an abortion is meant, or a hysterectomy, like the "panhysterectomy at nine" so pivotal in *Embers* (CDW 263). The former may seem more likely given Mr Tyler's remark about being "now [...] grandchildless"; though he may mean merely 'a confirmed non-grandfather' and a hysterectomy fits with Mrs Rooney's self-description (on the same page) as "hysterical".

The punctured tyre has a cryptic significance as a displaced image of abortion. It is no coincidence that it causes Mr Slocum to curse "the wet Saturday afternoon of my conception"(175). On the wet Saturday afternoon of the play Mrs Rooney is particular about the "balloon tyres" (177) of Mr Slocum's car, and that in itself is enough to suggest an image of pregnancy, especially after the pregnant woman in *Watt* with a belly "sticking out, like a balloon" (W 10). Then there is Mr Tyler's extraordinary outburst (so to speak) about his puncture:

Now if it were the front I should not so much mind. But the back. The back! The chain! The oil! The grease! The hub! The brakes! The gear! No! It is too much! (15)
This has what Leslie Hill calls a "mutually contaminating equivalence" in Mercier and Camier where Mr Conaire contemplates the pains of childbirth:

When I think what it means, said Mr Conaire. The torn flesh! The pretty crutch in tatters! The screams! The blood! The glair! The afterbirth! He put his hand before his eyes. The afterbirth! he groaned. (MC 53)

Tatters of torn flesh and bloody mess are not confined to birth-scenarios. It would seem that Mrs Rooney's warning, "you'll tear your tube to ribbons", itself a motherly admonishment, is somehow subliminally connected in the play to the preoccupation with the ruins consequent, not upon childbirth, but upon hysterectomy or abortion.

An abortion may be the something "Done long ago and ill-done" (174) mentioned by Mrs Rooney in her quotation from John Ford's The Lover's Melancholy, a play not coincidentally about lost children. Yet it seems an event she cannot put behind her - "So long ago...No! No!" (174) - a termination that is peculiarly unending. Thus it seems to be cryptically re-enacted within the play.

Mr Rooney's (implied) killing of the child on the track may itself be a compulsive repetition of the act of abortion. His bald question - the question at the centre of
the play: "Did you ever wish to kill a child?" (191) - is rephrased in such a way as to imply, not so much murder, but pre-emptive abortion: "Nip some young doom in the bud". "Doom" is a pointed variant on the apparently more fitting "bloom". The child as budding flower in and from the womb is an image used by Beckett before, as we have seen. In Whoroscope, Descartes' daughter is the "fruit of a [...] foetus" and an "exfoliation" (CP 2) and in Watt Kate "conceived and brought forth Rose" (W 100). But since, in Beckett, "birth [is] the death of him" (CDW 425) a child is doomed from the start: "[...] the backing of a loser, the birth of a child [...]" (W 52). In short "it is suicide to be abroad" (CDW 175). The horticultural 'nipping in the bud' indicates the termination of a budding foetus, rather than the killing of a child who has already flourished.

As Donald Davie points out in the review already cited (155), Mrs. Rooney "is a sort of parody of Molly [Bloom], grieving, as Molly did for her dead son, over a dead daughter." Mr Rooney's "doom" is thus a pointed variant on the Joycean Bloom. (It is no coincidence that in Ulysses Bloom's contraceptive "rubber preservative" is euphemistically labelled "Killchild".26)
When Mrs Rooney gets aboard Mr Slocum's car, a comically awkward manoeuvre that is accompanied by sound effects suggestive of intercourse, she exclaims "My frock! You've nipped my frock!" (178, my emphasis). She goes on to ask "what will [Dan] say when he feels the hole?" (178). This is partly lewd innuendo, suggesting a virginity test; but by figuring Mr Rooney as a doubting Thomas this also turns "the hole" into a wound matching that later attributed to Mr Rooney: "you might fall on your wound" (190). It is surely the kind of wound received when you nip a child in the bud by removing "the whole [...] bag of tricks" (174), and it is a psychological wound too; Freud described the melancholia, which he linked to mourning, as being "like an open wound".27 This is a mournful play that not only "gazes..." into the void" (178), but also more movingly "feels the hole" left by absent children. That Mrs Rooney continually "feels the hole" left by her lost child partly accounts for her "wild laughter" (177) when Mr Slocum asks "Have you a pain in the stomach?" (177). More significantly Mrs Rooney later feels the hole in her dress at just the moment in Mr Rooney's narration that corresponds to the death of the child on the line:
Mr Rooney: It was then I noticed that we were at a standstill. [Pause. Normal tone. Irritately.] Why are you hanging out of me like that? Have you swooned away?

Mrs Rooney: I feel very cold and faint. The wind - [Whistling wind.] - is whistling through my summer frock as if I had nothing on over my bloomers. I have had no solid food since my elevenses. (194)

Mrs Rooney reverts to the condition of an infant ("nothing on over my bloomers", "no solid food") at just the moment when she is thinking - though not speaking, for it is "unspeakably excruciating" to her - of her own non-bloomer, her absent child.

The wound had earlier been reopened when Miss Fitt described her as "a big pale blur": "You have piercing sight, Miss Fitt [...] literally piercing" (183). That invasiveness, once again, hints at abortion. Yet Mrs Rooney had just described herself as "a once female shape" (182), intimating, beyond the comic self-deprecation, that she has lost her figure through childbirth. In fact there are a number of indications in the play that Mrs Rooney has borne children - chiefly her response to her husband's reference to "the feeling of being confined": "Yes yes, I have been through that." (195) Perhaps, then, her daughter Minnie was not aborted but died as a child; perhaps, like the child who
fell from the train, she died not "at the terminus", but "on the line" (191).

It may be, however, that Mrs Rooney's sympathy with the condition of being confined is a result, not of childbirth, but of a more recent confinement, perhaps in a mental institution. Mr Tyler's memorable remark, "Ah in spite of all it is a blessed thing to be alive in such weather, and out of hospital." (176) is more than the casual joke it might seem out of context. It is given real significance by the way that Mrs Rooney is treated as a convalescent. Mr Tyler says "[...] it's nice to see you up and about again. You were laid up there a long time" (180) and Mrs Rooney remarks that "they [are] genuinely pleased...to see me again...looking so well [...]" (182). Embittered by her day she says "I should not be out at all! I should never leave the grounds!"(182). The implication may be that Mrs. Rooney has recently been confined to a home owing to the psychological wound inflicted long ago either by an abortion, a hysterectomy, or the death of a child.

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As "a lady in her seventies" (171) Mrs Rooney is often
comically at odds with the play's cryptic copulation. Mounting Mr Slocum's car she emits noises more appropriate to intercourse — "Oh!...[Giggles.] Oh glory!...Up! Up!...Ah!" (178) — but her remark ostensibly designed to forestall his embarrassment also registers the inappropriate nature of that activity: "[w]e're past the age when..." (178). Mr Slocum is "stiff" (178), not because he is virile, but more likely because he is arthritic; Mrs Rooney, herself "heaving" (178) with "fat" (174,191) and not sexual excitement, acknowledges Mr Slocum's innuendo with a remark that simultaneously and punningly confirms his impotence: "[t]he dry old reprobate!" (178). (Her description of Mr Slocum as "my old admirer" (177) means he is both an ex-admirer and an aged one.) Similarly, the dismounting from Mr Slocum's car, which is staged as a kind of birth —"[c]rouch down, and get your head in the open" (179-80); "[a]m I out?" (180) — is accompanied by Mrs Rooney's telling protestation: "Crouch down! At my time of life!" (180).

Sex is never far from Mrs Rooney's thoughts; but her desire is always inflected with a regretful acknowledgement of its impossibility, owing to her aged condition. "I am
tired of light old hands on my shoulders and other senseless places" (175). That is nicely balanced between yearning and resignation, depending on one's reading of the ambiguous "senseless"; is Mrs Rooney expressing the wish to be touched on her erogenous zones - "Enough my old breasts feel his old hand" (CSP 144) - or stating the futility (that is, the senselessness, for her) of erotic play? Because Mrs Rooney wants to "kiss" her husband (CDW 188) she may, as he supposes, have "taken leave of [her] senses" (188), but she shows that her senses have not (quite) taken leave of her. (He fears their aged kissing will provoke squeamishness - not wanting to kiss "[i]n public [...o]n the platform [...blefore the boy" (188). She then turns to the boy and enquires "[h]ow is your poor father?" (188), as though distracted from the incipient how's-yer-father with Dan by thoughts of the boy's progenitor.)

In his review of the play Donald Davie remarks that "Beckett avoids the easy dishonesty of presenting Mrs. Rooney's indomitable carnality as a panacea" (160). One reason that her indomitable carnality is no panacea (and is moreover more than just carnality) is that it signals a desperately thwarted urge to procreate. (That is another
reason why Mrs Rooney is a parody of the altogether more fecund Molly Bloom.) Mrs Rooney's notorious plea for love administered "twice daily" - "a little love, daily, twice daily, fifty years of twice daily love like a Paris horse-butcher's regular" (174) - may seem to be only a typical piece of Beckettian cynicism, reducing love to the act of sexual intercourse. But the plea is significantly placed immediately after her statement about her "childlessness" and her first mournful cry to "[l]ittle Minnie" (174). As we have already seen, it is her maternal feelings for Mr Tyler that provoke her invitation to him to "come back and unlace me behind the hedge" (177). Despite the innuendo, something more conjugal than mere carnality is implied on that occasion by the simultaneous sound of "Venus birds! Billing in the woods [...]" (177) She first hears "the cooing of the ringdoves" (176) just when she is apparentlywhelmed in grief about Minnie - when, that is, "it all came over me again" (176). Similar maternal feelings inspired by Miss Fitt lead to her implicitly nostalgic remark - and one that less kindly ribs Miss Fitt's spinsterhood - about the Matterhorn being a "great honeymoon resort" (184).
Such are the indirections and sublimations of this play that even apparently destructive wishes may conceal opposing feelings. Mrs. Rooney's unexpectedly morbid enthusiasm about the prospect of an accident on the line - "A collision! Oh that would be wonderful" - (186) may well signal a veiled wish for a child, for what Beckett elsewhere describes as "[...] new life [...] the fruit of a collision" (DFMW 117). Sexual puns, after all, abound at the station where, "the up-mail" arrives - "she's coming" - with a "clash of couplings" (187).

* "Can hinnies procreate?" (196) The answer is (ordinarily) no. Under the entry "Mule", the Oxford English Dictionary informs us that a hinny, the technical name for "the off-spring of a she-ass and a stallion" (more commonly called a mule) "is ordinarily incapable of reproduction". Mrs Rooney's apparently abstruse enquiry is at the centre of a complicated set of "mutually contaminating equivalences" within the play. Kristin Morrison has written that the question comes as a "sudden apparently illogical but psychologically clear leap" from Mrs Rooney's previous remarks which, as she points out, are all related to the
Thus Mrs Rooney begins with an image that modifies the topos of seasonal renewal into one of incremental decay: she speaks of "rotting leaves" - "in June?", Mr Rooney queries - "from last year, and from the year before last, and from the year before that again" (196). Then she notices, for the second time in the play, "that lovely laburnum again" (196), only this time the laburnum is a "[p]oor thing [...] losing all its tassels" (196). The first time she had noticed "that lovely laburnum" (174) had been immediately following her mention of her "childlessness" (174), her first mournful cry of "Minnie! Little Minnie!" (174) and her plea for "twice-daily love" (174). The laburnum is thus associated with botched reproduction, and of course its lost tassels, as Kristin Morrison indicates, are its reproductive organs. Noticing "the first drops" of rain, Mrs Rooney then speaks of "Golden drizzle" (196) and thus refers cryptically to Jove's procreative shower "somewhat abated" (in Morrison's phrase, after Swift). So the question about the procreative power of hinnies, coming after a sequence of allusions to reproductive failure, which itself follows hard upon the story of the girl who "had never been really born" (196),
has its subliminal logic.

Mrs Rooney elaborates her question - "aren't they barren, or sterile, or whatever it is?" - before apparently changing direction in her thoughts about hinnies: "It wasn't an ass's colt at all, you know, I asked the Regius Professor [...] Yes, it was a hinny, he rode into Jerusalem, or wherever it was on a hinny. (Pause.) That must mean something." (197) What it might mean is that scriptural authority is unreliable, a point reiterated in the following remark about the fact that "the sparrows, than many of which we are of more value, [...] weren't sparrows at all." (197) and in the derision with which the couple react to the verse about "the Lord uphold[ing] all that fall" (198) Yet perhaps, in view of the preceding logical sequence, what it crucially means for Christ to have ridden on a hinny has more to do with procreation. The Son of God did not ride on the colt of an ass, but on a hinny incapable of producing offspring and thus incapable of fathering a living tradition connecting us with the events of the Gospels. Mrs Rooney suspects the scriptures are false, whereas she remarks elsewhere that "[t]hat was a true donkey. Its father and mother were donkeys" (190).
Given the play's pre-occupation with hinnies and their relations, it is slightly obtuse of Donald Davie to describe Mrs Rooney's remark about her "life-long preoccupation with horses' buttocks" (195) as "gratuitous zaniness" (Davie, 158). Pace Davie, the joke can "afford to fall flat" (158) precisely because it is much more than a joke.

Mrs Rooney first meets a hinny at the very beginning of the play when she recognises Christy because of it: "I thought the hinny was familiar" (172). During the ensuing conversation the hinny gets a little too familiar:

Mrs Rooney: Mercy! What was that?
Christy: Never mind her, Ma'am, she's very fresh in herself today. (173)

The hinny's friskiness reminds Mrs Rooney that for her part she is less then "fresh in herself"; where she had previously shown some sign of interest in the "dung" (173) offered by Christy - "I'll ask the master" (173) - she now asks bitterly, "Dung? What would we want with dung at our time of life?" (173) The aged Mrs Rooney has no more use for fertiliser. 30

Mrs Rooney says she saw "one of these new mind doctors [...] hoping he might shed a little light on my lifelong preoccupation with horses' buttocks" (195). After she has
described the lecture, however, Mr Rooney thinks she has been short-changed: "Nothing about your buttocks?" (195). But Beckett often writes about birth as though it were a difficult anal expulsion, and so her fixation may have some relation to the doctor's story about the girl who had "never been really born" (195). This is also implied by Mrs Rooney's insistence that the doctor she saw was not, as her husband supposes "a lunatic specialist" but a specialist of "the troubled mind" (195). "Trouble" had previously been associated with distress over offspring: "Can't you see I'm in trouble? [...] Minnie! Little Minnie!" (176); "[...] all her troubles over. [...] All the laying and the hatching." (179). If Mrs Rooney was troubled by horses' buttocks, it is because they are subliminally connected with her other troubles.

Beckett's first novel had opened with a chapter in which his own preoccupation with horses' buttocks is evident and which prefigures the setting of All That Fall in many of its details:

Behold Belacqua an overfed child pedalling, faster and faster, his mouth ajar and his nostrils dilated, down a frieze of hawthorn after Findlater's van, faster and faster till he cruise alongside of the hoss, the black fat wet rump the hoss. Whip him up, vanman, flickem, flapem, collopwallop fat Sambo.
Stiffly, like a perturbation of feathers, the tail arches for a gush of mard. Ah...! (DFMW 1)

There the slapstick of the horse's excretion is represented as a climactic release. The association of being born with being shat upon is plausibly connected to the Beckettian fantasy of anal birth, and this displaced birth-scenario is comparable to the one in *Watt* where, just after Tetty's narrative about the birth of her son, Watt emerges from a bus like a "roll of tarpaulin" (W 14). ("Just prop me up [...] like a roll of tarpaulin", echoes Mrs. Rooney in *All That Fall* [CDW 185].) It is comparable also to the constipated "heave! ho! heave! ho!" that is an analogy to birth in *First Love* (CSP 4), and to the memory of being "born with a pop" in "Sanies I" (CP 17). "With a yo heave ho, concentrating with all my might on a horse's rump, at the moment when the tail rises [...]" (T 305): thus the Unnamable reiterates this callipygous preoccupation with going through the motions. 31

*All That Fall* is, like the excerpt from *Dream*, and like, for instance, 'Sanies I', *kinetic* - but (unlike the poem) only intermittently so. Part of the play's peculiar tone is due to the fact that the tension created by the need to get to the station before it is too "late" (173,175) is
set against a "torpid" (192) air created by the seemingly leisurely pauses on the way. Like Mrs Rooney, the play keeps getting "stuck" (179,184). So when Christy, like the "vanman" in Dream, urges his hinny onwards - "Yep! [Pause. Louder.] Yep wiyya to hell owwa that!" (173) - she "does not move a muscle" (173). Unlike the "hoss" in the novel, this hinny is (in every sense) motionless.

Mrs Rooney identifies with this "familiar" hinny, whose intransigence - she is stubborn as a mule - reminds her that "I too should be getting along" (173) Mrs Rooney advises Christy to "give her a good welt on the rump" (173) and when he does so she exclaims "Well! If someone were to do that for me I should not dally!" (173) This is more than the comic innuendo of indomitable carnality; the hinny had previously reminded Mrs Rooney of her ruined condition, and now she is momentarily reinvigorated with a sexual frisson. The "preoccupation with horses' buttocks" is not "gratuitous zaniness"; connected as it is with the urgent need for motion, it indicates the sublimated desire to give and be given birth.
So what are Samuel Beckett's family values?

My title is meant partly as a joke: few authors could seem less likely to subscribe to the pious convictions suggested by a phrase which, as political propaganda, has a certain regrettable topicality in these times. Nevertheless, I hope to have shown how Beckett's project is something other than merely to mock and sneer at time-honoured notions of humanity within a consoling familial continuity. Certainly he puts them under considerable critical pressure, and they are sometimes found wanting, but his scepticism - which is distinct from, and should not be confused with, a tactically deployed and rhetorical cynicism - countenances the wholesale rejection of values no more than a wholehearted affirmation of them. Indeed the rigour of his examination of traditional pieties - about the value of continuity, procreation and fertility -
is in one sense a mark of his respect for their tenability.

Beckett finds in regenerative repetition and continuity both something to lament and something to be consoled by; similarly he finds the transience of the individual life a matter of relief, but also for elegaic regret. The prodigious profusion of life on earth, and in history, is for him both a torture and a comfort. If he often imagines such life in terms of horrifying excess, such imaginings are almost always infused with a comic zest which hints at a more welcoming attitude. Humanity at large - the family of man (and by evolutionary extension, and the "loss of species" [W 82; HII 29], of animals too) - provides a context which confers meaning, and though such meaning is always likely, under close scrutiny, to be disappointingly inadequate, the disappointment is again frequently registered in a comic key that suggests geniality and good grace more than cynicism.

Beckett's feelings about the family's smaller units are also equivocal rather than dismissive.

With the family there passes away, while the system lasts, not only the most effective agency of the bourgeoisie, but also the resistance which, though repressing the individual, also strengthened, perhaps even produced him.
For Beckett, as here for Theodor Adorno, the family is first renounced as an agent and purveyor of a pernicious homogeneity and then belatedly, perhaps reluctantly, but sometimes fondly acknowledged as an inevitable, useful, and sometimes benign structure which engenders and contains it.

For Beckett families are partly rigid structures to be escaped from, but they are also durable and vital structures to be affiliated to and adopted by: existence outside them, at any rate, is finally unimaginable. Watt, Clov and Sapo, all seek - if often warily - adoption into a household, and Beckett too, as I argued in my first chapter, often seeks to affirm affiliative as well as filial relations with his fellow creatures.

Beckett’s work generously acknowledges a life lived "among others" (CSP 201). Although the isolation of the individual mind is depicted with unflinching accuracy in Beckett’s work, such isolation is generally figured as "company", and not as solipsism, and "company" - the state of being either in an affiliative partnership (the pseudocouple) or more complicatedly "gathered together for life" (CSP 71) even when alone, is itself modelled on
familial patterns and memories. (*Company* is about "one lying on his back in the dark" - alone, but also accompanied by the memory of others, not least the shade of the father.) Beckett rarely imagines solitude without a sense of others being there too - even when those others are other parts of the self - and other people are a comfort in Beckett at least as much as a torture.

Contrary to the arguments of Edward Said, Fredric Jameson and Tony Pinkney, Beckett emphasises, sometimes affirmatively, the filial as well as the affiliative relations between the generations. Moreover, despite the facade of cynicism and phobia, Beckett's writing registers an awed fascination with the unstoppable regenerative processes of a strenuously "clonic" earth (CP 23), and a human family that is, as a consequence, always "All at once over and in train and to come" (NO 27) In spite of the recognition that in one sense a new life can only be a repetition of inevitable suffering and folly, Beckett's writing is often animated and quickened by the very newness of incipient life and is inflected, especially in later years, by a plangent wistfulness about possible future lives.
As well as an intermittent desire for regression to the womb - more often attributable to the characters in the work than to the author of it - Beckett's own writing also manifests an eagerness to find issue, to get itself born. Informed by a principle of incipience and new starts, the writing is always regenerating itself (with each new sentence, paragraph, strophe or work) in a ceaseless process of renewal that strives always for perfection: "No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better." (NO 101) The late work, in particular, is calmly unwearied by repetition, and particularly alive to the new moments of impetus available within it. Where the earlier work had espoused a world of "nothing new" (M 5), the later work is more generous in its sense that "even olden things each time are first things, no two breaths the same" (CSP 135). In Company, which asserts repetition as much as ever - "Days other than today and so akin"; "So many times already round the earth" (NO 11;18) - determinism is mitigated by a generous sense of new possibilities, as in the nativity passage where an incipient life is about to "set out anew" (NO 11). The writing is always ready to "strike out and away" (NO 28), quickened by possible new directions: "As if bound for Stepaside. [...]
suddenly you cut through the hedge and vanish hobbling east across the gallops" (NO 19)² Undaunted by countless starts "from nought anew" (NO 30), the late work urges itself "somehow on" (NO 121), and is always imagining new lives, as well as the passing away of old ones.

Beckett's plays and novels aver a need for children: his characters are always inclined to invent them in order to explain and explore themselves through fictional surrogates. If children are needed in order to facilitate the continuation of stories as well as of families, they should nevertheless not be dismissed as 'mere fictions'; the manifestation in the writing of the pressing "need to seem to glimpse" (ASWT 134) new lives, is evidence of something more than the need to have something to talk about. The very nature of the child itself is closely examined.

For Beckett the child - so disdained and loathed on one rhetorical level - is a crucial image identified with in several ways. The child is representative of a vulnerable and diminutive - if also sometimes verminous - humanity, orphaned but resourceful. The parenting of children - an activity closely observed in Beckett's work - becomes a crucial image. In the absence of a caring deity, Beckett's
writing itself manifests an exemplary diligence in monitoring human life and paying attention to its every detail; there is an unwillingness to pass over or let anything be unnoticed or un-noted, or otherwise "lost for tininess" (T 277). Beckett's work advocates and avers the nurturing of little things, and manifests a perental and watchful eye, as well as a cruelly scrutinising one. Beckett's writing is "always on the alert", if sometimes, in its more defensive moments, "against itself" (CSP 131). The child as object of care and carelessness, at once cherished and disdained, mirrors the status of Beckett's own work in its author's critical and scrutinising eye.

Beckett - not in fact a parent himself - has evidently watched children very carefully. The variety of modes in which they are represented in the writing, and the diversity of responses to them, testifies to this, and evinces a generously accommodating sense of their complexity and not a narrow cynicism or dogmatism. Children in Beckett are in many ways exemplary figures: calm but fastidious, they are models of grace and finesse - both simple and somehow "expert" (M 88). If they are also elusive, knowing, and opaque, their inaccessibility and incommunicativeness are
the very things with which Beckett's adults feel a strange affinity. The child in Beckett is sometimes unexpectant and patiently serene, but at other times an image of fretfulness, or desperate and insatiable need. Despite the anti-birth rhetoric, the work also expresses profound regret about the absence of children: children are conventionally, and movingly, mourned for.

Childhood itself is both mourned as irretrievably lost and sealed off, and warmly embraced as an imaginatively accessible and comforting resource. An early tendency to disdain childhood and childishness is later revised in a more imaginatively accepting mode. Thus the prodigal son motif, so prominent, but heavily ironised in the early work (DFMW 145; CP 18; CP 44) finds its fulfilment in the latter part of the oeuvre which, with Company for instance, constitutes to some extent a return to the family.

That novel and its companion, Worstward Ho, pick up and develop the iconic image, from Enough, of the old man and the child walking in tandem - "The as one plodding twain" (NO 110), "Joined by held holding hands" (NO 105). It is a poignant and restrained image of reciprocation and trust, solemn but not grim. As an image of the contact between old
and young lives as they move forward together, it indicates the comfort and consolation to be drawn from continuity - across generations, and across an individual span of life.

I shall end, as seems appropriate, with a passage from Beckett that illustrates many of my concluding remarks. It comes from one of the Texts for Nothing where the speaker recalls a childhood ritual in which - "every evening" the father recited a story - always the same story, a winter's "tale for children", itself about a father and a son (CSP 74). In his current uncertain situation the speaker habitually tells himself the tale - playing both father and son. The passage - itself a retelling of an earlier version (CSP 37) - is about the therapeutic effect of narrative, but might also be said to be about the comfort to be drawn from the faithful repetition, in the widest sense, of the same old family story.

Yes, I was my father and I was my son, I asked myself questions and answered them as best I could, I had it told to me evening after evening, the same old story I knew by heart and couldn't believe, or we walked together, hand in hand, silent, sunk in our worlds, each in his worlds, the hands forgotten in each other. That's how I've held out till now. And this evening again it seems to be working, I'm in my arms, I'm holding myself in my arms, without much tenderness, but faithfully, faithfully. (CSP 74)
1. The structure of the Trilogy, and of a larger series of the novels, is dynastic; "all these Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones" (T 217) - not to mention the Macmanns and Mahoods - sound like so many unwanted branches of an extended Irish family. The present thesis will not discuss these matters; they have already received useful attention in Leslie Hill's Beckett's Fiction. In Different Words (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Ch. 7, "Fables of Genealogy".


3. In recent years P.J. Murphy, in Reconstructing Beckett:
Language for Being in Samuel Beckett's Fiction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), Eyal Amiran, in Wandering and Home: Beckett's Metaphysical Narrative (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) and Paul Davies, in The Ideal Real: Beckett's Fiction and Imagination (Associated University Presses, 1994), have sought in different ways to re-align Beckett within a more positive and humanist tradition. I am indebted to these works whose projects are related to mine, though my own approach is sufficiently different to justify another attempt. An older book, Steven J. Rosen's Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1976), also deserves mention.


5. "I believe, with the uninstructed," writes Karl Miller, "that authors have personal lives which they communicate - but which, as on many occasions in their private capacity, they may not obtrude or display and may even dissemble - in the various kinds of writing that they produce." Authors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), v. Miller briefly discusses Watt and its biographical context (178-80). For more thoughts on these matters, see William Empson, Using Biography (London: Chatto & Windus, The Hogarth Press, 1984), which not only makes good use of biography, but has a
preface arguing rightly that "a student of literature ought to be trying all the time to empathise with the author" (viii). See also Empson's "Still the Strange Necessity", Sewanee Review, LXIII: 3, Summer 1955; reprinted in Argufyving: Essays on Literature and Culture, ed. John Haffenden (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), 120-128, especially 12-5 where Empson argues against W.K. Wimsatt's fallacy of Intentionalism: "a man must all the time be trying to imagine another man's mind; as soon as he stops that, he is off the rails" (125). Beckett, on two occasions, tried to imagine another man's mind by reading a great deal of biographical material; the men in question were René Descartes and Samuel Johnson.


7. Perhaps the best and livliest study of all - if also the most idiosyncratic - deserves special mention. In Beckett's Dying Words: The Clarendon Lectures, 1990 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) Christopher Ricks, perhaps more than any other critic, comes close to doing justice to Beckett's genius as a stylist.

PART I INTRODUCTION

2. Ibid., 116.
4. The World, the Text, and the Critic, 113.
5. Ibid., 17.
7. Ibid., 59, 60.
9. Ibid., 87.

CHAPTER ONE

1. The visit of the Galls, father and son, resembled all the incidents of note in Knott's house, we are told

   in the vigour with which it [...] gradually lost, in the nice processes of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal.
  Thus the scene in the music room, with the two Galls, ceased very soon to signify for Watt a piano tuned, an obscure family and professional relation, an exchange of judgements more or less intelligible, and so on [...] (W 69; my emphasis)

3. Ibid., 35. Pilling highlights the ambiguous status of the novel as both sui generis and 'classical' when he argues that it "has no real antecedents" but compares it to Candide and Rasselas. (39).
4. "'He has turned the corner', said Dr. Nye, but did not make it clear in what direction." "A Case in a Thousand", The Bookman, 86 (August 1934): 241-2.
6. John P. Harrington, The Irish Beckett, 109. Further references to this work in this paragraph will be identified parenthetically in the text.
7. The anagram is imperfect unless "Jasus" serves for Jesus. Thanks to Peter Swaab for pointing this out.
9. Like "Saposcat" (T 171) whose name combines wisdom with excrement, this man is painfully binary, and hence preoccupied with theological incorporation: if a rat "eats of a consecrated wafer... does he ingest the Real body...?" (25) See Leslie Hill, Beckett's Fiction, ch. 2 passim.
10. Or a synonym, like 'Krapp'. Krapp talks about "my dust" and identifies himself wholly with his name: "...back here to me... Krapp" (CDW 217). "The tragedy of Krapp [...] is not that we become what we were not, but that we are now and evermore the same." (Leonard C. Pronko, Avant-Garde: The Experimental Theatre in France (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962) 51.) Beckett often affirms a fundamental materialism according to which bodies will be candidly "taken by the maggots for what they are" (CP 28).
11. See, for example, David Watson, Paradox and Desire in Samuel Beckett's Fiction, 28. Leslie Hill notes the funereal connotations of Watt's pot (Beckett's Fiction, 29) but draws different conclusions.
13. Compare Ohio Impromptu: "a man appeared to him and said, I have been sent [...] to comfort you" (CDW 447). The situation in that play, two men involved in the ritual telling of an inscrutable "sad tale", owes much to Watt.
17. ibid. 29.
18. ibid. 31. The list is unfinished because, as Connor cannily spots, one combination ('sang and stated and murmured') is missing.
20. ibid. 74.
23. In Mercier and Camier a donkey, accompanying a "ragged shaggy old man plodding along", "set with small steps its dainty dogged course" (MC 77; my emphasis). Cf. Molloy: "My eyes caught a donkey's eyes, they fell to his little feet, their brave fastidious tread." (T 26). Asinine clumsiness is averted, or redeemed, by diligence. Elsewhere in Watt it is Watt's "delicacies" that mitigate his "trasgression". "And perhaps this was counted to him for grace." (W 114)
25. In Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist Stephen has a vision of future generations going on into the world. "On and on and on and on" (186). Eric Griffiths, in a 1988 lecture at Cambridge, argued that this is both visionary and a gentle mockery of the visionary, Joyce partly distancing himself from the young man who is going on a bit.
26. The "crex-crex" of "the corncrake" Belacqua hears, is a "death-rattle" (MPTK 118-9); Molloy speaks elegiacally of "the awful cries of the corncrakes that run in the corn [...] all the short summer night long, dinning their rattles" (T 17). Michael Robinson points out that the corncrake is "the sacred bird of Artemis, goddess of birth" (The Long Sonata of the Dead, 157), but notes Beckett's mournful associations.
28. A draft version has this:

Let L be the life, E the experience and ltewfr the lamentable tale of error, waste, folly and ruin - then

ltewfr = L = L+E = L+2E = L+3E = L+(n-1)E = n(2L+(n-1)E

30. "Life isn't such a bad old bugger", says Mr. Gorman (W 245). "[...] The object of Beckett's ridicule [...] is not 'life', but the tendency to formulate judgements about
life's quality, whether affirmative or negative." Steven Rosen, *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition*, 34.

31. Compare The End, where the narrator milks a cow: "The milk fell to the ground and was lost, but I said to myself, No matter, it's free." (CSP 61). "No matter, it's free" is what *All That Fall* might induce us to say about the child who is lost, but the play eschews this glib consolation.


33. Ecclesiastes 3:1,2.

34. In *That Time* "leaves turning" pertains to both books in a library and a an autumnal lovers' tryst (CDW 395).

35. In ironic allusion to Matthew 7:7-9 - "Ask, and it shall be given to you [ ... ] For [ ... ] what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" - Arsene advises: "If you want a stone, ask a turnover." (W 44)

36. Compare "Ooftish": "the things taken too late the things taken too soon" (CP 31). Lawrence Harvey discusses Beckett's "Theme of 'Too Late!'" in *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 186-8.

37. Arsene's list is actually confined to four generations who might conceivably be on the earth at the same time.

38. On Beckett's "residua" see Leslie Hill's *Beckett's Fiction: In Different Words*, chs. 2 and 8.

39. Compare: "The Lamberts [ ... ] There was the man, the woman and two children, a boy and a girl. There at least is something that admits of no controversy." (T 183)

40. A fellow refugee in Roussillon, where *Watt* was written, remembered the author's fixation with mothers: "Mothers of anything, dogs, cats, humans, anything!". *Samuel Beckett: A Biography*, 276.

41. Vladimir's song in *Godot* (CDW 52) reiterates the links between culinary waste, dogs, mortality, and infinite repetition - though repetition is represented there as hellishly cyclical rather than as burgeoning proliferation:


43. Elsewhere a bitch in labour exemplifies "this clonic earth" (CP 23); "dogs and children" are implicitly equated (DFMW 127); the post-coital paralysis of rutting dogs mirrors the pseudocouple's interdependence (MC 11); Molloy kills Lousse's dog, only to take its place as her "child" (T 32); Moran sympathetically imagines a dog, like him, "at the threshold" (T 147); Malone explains his decaying limbs with a canine analogy - "To old dogs the hour comes when, whistled by their master [ ... ] they cannot spring after him"
(T 176). In How It is a dog is connected to its owner by an implicitly umbilical "leash" (HII 32), and is analogous to the human couple: "it had the same notion at the same instant" (HII 33).

44. William Empson, The Structure of Complex Words (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951; republished, London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), Chapter 7: "The English Dog". References to this work in the following paragraphs will be given parenthetically in the text.


46. The rutting dogs in Mercier and Camier illustrate the point, although the post-coital paralysis that leaves them interminably "tied together" (MC 15) suggests that loose sex is not incompatible with what Molloy describes lewdly as a "tight fit" (T 54).

47. The dog, as Empson acknowledges, is partly famed for its servile nature (cf. Clov's "Your dogs are here" [CDW 111]) and Watt's dogs are biddable and compliant. There is nevertheless in the dog what Empson calls "the paradox of the independence of a specially dependent creature" (166). 48. "Censorship in the Saorstat", written in 1935.

49. The Lynch's uncouth youth invade All That Fall: "the Lynch twins jeering" (CDW 191). "They never lynch children [...]", regrets another narrator. (CSP 26)

50. I have omitted distracting page references in this and the following lists: many individuals crop up several times.


56. "I was fighting against the Germans, who were making life hell for my friends, and not for the French nation." Samuel Beckett: A Biography, 262.

57. Strictly speaking, "in front" and "behind" are spatial terms in How It is, but the "procession" is implicitly temporal too.
57. Unlike the egalitarian quasi-Darwinism of How It Is, "Christianity requires a sharp distinction between the creatures with eternity before them and those without." (William Empson, The Structure of Complex Words, 172). Beckett wryly mocks this when Malone speaks of Lambert and "the pig he had dispatched, I would say into the other world if I was not aware that pigs have none but this" (T 184). Cf. "no a beast here no the soul is de rigueur the mind too a minimum of each otherwise too great an honour" (HII 15). 59. "mad or worse transformed a la Haeckel" (HII 47). For Haeckel "the embryo was held to recapitulate (or condense) the development of the species to which it belonged."

Cf. "no a beast here no the soul is de rigueur the mind too a minimum of each otherwise too great an honour" (HII 15).


60. Darwin's Plots, 63, 66. Further references to this work in this section will be given parenthetically in the text.

61. George Herbert, "Man"; the poem is cited and discussed in Darwin's Plots, 19-20.


CHAPTER TWO

9. Typescript, Reading University Beckett Archive, MS. 1227/7/16/7.
10. On page 14 of the typescript.
15. See Haerdter's diary; ibid., e.g. 214, 230.
16. Remembered by Haerdter; ibid., 208. Beckett increased the verbal echo in the light of the German productions. See Revised Text in Theatrical Notebooks, Vol II.
17. Compare Théodor Adorno, who admired Beckett, and wrote an essay on Endgame:

Even the outdated, inconsistent, self-doubting ideas of the older generation are more open to dialogue than the slick stupidity of Junior. Even the neurotic oddities and deformities of our elders stand for character, for something humanly achieved, in comparison to pathic health, infantilism raised to the norm. One realises with horror that earlier, opposing one's parents because they represented the world, one was often secretly the mouthpiece, against a bad world, of one even worse.

19. In an interview with Patrick Magee; Beckett in the Theatre, 177.
20. King Lear IV.i.36-7. The other references to the play in this paragraph are at III.iv.105; III.iv.30; and IV.vi.3.
21. In The Long Sonata of the Dead, 266ff. See also William Hutchings' "'As Strange a Maze As E'er Man Trod': Samuel Beckett's Allusions to Shakespeare's Last Plays", in Past Crimson, Past Woe, 3-14.
22. The Tempest, ed. F. Kermode, Arden edition (London:
443

23. ibid. I.ii.33-5.
25. At I.ii.55.
30. Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (Fontana, 1976) 136.
33. Beckett in the Theatre, 15; "one must make a world of one's own in order to satisfy [...] one's need for order [...] There, for me, lies the value of the theatre." This echoes Clov's desire "to create a little order" (120) which expresses itself in a penchant for housework. Compare Beckett's comment to Rosette Lamont in 1983: "When I was working on Watt I felt the need to create for a smaller space [...]" (Beckett in the Theatre, 15.)
34. This might be added to the discussion about Beckett's use of the phrase "the last ditch". (See James Mays, "Young Beckett's Irish Roots"; and John Harrington, The Irish Beckett, 75-6.) Asked to account for Irish literary successes Beckett remarked, "when you're in the last ditch, there is nothing left but to sing." It is, as Harrington notes, "a phrase often suggestive of certainty and gallantry given connotations of failure and resignation." See MPTK 34 and 174; and W 31-4.
35. Watt may be a commentary on the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy 'Big House' tradition: see The Irish Beckett, 109-142.
36. MS 1227/7/7/1.
37. See Eygal Amirian, Wandering and Home, 155: "Hamm, the tormentor, controls the home, as his name suggests [...] Clov, the tormented, is the subject that tries to leave but cannot, and remains poised on the threshold [...] His name suggests his dilemma: "cleave", "clove", from the Old
English *clofan*, means "to cut with a blow", while the word's other root, OE *clifan*, means "to cling."  
40. Haedter's diary; *Beckett in the Theatre*, 211.  
42. *The Irish Beckett*, 148.  
43. Cf. "The man has not yet come home. Home." (T 176); "All you had to do was stay at home. Home." (CSP 71); "At this rate it will be black night before she reaches home. Home!" (NO 70); "one evening on the way home...Home!" (CDW 380)  
44. *Beckett's Fiction*, 86.  
49. This draft, now in Ohio, is described in *Theatrical Notebooks*, Vol.II, 57, and in Ruby Cohn's *Just Play*, 178ff.  
50. Genesis 8:21-2  
54. Genesis 7:21, 8:19.  
56. "Beckett is the first dramatist of the space-age. In

57. Resurrection is raised again at the end of the French text when Hamm suggests that the child may be leaning against "la pierre levée". (FP 104).

58. Of course "nothing is funnier than unhappiness" (100). Cf. "the laugh that laughs [...] at that which is unhappy" (W 46).


60. In the French text Hamm remarks of the child later glimpsed through the telescope: "Il regarde la maison, sans doute, avec les yeux de Moïse mourant." (FP 104) Although Hamm pictures the child dying, and therefore posing no procreative threat, the comparison with Moses merely serves to make Hamm's household itself the locus of potential incipience. Unable to make the short walk to the promised land Moses had to settle for the thought that in the long run it would be peopled by a multitude in transports of joy.
CHAPTER THREE

2. Cf. *Watt* : "life begins to ram its fish and chips down your gullet until you puke [...]" (43).
7. *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition* 34.
9. "Eleutheria" was successfully aborted during Beckett's life, but less so subsequently.
12. Ibid., 176.
14. Christopher Ricks, "William Empson: The Images and the Story", in *The Force of Poetry*, 189. The essay as a whole is apposite to the present discussion. In Beckett's *Dying Words* (41-2) Ricks notes that the examination of traditional cliches about dying reflects ethical debates about modern medical developments. Compare his revaluation of the ethics of fertility.

19. The scene partly alludes to Hamlet's graveside musings:

   Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of
   infinite jest [...] He hath bore me on his back a
thousand times, and now - how abhorred in my
imagination it is. Here hung those lips that I have
kissed I know not how oft. Where be your jibes now
[...]?


20. "On the Sufferings of the World", 87. Cf. "To saddle me with a lifetime is probably not enough [...] I have to be given a taste of two or three generations." (T 303).


24. The title From An Abandoned Work describes not only the text's status as unfinished fragment, but also the provenance of the monologue that comprises that text (compare "From the Only Poet to a Shining Whore"): the narrator is an abandoned work too. Krapp's childless condition is not explicit, but the family scenario described as an alternative to his predicament indicates Beckett's consciousness of it. Being "widowed" (Theatre Workbook 1: 85), Krapp is abandoned or remaineder; his voice and bony frame are remnants like Echo's. Dreaming of his childhood, he wishes to "be again" (CDW 223); but his world is unpeopled - "the earth might be uninhabited" (221) - he having created nothing more than his "opus... magnum" (218) to trickle through it.
25. The horse is "[...] what the Germans call a Schimmel, oh I was very quick as a boy and picked up a lot of hard knowledge [...]" (CSP 130) See Theodor Storm's 1888 novella, Der Schimmelreiter.

26. Compare these thoughts on children:

Mr Coleridge observed there was scarce any being who looked upon the beautiful face of an infant, that did not feel a strong sensation - it was not pity, it was not the attraction of mere loveliness; it was a sense of melancholy; for himself, he always when viewing an infant, found a tear a candidate for his eye. What could be the cause of this? It was not that its innocency, its perfectness [...] was like a flower to pass away. [It was rather the] thought, doubtlessly felt by everyone - if he could begin his career again, if he could recover that innocency once possessed, and connect it with virtue [...] Report on Coleridge's lecture on education in The Bristol Gazette, November 1813. Cited by Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 89.


30. Translated from the French Pour finir encore, with a peculiarly literal rendering of the infinitive construction, and the addition of the intensifying "yet".


32. Both Collected Shorter Plays (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1984) and Complete Dramatic Works wrongly give "never really been born!".


34. Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, 247.


39. Cf. "[...] there's a true one in pickle, among the unborn hordes, the true sepulchral body" (CSP 105). Faith in putative "true" ones who are (or will be) more properly born may seem uncharacteristic, and indeed they are soon brushed aside as: "junk [...1 all dead with words" (CSP 105). Nevertheless in 1961-2 Beckett spoke in comparable terms of faith in a possible future: "there is a form, but it doesn't move, stand upright, have hands. Yet it must have its form. Being has a form. Someone will find it someday. Perhaps I won't, but someone will." *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 249, (my emphasis).


41. *Frescoes of the Skull*, 54, 55.
CHAPTER FOUR

2. On the "mockery" of Murphy, and "the risk of taking him too seriously", see D 102.
4. The fullest commentary on this poem is by Lawrence Harvey in *Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic*, 138-50; he notes that rhythmically "the most obvious contrast is between lines that introduce periods of vigorous pedaling (3,10,16,42) and others that indicate moments of fatigue when the rider coasts along or has dismounted (9, 33,38,45)." (141). See also D.Hesla, *The Shape of Chaos* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).
6. Cf. *Eleuthéria*: "You are around [...] like a sort of ooze. Like a sanies [...]" (E 81)
7. The prodigal son - "un enfant/prodigue à sa façons" (CP 44) - and, less specifically, "the return" (NO 30; cf. CSP 74, 34) constitute recurring motifs in Beckett. "It was [...] the return, to what no matter, the return, unscathed, always a matter for wonder" (CSP 77). See also "Dieppe" (CP 51; and cf. W 38) and the rondeau, "Roundelay", (CP 35).
12. Cf. "Enough of acting the infant who has been told so often how he was found under a cabbage [...]" (T 297).
14. James Hansford pointed out to me the misprint for "impassible". See *The Expelled and Other Novellas*
Thomas Hardy and British Poetry (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 33. I am arguing that, in these terms, First Love's irony is "strategic" while Company's is "cosmic".
21. E.g. "the years have flown" (NO 32); "a moment later that seems an eternity" (NO 33).
22. "So many since dawn to add to yesterday's. To yesteryear's. To yesteryears'. [...] The giant tot in miles. In leagues. How often round the earth already." (NO 11)
23. "The moon, with its periodic waxing and waning, seems to fit better [than the sun] into the mythological representation of the constantly renewed longing to return, and appears in myths not only directly as a pregnant woman and one giving birth, but also as the disappearing and returning child. The goddess of the moon is also of importance as giving help in birth (midwife), which is connected with her influence on menstruation." (The Trauma of Birth, 75.)
24. "Over [...] I love the word [...] Often [...] as I went along I have said it, and sometimes I would be saying vero, oh vero."(CSP 137). This emphasises the paradoxical continuity implicit in "over", its sense of going over and over. In Beckett's beloved cricket, "over!" signals both the end of an "over" but the beginning of another.
25. The exclamation in "Over!" may partly register dismay at a coming end; Company is a late work, from a childless
septuagenarian. Cf. Eric Griffiths on *Stirrings Still's* "Oh all to end" (ASWT 128). "The four monosyllables [...] express both a hope and a regret: 'if only the whole thing would be over', 'how sad that it should stop'. (*At Odds with Ends*)

PART III INTRODUCTION


CHAPTER FIVE


4. Both quotations – the first attributed merely to "Watts", the second from *Emile* – cited in *The Image of Childhood*, 44.

5. For example, Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671-2); *The Image of Childhood*, 44.


12. Janeway, A Token For Children (1671-2); cited in The Image of Childhood, 44.
15. Written in what Beckett described to Lawrence Harvey as a "syntax of weakness" (Samuel Beckett: Poet and Critic, 247-9) - in "midget grammar" (HII 84) - How It Is is a novel in which puniness leaps also to the ear.
20. The Image of Childhood, 165.
23. The Image of Childhood, 164-5.
24. Cf. lambs "springing into the world every minute." (MPTK 109)
26. Genesis 7:21. Murphy is described as "the creepy thing that creepeth"(M 121).
27. Compare the flatter French originals: "Ils sortaient de tous les coins" (FP 91); "Ah les gens, les gens, il faut tout leur expliquer" (FP 61).

30. For other stoopings, see CSP 63; NO 127. For three parallel moments of condescending conversational stoops towards children, see W 80; CSP 40; NO 13.

31. Three times the prose fiction (CSP 53; T 246; NO 8) describes a psychological and theological primal scene in which a child, enquiring about the appearance of the sky, receives a "cutting retort" (NO 8) from a mother who chooses not to stoop in reply.

32. "I am what her savage loving has made me." (Letter to Thomas M. Greevy, 6th October, 1937; Trinity College Dublin, Ms.10402.) A photograph of Beckett as a child, "whelmed in a nightshirt" and kneeling in front of his mother was taken c. 1908. It is reproduced in Samuel Beckett: A Biography. In Film the photographs examined by O. include one exactly like the scene described in How It Is, and another in which his mother's "severe eyes devour[... him" (CDW 333-4).


34. "The first microscopic observations were legends about small objects, and when the object was endowed with life, legends of life. Indeed one observer, still in the domain of naivete, saw human forms in 'spermatozoic animals'!" The Poetics of Space, 156.

35. Cf. "under [...] glass [...] suffer[ing] under that miserable light" (CSP 75).


37. Cf. Blake's "A Dream": the speaker sees "an Emmet" that had "lost its way/ Where on grass methought I lay", and fears for its bereft "children". The Complete Writings of William Blake, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) 111-2. For another possible source, see The Trauma of Birth, 152. Beckett's obsession with the "clasping" nurture of egg-like rubber balls is notable: see CSP 125; CDW 198; 220.


39. On Lamartine's "Un seul être vous manque, et tout est
40. Compare the seemingly callous notation of "human trait[s]" (CDW 281) in Rough For Radio II and Catastrophe.
41. George Steiner, Real Presences (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 155-6. Steiner gives no source. Cf. "Malebranche less the rosy hue the humanities I had" (HII 33); and see John Pilling, Samuel Beckett, 114-6.
43. "Sounds" (a draft for Still); Essays In Criticism 28, no.2 (1978) 155-6: 156.
45. Compare Beckett's allusion to "a passage in Leibnitz [...] where he compares matter to a garden of flowers or a pool of fish, and every flower another garden of flowers and every corpuscle of every fish another pool of fish [...]" (DFMW 47).
48. In the four volumes of Theatrical Notebooks, for instance.

CHAPTER SIX

1. The Making of the Reader, chapter 1, passim.
3. Cf. The Expelled: "One should reserve [...] special tracks for [...] their prams, hoops, sweets, scooters, skates [...] balloons and balls" (CSP 26).
4. Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction, C.A. Hackett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 32. The narrator's experiences are more than once compared with a child's: not only is he "blanker than the brain of a child" (CP 127) but the water seeps into his hull "more firmly bland than to children apples' firm pulp" (CP 127).
5. Beckett completed the translation in 1932, but it was begun some years earlier. (See editor's note, CP 177-8)


11. "For Avigdor Arikha", Beckett's 1967 translation of his 1966 hommage to the Israeli painter. The last two sentences draw on biblical sources. God granted Moses only a glimpse of his "back parts" ("end-on", so to speak); "my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:23). Moses was marked indelibly: "the skin of his face shone" (Exodus 34:29, 30, 35). Paul taught that "now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12). The "deep marks" allude partly to Thomas' doubts being put to rest when, face to face with Christ he places his fingers in his side (John 20:27). "Face to face" is a cliche invested with feeling in Beckett's mature writing: e.g. "fleeting face to face" (HII 33); "you cleave face to face" (NO 33).

12. Cf. the lunatic "fumbling at the wall that divided the grounds of the asylum from the field" (MPTK 31). Cf. also fidgeting rats (DFMW 26;M 64-5) and toads who "favour thresholds" (CSP 66).


16. The Image of Childhood, 124.
19. The translation is that given by McMillan and Fehsenfeld in Beckett in the Theatre 49. It seems to me superior to its equivalent in Michael Brodsky's recent translation of the complete play
20. Cf. "'Approach, my child,' said Mr Kelly [...] 'Damn it, I am approached,' said Celia. 'Do you want me to get in beside you?'" (M 17)
21. Crucial to the effect in performance, however, is the child-actor's own ingenuousness, his inability to put on an act. At his 1975 Schiller Theatre production Beckett replaced an adolescent actor whom he thought too "knowing" with a "cherubic" nine-year-old, "shy and ignorant". See Beckett in the Theatre, 150.
22. "He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats" (Matthew 24: 32).
25. Lawrence Miller, Samuel Beckett: The Expressive Dilemma, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 52. Miller's is among the best commentaries on the interaction between the fiction and the critical prose. For Beckett's discussion of art in "terms of need", see "Intercessions by Denis Devlin", Transition, April-May, 1938 (D 91-7); and "Les Deux Besoins", written in 1938 (D 55-7).
27. Belacqua runs into a Civic Guard soon after the encounter with the "little sloven" (DFMW 225-7; MPTK 75-8). In The Expelled "a child" appears after a "policeman" (CSP 26), and in The End "a little girl[s]" visit is followed by "a visit from a policeman" (CSP 57); later "little boys" and "a policeman" again appear on the same page (CSP 60). Molloy meets "a policeman" (T 20), as well as an "urchin" (T 47,84) and Mercier encounters "a little boy and a little girl" (MC 31) as well as a "constable" (MC 91).
28. "We are needless to say in a skull" (CSP 43). Earlier the narrator had recalled "the story my father used to read to me, evening after evening, when I was small [...] to calm me" (CSP 37; cf. CSP 74). The story was about a boy, the son of a lighthouse-keeper, who swam with a knife after a shark "out of sheer heroism". The narrator's own story, The Calmative, is in a sense a heroic re-enactment both of the telling of the childhood story and of its content. "For me now the setting forth, the struggle and perhaps the return" (37). The "setting forth" indicates both an adventure and a narrative act, and "the return" implies not only homecoming, but reward. If the meeting with the boy is "what I must have come out for", it corresponds to "the struggle" itself, the central episode in the childhood story.


30. Dante, The Divine Comedy, Vol 1, Inferno, 1.63.(24,25)


32. Cf. Watt: "he continued to think of himself as a man, as his mother had taught him, when she said, There's a good little man, or, There's a bonny little man, or, There's a clever little man." (W 80); and Company: "What were her words? God reward you little master. Some such words. God save you little master." (NO 13)

33. There is much talk of loss and gain in the story: after the encounter with the child, "I wasn't returning empty-handed, not quite [...] But I was paying the price." (CSP 42). Later: "[...] this evening I have nothing to lose that I can discern [...]" (CSP 46).


36. The Trauma of Birth, 22.

37. Cf. Nathalie Sarraute: "Now that he was grown, he still made them come and look everywhere, hunt inside him [...]"

38. He writes in an "exercise book, almost a child's" (T 205), "this big child's exercise book" (T 252); his crutch is so small "you'd think it was a baby's crutch" (T 232); he gapes, "so as a tiny tot I gaped" (T 182); his chest "moves no more than a sleeping child's" (T 182); he hears with "the hearing of my boyhood" (T 189); he forgets himself in bed "as when I was a baby" (T 234); he can associate the bowl of his pipe only with the one "with which, as a child, I used to blow bubbles" (T 181).

CHAPTER SEVEN

3. The poem as a whole is about chickens and eggs: or metaphorically, causes and effects. But Descartes' preferred egg only ripens and does not hatch. Much of the poem seems committed to the denial of connections (theological as well as human) between parents and children: Descartes is keen to suppress the date of his birth, for instance, and to proclaim that he is "not [...] my father's [son]" (CP 4).
9. Cf. First Love "I [...] barged my way through" (CSP 18); the narrator also wonders "if canals flow" (CSP 5). Mrs. Bray's vigil anticipates Krapp's, outside "the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying" (CDW 219).
14. Psalm 145:14
15. John Pilling has highlighted the extent to which the play is governed by Mrs Rooney's question: "Will it hold up?" *Samuel Beckett*, 97.
20. *Beckett's Fiction*, 95. Cf. Beckett's early translation of René Crevel: "As long as I live I shall never be able to visualise death otherwise than as a heavy ball of wool growing cold, on a road, at the fall of evening." "Everyone Thinks Himself Phoenix...", *This Quarter*, 5 (1932); cited in Christopher Ricks' *Beckett's Dying Words* (119). Ricks notes (168) that when William Empson wrote that Godot reminded him of one who "behaves like a dog with its back broken by a car" (*Times Literary Supplement*, 30th March, 1956; reprinted in *Argufying*, 593) he "hit upon [!] an image recurrent in Beckett".
21. Leslie Hill has written well about mourning in Beckett, where "objects are not forgotten, but recur like ghosts", in *Beckett's Fiction* (70-1); and "Late Texts: Writing and the Work of Mourning*, *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, no.1, *Samuel Beckett 1970-1989*, 10-25.
22. Molloy calls his parents "Mag and "Dan" (T 18). For Otto Rank "ma" is the universal human syllable* (*The Trauma of Birth*, 102).
25. John Ford, *The Lover's Melancholy*, ed. R.F. Hill, Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985) IV:ii.120-1: 124. The words are spoken by the melancholic Meleandor, mourning (in "wild distraction") the supposed loss of his daughter Eroclea. As R.F.Hill points out, the play is largely about "therapy": "the essential character of *The Lover's Melancholy* is not of concealed facts suddenly disclosed but a process of healing in which known facts are slowly disclosed." (16)


30. Cf. other allusions to dung: "the crest of your manure"(173); "that on top of my manure heap on top of of everything else"(190); "picking happy at the dung (179).

31. Elsewhere the bovine "bottom of a dairy-woman in Waterloo lane" (CDW 242) again brings together bottoms, fruition (dairy-woman) and expulsion (Waterloo). Otto Rank discusses childish phobias of large animals like horses and cows, remarking that "the size or fatness (circumference of the body) of the animals [...] refers to the state of pregnancy of which the child [...] has more than a vague memory." *The Trauma of Birth*, 13. On anal births in Beckett, see *Beckett's Fiction*, 88-92 and passim; *Women in Samuel Beckett's Prose and Drama*, Chapter 7, passim.

CONCLUSION


2. Cf. "You take the course you always take which is a beeline for the gap [...]" (NO 29). Even at its close, the novel describes a gradually reclining body in terms that oddly evoke incipience: "From time to time with unexpected grace you lie. Simultaneously the various parts set out." (NO 51).
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