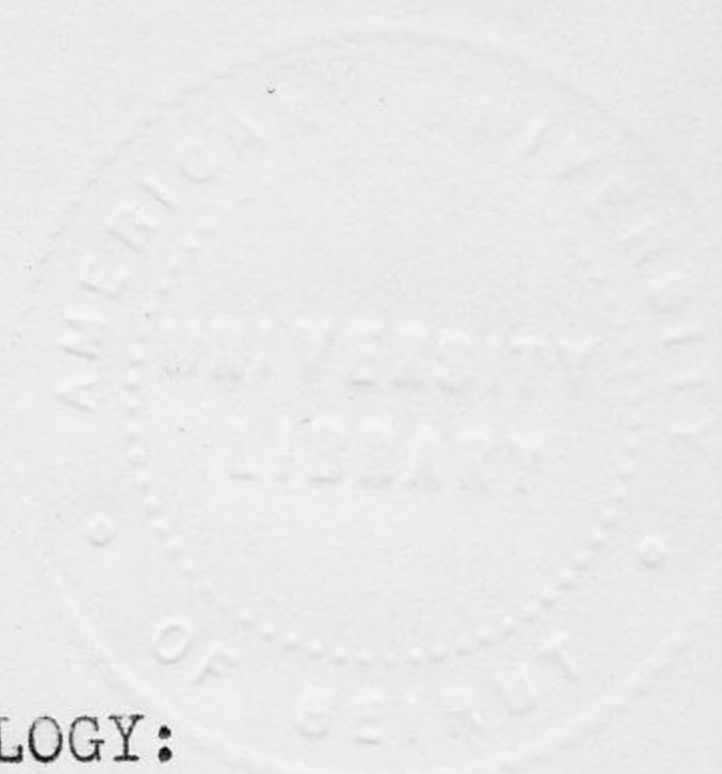


T
869
cl



THE NOTION OF IDENTITY IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S TRILOGY:
MOLLOY, MALONE DIES, THE UNNAMABLE

by

Arpi Kouyoumdjian

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Arts in the English Department of the
American University of Beirut
Beirut, Lebanon
May, 1967

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Professor George Khairallah for his helpful criticisms and suggestions throughout. I also acknowledge with gratitude the patience and good humour of my mother during the typing of this paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I	8
CHAPTER II	24
CHAPTER III	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY	64

INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett, one of the more important authors of this century, is admittedly a difficult writer. Part of the difficulty that readers experience in reading his novels lies in the fact that they do not seem to have much in common with the practices of the traditional, nineteenth century novels. Some outstanding characteristics of the traditional novel, from which Beckett departs, are that it has a plot, a story, which is acted out by particular people in particular circumstances; the time and place, as components of the setting, are thus never left vague. There is frequently a minute description of the background of the characters, placed in the novel to give "verisimilitude." Another important feature of the traditional novel is characterisation, by which is meant that the novelist accords special attention to the individualisation of his characters by presenting them to us in a background of particularised place and time, and naming them in the same way particular individuals are named in ordinary life. A novel, then, in Ian Watt's definition, is "the production of what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experiences of individuals . . . with the adaptation of prose style to give an air of complete authenticity."¹

¹ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p. 27.

What Beckett's novels have in common with this generalised definition does not go beyond the "adaptation of prose style." Beckett's prose, even in translation, is most precise and highly formal.

Beckett's first novel, Murphy, with its relatively greater lucidity of plot and characters, differs from its successors in that it has more in common with the traditional novel. Murphy has a plot; it tells a story by using the narrative technique of the traditional novel. The plot in Murphy is provided by two quests; that of Neary and his companions for Murphy, and that of Murphy for himself. Neither quest is successful, since Murphy is hard to find. However, this quest is presented to us in carefully particularised time and place. Dates are never left vague. Murphy is a Dubliner living in London. His residence at the beginning of the novel is a West Brompton mew; the place of his meeting with Celia in Chelsea is precisely stated, and the room they occupy together is in Brewery Road in Islington, and so on. Together with this detailed accuracy of place and time, there is the creation of vivid characters, as the traditional novel would understand the term. Several minor characters come out vividly, such as Mr. Kelly, Celia's grandfather. In spite of all this specified background, however, Murphy is an alien to society; he is a "seedy solipsist" who believes his mind to be "a large hollow sphere, hermetically

closed to the universe without."² He, eventually, finds happiness among the mad and the deranged. Nevertheless, Murphy can be described as "a citizen of the world."³

In Beckett's second novel, Watt, the allusions to the world one lives in and the society around decrease; "the tone comes nearer to the strident cry of loneliness . . . that is characteristically Beckettian."⁴ The setting, here, is far less precise than that of Murphy. We know, for example, that Mr. Knott's house is in the Irish countryside near a railway-station, not far from the sea; "but there is . . . little commerce between the house and the outside world."⁵ Moreover, Watt does not have the distinct personality that Murphy has; he is a much hazier character. He speaks only three or four times in the book, and is, on the whole, quite passive. At the very beginning he appears as a mysterious and uncertain person to his fellow men. Mr. Hackett and Mr. and Mrs. Nixon, for example, cannot decide who he is or what he does. Watt has a "big red nose and no fixed address." Watt introduces us to a new kind of hero:

² Nathan Scott, Samuel Beckett (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1965), p. 41.

³ John Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), p. 55.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

the anti-social vagabond whose identity or "whatness" is uncertain. Watt is "probably" a university man.⁶

It is in the trilogy — Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable — that this new type comes out triumphantly. Molloy is no more "a citizen of the world." Even less so are Malone and The Unnamable. The novel, here, is reduced to an interior monologue, a confession. We have moved from the recognisable world of Murphy to a non-defined country with planes, hills and forests, or are enclosed within the four walls of a room in an unidentified place.

The first novel, Molloy, is somewhat situated within a world of people, incidents and encounters, something that is difficult to say of Malone Dies and The Unnamable. In these two novels we have almost no action, the time is uncertain, and the place undetermined. Malone, in Malone Dies, is infirm in bed, abandoned by everybody and fed by an invisible person. He has surrendered himself to his thoughts and memories of the exterior world, in which he is no more active. He is engaged in writing stories while waiting to die.

When we get to The Unnamable, we do not even have an identifiable body (Malone had a body, even though it was half-paralysed). The Unnamable is motionless in a place

⁶ William York Tindall, Samuel Beckett (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 18.

with no colour — everything is grey. We do not know where this place is; time is irrelevant. The Unnamable's major preoccupation is himself; he is in search of his identity. We gather from him that all that has preceded him in Beckett's fiction is his own invention, in his effort to "find" himself. All the preceding characters turn out to be "personae" (masks) created by one who is unnamable, and who remains unnamable. The question "Who am I?" is constantly asked, but never given a satisfactory answer. Towards the end, we have a complete disintegration of the pronoun "I", thus reducing the certainty of self-definition. The only certainty we are left with is that "we don't know."

We do not know and yet we do not give up; we try to find out. Existence, for Beckett, is this struggle, and the consciousness on the part of the individual that he is struggling. Existence is looking at oneself while existing. The only thing left intact in Beckett is "the capacity of human consciousness to reflect upon itself and to entertain its own end."⁷ Those selves that are not aware of the challenge of existence are represented as ludicrous. Life is "the burden of one conscious that he is conscious."⁸ The achievement of the characters in Beckett's fiction, then, is

⁷ Ihab Hassan, "The Literature of Silence: From Henry Miller to Beckett and Burroughs," Encounter, (January, 1967), p.80.

⁸ Hugh Kenner, Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study (London: John Calder, 1961), p. 35.

reduced to the asking of questions. The Beckett hero is constantly asking himself who, what and where he is, without ever finding a satisfactory answer to his questions. In spite of the futility of his efforts, however, he never gives up, he "goes on," for he "must go on."

The "self" in Beckett is no more the identifiable self of the traditional novel; it does not have a society to define it. It is, therefore, fearful and hesitant, searching and struggling, without any a priori assurances.

It is the efforts of this self in search of itself, of its identity, that I am interested in exploring in my thesis. I shall be pointing out that all the characters in the trilogy are basically one character in search of its identity, showing how far this search goes in finding an answer to the question "Who am I?" Occasional references will be made to the plays of Beckett.

The fact that Cartesian echoes abound in Beckett, as some commentators — notably Hugh Kenner — have pointed out, is not a coincidence. One of the methods followed by Beckett in his search for identity is that of Descartes, who was engaged in a similar search. Descartes proves man's existence as a "thinking thing," and then goes on to prove the existence of the body: "I think, therefore I am." Beckett takes this formula and operates it backwards, by starting his trilogy with Descartes' "mechanical body" and

ending it with "je pense," reaching, however, no definite answer like his predecessor.

The first chapter of my thesis will be devoted to the Descartes-Beckett "parallel." The second and third chapters will deal more closely with the question of identity. In the second chapter I will show why the Beckett hero has no defined identity; and in the third, how he goes about looking for one. The trilogy is basically a quest for identity, and the different characters are basically one character employed in this quest.

CHAPTER I

Both Descartes' Discourse on Method and Beckett's trilogy — Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable — seem to be, among other things, efforts to define self and speculate about what constitutes "human identity." What is this creature who inhabits the vast world without exactly knowing who he is, and who is constantly obsessed by the idea that he is a victim of some superior agent or force? "What am I?"

Descartes keeps asking himself in the Discourse on Method and the Meditations; "Who am I?" reiterates the Unnamable three centuries later. One could almost say that the trilogy is, among other things, a parody of the Discourse and the Meditations. The scheme followed by Beckett in his search for an answer to these questions is highly reminiscent of Descartes'. After long speculation Descartes comes out with a neat, rational definition of man. He eventually succeeds (to his own satisfaction at least) in defining man as a "thinking thing." The self is equivalent to the mind; the body is discarded altogether as a first step, and acknowledged only after the existence of the mind has been established. I think, therefore I am. Beckett takes this Cartesian formula and operates it backwards by starting his

trilogy with a bodily je suis and ending it with je pense.

Beckett starts off with Molloy, who is a perfect symbol of Descartes' "mechanical man;"¹ moves to Malone, where the body has started to disintegrate; and ends with The Unnamable, who is nothing more than the inside of the skull (where Descartes said the mind resided), brooding over his identity. There is, however, a basic split between the two; whereas Descartes finds a sure and positive answer to the question "What am I?" Beckett ends his trilogy with no answer, but only a determination to carry on the search. "I think, therefore I am," says Descartes; Beckett's Unnamable thinks, but he is not so sure that he is.

Descartes started off by accepting nothing as true that he did not know to be distinctly so; he rejected everything that gave rise to the slightest doubt in his mind, and pretended that everything that entered his mind was false. "I was aware of myself as something real From the mere fact that I could think of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite clearly and evidently that I existed."² Hence the famous "I think, therefore I am."

¹ This term will be discussed later in this chapter.

² Descartes, Discourse on Method (London and Tonbridge: Whitefriars Press Ltd., 1962), p. 61.

Once his existence as a thinking thing was established, Descartes set out to find out what this existence was. A substance whose essence consists in thinking, he had said, thus equating the mind with the self. In spite of this, he argues in The Meditations that his mind is intimately united with his body, and so confused and intermingled with it, that "I and my body" (body not part of I) compose a single whole. All the feelings of pain, hunger and thirst that the body feels are indeed nothing but ways of thinking, which arise from and depend upon the intermingling of mind and body. The existence of the body is to be assured through the senses, and yet the senses are not to be trusted, he says. The whole relationship of mind and body is left in a muddle, however, the only certainty being that the body is a machine subject to decay, whereas the mind is immortal, and man exists only as long as he thinks. The Self is divided into mind and body, the former being given precedence.

It is by beginning with and then passing beyond his method of doubting methodically that Descartes reaches these conclusions. After freeing his mind of all care he sets himself to exploring himself.³ What am I? A man; but what is a man? Definitely not "that assemblage of limbs which is called

³ For this purpose he secures for himself untroubled leisure in a safe retreat, which reminds us of Malone sitting in bed, or The Unnamable inside his skull.

the human body."⁴ Existence has been recognised; but what is this being whose existence has been recognised? "What am I? A thinking thing — a thing, that is to say, which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills and does not will, and which also affirms and feels."⁵ A body's identity, he concludes, is the result of an inspection of the mind, the understanding; it is not defined by what is perceived through the senses. A body, therefore, does have an identity, and for Descartes it is quite simple to inspect and to get to know this identity through the mind, the understanding.

In Beckett the search for identity involves several characters, who are basically the same character.⁶ Molloy, Malone and company seem lost in a vast and meaningless world. They have lost all contact with the physical (social) world around them. Their bodies are vestiges of what one would normally recognise as a human being's. They are crippled, shabby, blind, impotent old men, who never wash and spend hours counting the rate at which they fart. Movement is almost an impossibility for them without the help of a bicycle or crutches. This "machine-using" aspect of Beckett's characters is highly reminiscent of Descartes, for whom the body was a machine in-

⁴ Descartes, op cit., p. 110.

⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

⁶ This notion will be fully discussed in chapter II.

vented by God. In Beckett the bicycle is a perfect symbol of this "mechanical man;"⁷ the bicycle is an extension of Molloy's body; it serves, like Descartes' body, to move the "self" around, however inefficiently.

One need not rummage too much to find the "Cartesian focus" in the trilogy. Descartes' method of speculation is one in which most Beckett characters specialise. His method of doubting and forming closely linked arguments (as in the Meditations) seems to be that of Malone and the Unnamable. Malone in bed is similar to Descartes, whose speculations were pursued in the same place. In fact, several passages of the Meditations could be mistaken for Malone's or The Unnamable's:

Perhaps there is a God, or some other power, that puts these thoughts into my mind.⁸

These voices are not mine, nor these thoughts, but the voices and thoughts of the devils who beset me,⁹ says The Unnamable. The one seems to be the paraphrase of the other, except that the devil replaces God.

The trilogy progresses from movement to a sort of stasis.¹⁰ It starts off with crippled Molloy, whose body is

⁷ This "mechanical man" is what Kenner calls "The Cartesian Centaur."

⁸ Descartes, op cit., p. 108.

⁹ Samuel Beckett, Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965), p. 347.

¹⁰ Tindall, op cit., p. 22.

at first hardly distinguishable from the bicycle he rides, which becomes clearly a symbol of the machine that Descartes said the body was. It ends with The Unnamable, who has no identifiable body, and is purely a "thinking thing;" "Of me whom they have reduced to reason,"¹¹ he says in one instance. The Unnamable is incapable of the smallest movements, "fixed and at the centre of this place, whatever its shape and extent may be."¹² It is the "same place as always . . . which is perhaps merely the inside of my distant skull,"¹³ the head, where the mind resides. The Unnamable is the mind; he thinks, a criterion which satisfied Descartes in his search for the "self," but which seems inadequate for Beckett.

Molloy, the hero of the first novel in the trilogy, is almost constantly in motion, on his way to his mother,¹⁴ whom however he will never reach. To be able to move one has to have a body, that wonderful machine which "is far better ordered, with a far more wonderful movement, than any machine that man can invent."¹⁵ So, more than anything else, Molloy is a human machine subject to decay, loss of toes and arthritis of the wrist. He is not like Descartes' body, which,

¹¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 338.

¹² Ibid., p. 295.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 302-303.

¹⁴ The symbolism of this journey will be discussed later.

¹⁵ Descartes, op cit., p. 79.

though mortal, is wonderful as long as it lasts. Molloy is crippled, he is old, perhaps older than seventy.

Molloy, therefore, is not capable of Descartes' "wonderful movement" and needs another machine, may be a less perfect one, to supplement his original body. Molloy with his bicycle, becomes a perfect symbol of this mechanical body. The "man-using-machine" image becomes the prominent one in Molloy, as in Beckett's other work. Most Beckett protagonists have something to do with machines at some time of their lives. Hat, stick, earthen pot and bicycle:

are . . . extensions of bodies and guarantors of identity. As the body's members lose their strength, or are shortened, or disappear altogether, the task of precisely maintaining the self within macrocosmic lines and curves becomes more and more difficult.¹⁶

Molloy has a bicycle, Moran is carried on the luggage rack of a bicycle, Malone recalls the cap of the bell of a bicycle (Molloy's?); Clov begged for a bicycle while bicycles still existed, and it was a bicycle that deprived Nagg and Nell of their legs. This bicycle is never a shiny or new one, but it is always lost, like Molloy's, or remembered, like Nagg and Nell's in Endgame. This is a circumstance essential to its role; namely, that like the body it disintegrates, and "like the body's vigor it retires into the past."¹⁷

¹⁶ Frederic J. Hoffman, Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1964), p. 85.

¹⁷ Kenner, op cit., p. 117.

Molloy's is "a chainless bicycle with no brakes" and "with a free wheel, if such a bicycle exists."¹⁸ It is inseparable from him, and each is indispensable to the other's support. Molloy has a stiff leg, and a bicycle is thus "indispensable" for his advance. Even when he stops, which he does every hundred yards to rest his legs, he does not get off the machine:

I didn't properly speaking get down off the machine, I remained astride it, my feet on the ground, my arms on the handlebars, my head on my arms, and I waited until I felt better.¹⁹

So, at rest, the bicycle is an extension of Molloy and it stabilises him; in motion, it complements him and makes up for his structural deficiencies. Molloy is no "mean cyclist," though, in spite of his stiff leg:

I was no mean cyclist, at that period. This is how I went about it. I fastened my crutches to the cross-bar, one on either side, I propped the foot of my stiff leg (I forget which, now they're both stiff) on the projecting front axle, and I pedalled with the other.²⁰

This odd machine, exactly complements Molloy; it even compensates for his inability to sit down: "The sitting posture was not for me anymore, because of my short stiff leg."²¹

¹⁸ Beckett, op cit., p. 16.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 22.

All these motions and postures so complex for the intact human body are impossible for Molloy without the help of a "machine."

The bicycle does not keep Molloy company till the end of his days, however. He leaves it with a certain Mrs. Lousse, with whom he spends two months after having run over her dog. He parts with his bicycle "suspecting it to be the vehicle of some malignant agency". Yet, he adds, "I would have taken it with me if I had known where it was and that it was in running order."²² This separation from his bicycle is paralleled by a disintegration in the body itself; namely, the stiffening of one leg, the shortening of the other leg, which had previously been stiff, and the loss of toes from one foot, he forgets which. Even after the bicycle is abandoned, Molloy is still half-mechanised. He now has his crutches to support him:

There is rapture, or there should be, in the motion crutches give. It is a series of little flights, skimming the ground. You take off, you land, through the thronging sound in wind and limb, who have to fasten one foot to the ground before they dare lift up the other.²³

Molloy's progress suffers a lot from this state of affairs, and the only way to progress becomes taking longer and longer halts

22 Ibid., p. 59.

23 Ibid., p. 64.

each time. Dependence on crutches does not last long either, and Molloy is reduced to crawling on his belly, having lost all possible functioning of the legs. When we last see him he is labouring hard to make some advance through the forest, flat on his belly, with the feet higher than the head, "now prone, now supine, now on one side, now on the other."²⁴ He still uses crutches to assist him:

Flat on my belly, using my crutches like grapnels, I plunged them ahead of me into the undergrowth, and when I felt they had a hold, I pulled myself forward, with an effort of the wrists.²⁵

As he crashes forward in this way Molloy still remembers his bicycle by blowing the horn (which he had taken off his bicycle) through the cloth of his pocket: "Its hoot was fainter every time." Like the body, it too, constantly deteriorates.

We see, therefore, that as his physical members deteriorate, Molloy has recourse to machines. The bicycle first, which is an extension of the whole body; then the crutch, which is an extension of the leg. Molloy's powers of motion constantly diminish, as they depend upon a corruptible body, whose members may diminish and disappear altogether. Bicycles and crutches depend on relatively sound

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 82-83.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

members, or at least members of which they are the accessories. When they are gone they leave "the agony and monotony of painful crawling:"²⁶

But I am human, I fancy, and my progress suffered, from this state of affairs, and from the slow and painful progress it had always been, whatever may have been said to the contrary, was changed, saving your presence, to a veritable calvary, with no limit to its stations and no hope of crucifixion.²⁷

Pain is part of the human body, and even Descartes, for whom the body was a perfect machine, could not explain it away. This is why he stressed the importance of medicine, which, he believed, could help in maintaining the body in as healthy a condition as possible.

Molloy, then, starts off in a state of comparative soundness; he then proceeds towards self-disintegration. We leave him crawling in the forest with not much left to help him "move." It is inevitable, therefore, that he should stop his journey, or, that the novel should end. The "machine" has disintegrated and completely decayed. When we next take "him" up he is sitting in bed, waiting to die. We have ample evidence to believe that Malone dying in bed is the Molloy we left crawling in the forest,²⁸ with a voice telling him

²⁶ Hoffman, op cit., p. 124.

²⁷ Beckett, op cit., p. 78.

²⁸ This point will be discussed more fully in Chapter II.

"not to fret, that help was coming."²⁹

Malone is in bed in a plain private room, in "what appears to be a plain ordinary house." He is the linking step between the two poles (I think and I am) of the Cartesian formula. Here, the body, the "machine," has almost completely disintegrated, and it is Malone's mind that dominates, the mind that invents stories, and will continue to do so, till it dies. Having no "body" properly speaking, Malone cannot move; and so, unlike Molloy, he is at rest. "So far has the Cartesian mechanism dismantled, that it would take, he estimates, several weeks to re-establish connection between his brain and his feet, should there be any need for that."³⁰ His body is "what is called, unadvisedly perhaps, impotent. There is virtually nothing it can do."³¹ It has, needless to say, no bicycle. It is, on the other hand, with the help of a long stick — another extension of the body symbolising its "machine" property — that he manages to rummage in his possessions, which are in a heap in the corner of the room. When he wants to eat, he hooks the table with his stick and draws it to him. The two poles of his existence are his dish (soup) and his chamber-pot, which he puts side by side on the

²⁹ Beckett, op cit., p. 91.

³⁰ Kenner, op cit., p. 126.

³¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 186.

table and reaches for with his stick when necessary. "How great is my debt to sticks! So great that I almost forget the blows they have transferred to me."³² The stick serves him, however, as long as he remains in bed, and uses it to push things away or bring them to him. It is only when he tries to move his bed with the help of this stick, that is, when he attempts to act contrary to his nature, he being "at rest" in bed, that he loses it:

I wonder if I could not contrive, wielding my stick like a punt-hole, to move my bed. It may well be on castors, many beds are. Incredible I should never have thought of this, all the time I have been here. I might even succeed in steering it, it is so narrow, through the door, and even down the stairs, if there is a stairs that goes down. . . . I have only to set the stick against the wall and push.³³

It is while trying this that the stick slips and he loses it, realising what it had meant to him. Malone, with no stick, is reduced to a mind inventing stories.

In progressing from Molloy to Malone, motion has diminished from bicycle, to crutch, to stick, to bed. When we get to the Unnamable, we have moved to the final step, I think, of the inverted Cartesian formula. The Unnamable has no verifiable body. Malone has died; only his head is still alive. He, therefore, needs no stick, and thus has no

³² Ibid., p. 185.

³³ Ibid., pp. 253-254.

problems of the Malone order. Furthermore, there is no mention of a bicycle, nor allusion to a bicycle, nor reflection of a bicycle from the beginning to the end of the novel. He exists in his inventions, his mind, only, coming nearest to Descartes' definition of a man, of a human identity. Nevertheless, he seems to be farthest removed from having any identity at all, as will be seen in the second chapter. He does not even have a name, if we take names to be signs of identity. He sits alone in a shallow container, paralysed entirely. Unable to write — writing being a bodily function — he "speaks" to himself while tears flow from his immovable eyeballs. But is it he speaking: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me. . . . I say aporia without knowing what it means." But, he affirms that he "shall never be silent."³⁴ He exists, as already mentioned, in his inventions alone, and his creatures, confused with the creator, become his possessors and he becomes the possessed.³⁵ The Unnamable, like Malone, makes up stories. There is one about a certain Mahood, for example, whom we encounter under two aspects, in motion and at rest. In motion, on one leg, he goes around the world in a circle; at rest, he is confined night and day in a jar, outside a restaurant, with the menu fixed to the jar.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 291.

³⁵ Tindall, op cit., p. 30.

Only the trunk remains (in a deplorable state) "surmounted by the head, with which we are already familiar." All the members are lost "with the exception of the onetime virile."³⁶ "To have lost one's limbs and preserved one's dentition, what a mockery!"³⁷ The jar is what the body is reduced to when the mind dominates. The one-legged man with the crutch, on the other hand, complements, with his "ideally incommoded motion,"³⁸ the other's "ideally perplexed cogitation,"³⁹ and so completes a little cosmos pervaded by the two Cartesian functions, movement and thought.⁴⁰

The Unnamable's thinking, particularly in the second half of the novel, is simply the repetition of the same things over and over again; namely, cursing "them" (the gods?) who

³⁶ Beckett, op cit., p. 327.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 332.

³⁸ "Admittedly it is difficult, for a man with but one leg, to sink to earth in the full force of the expression, particularly when he is weak in the head and the sole surviving leg flaccid for want of exercise, or from excess of it." (Ibid., p. 321).

³⁹ "Then at last I can set about saying what I was, and where, during all this long lost time. But who is he, if my guess is right, who is waiting for that, from me? And who these others whose designs are so different? And into whose hands I play when I ask myself such questions? But do I, do I? In the jar did I ask myself questions? And in the arena? I have dwindled, I dwindle." (Ibid., p. 331).

⁴⁰ Kenner, op cit., p. 130.

tempt him into believing he is he, when, in fact, he is only a sufferer of their whims, "the fake maniacs."⁴¹ "The serene confidence of the lordly cogito . . . is similarly dissociated, in this last phase of the dream of Cartesian man, into a gar- rularity, vestigially logical, which is perhaps piped into him by other beings,"⁴² the Mahoods and the Worms. The bicycle, on the other hand, is gone, and nothing remains of the days when it was master of all movement. The Cartesian dream of being, of knowing and moving like a God, is shattered. The "Cartesian Centaur" was a seventeenth century dream. The Unnamable ends with:

I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you
don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll
go on.⁴³

The Unnamable does not even have Malone's satisfaction of knowing that there is nothing any more:

Never anything
there
any more.⁴⁴

So he persists in "going on," who knows, still in search of his identity.

⁴¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 368.

⁴² Kenner, op cit., p. 131.

⁴³ Beckett, op cit., p. 414.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 288.

CHAPTER II

Beckett's is a "disinherited and disenchanting world" whose inhabitants are at "the lowest common denominator of dignity and human resources."¹ They are tramps, either journeying through vast planes, forests or mud, never reaching their destination, or waiting to die, thus replacing the suffering of action by the boredom of waiting. Their journey is never a pleasant one; it is always full of difficulties, accidents and unpleasant encounters, accompanied by a constant deterioration and disintegration of the body, such as paralysis of the legs or loss of toes. These sufferings make their journey a calvary. When they are waiting, on the other hand, they are bored, as they have no company. When they have company, however, the least attempt at conversation is painful and the result a failure, as they have lost all skill at communication. They are, by definition, outcasts, tramps, alienated in the world they inhabit and from the society which surrounds them. They will not, therefore, fit into any "social machine." In Beckett's fiction they have, therefore, escaped it, and are trying hard to give some other, non-social, significance to themselves. They have, moreover,

¹ Hoffman, op cit., p. 112.

no faith in a superior, transcendent power, a God perhaps, which would make up for the failure of society and thus console their existence.

The only God they are aware of is one that, instead of helping them, tortures them and devises arbitrary tasks for them to perform: "God does not seem to need reasons for doing what he does, and for omitting to do what he omits to do, to the same degree as his creatures."² They are thus deeply suspicious of their creator, knowing themselves to be defective creatures. It is one aspect of this creator that we see in Youdi, in the second part of Molloy, the first novel in the trilogy. Youdi sends Gaber to inform Moran that he has to go on a search for Molloy. Moran does not know why he in particular is chosen for the task, and why he is to look for Molloy. But his ignorance of these facts does not seem to matter much; the order is given by the unknown superior and it must be carried out. All he can do, however, is flatter himself that he and not somebody else has been chosen to perform such a difficult task. Gaber, similarly, "understood nothing about the messages he carried".³

After taking his instructions Moran says that the job does not interest him, to which Gaber answers: "He wants it to

² Beckett, op cit., p. 245.

³ Ibid., p. 106.

be you, God knows why."⁴ The capricious nature of this "employer" is already made clear when he makes Gaber get up "in the middle of the night," to deliver the message to Moran, "just as he was getting into position to make love to his wife."⁵ Refusing Youdi is out of the question, "but we agents often amused ourselves with grumbling among ourselves and giving ourselves the airs of free men."⁶

It is this same Youdi that we meet in The Unnamable, the third novel in the trilogy, under the name of Basil (and his gang), who later becomes Mahood: "Decidedly Basil is becoming important, I'll call him Mahood instead, I prefer that."⁷ Later still he changes into Worm: "Mahood too, I mean Worm, no, Mahood."⁸ It is this Mahood's voice that prevents The Unnamable from saying who he is, hence from discovering his identity. It might, on the other hand, be not just one tyrant but "a whole college of tyrants, differing in their views as to what should be done with me . . . listening to me from time to time, then breaking up for a meal or a game of cards."⁹ This master, created in "man's own image,"

⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 95.

⁷ Ibid., p. 309.

⁸ Ibid., p. 373.

⁹ Ibid., p. 310.

is "used to giving orders and being obeyed," never bothering to enlighten his subject, and never being explicit either. It is "he" that commands The Unnamable to be well, and is concerned with his welfare, "but differing as to its nature."¹⁰ The Unnamable suffers, but even that he does wrong:

I suffer all wrong too, even that I do all wrong too, like an old turkey-hen dying on her feet, her back covered with chickens and the rats spying on her.¹¹

In one of his desperate moments he cries: "But who are these maniacs let loose on me from on high for what they call my good."¹² To have saddled him with a lifetime does not seem to be enough for "them;" they must torture him and tease him for their greater enjoyment and satisfaction.

This, then, is the image of Beckett's "God," who, if he exists, cannot be forgiven for the suffering which he inflicts on man. He is a deceiving God for whose whims and deceits a "culprit is indispensable."¹³ He is also jealous, or else he would not torment his own creation, nor order him about on arbitrary tasks. Beckett's man is little more than a plaything in his creator's hands, if such a creator exists.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 313.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 314.

¹² Ibid., p. 326.

¹³ This supreme power is usually referred to as "they," it being constantly mentioned that it might be more than one tyrant, who know that "I don't know."

Not only does God fail man in giving him firm sanctions for his existence and identity. The idea of a society as an alternative to a transcending God also fails in Beckett's fiction. His characters do not belong to any specific society but are representative of the general human condition, considered in the abstract. They could not fit into any "social machine," for they are old men, half-blind and stinking: "I don't wash," says Malone, "but I don't get dirty. If I get dirty somewhere I rub the part with my finger wet with spittle."¹⁴ They are bedridden or dependent on crutches, sometimes reduced to crawling. Their residence is under a tree, in garbage cans or in insane asylums. They are impotent, and ignorant as to who or where they are. Their bodies are vestiges of what one would normally recognise as human beings'. Finding no identity in the social world around, they are hostile to it and are thus outcasts, tramps with battered shoes, baggy trousers and bowler hats.¹⁵

Beckett is far removed from the practice of the traditional novelists, who deal with "characters wearing their social masks . . . set in a background of particularised time and place."¹⁶ His novels are diametrically opposed to this

¹⁴ Beckett, op cit., p. 185.

¹⁵ They, in fact, manifest the characteristics of a classic clown: clothes too long and too tight, bowler hat, pants supported by a necktie and battered shoes. (Kenner, p. 14).

¹⁶ Watt, op cit., p. 21.

tradition; we do not know when and where his stories take place. The traditional novelist's notion of particularised time and place is completely disregarded. A character in the traditional novel shared and accepted the set of values shared and accepted by everybody, or rebelled against them in terms of a privately derived equivalent set. Society contains certain values that must be accepted by the individual to make his life meaningful. A person with a good position, for example, is more respected by the bourgeois society than a person with a lower position. Everyone, then, does his best to acquire a good position to be accepted by his particular society, as his life without its approval would be meaningless. It is this person with a society to support him (that is, the person wearing "a social mask") that we see in the traditional novel. The character, here, cannot be taken in isolation; he cannot stand apart from the society he lives in, and which makes him what he is.

As Henry James says in the Introduction to his Art of Fiction, we know a man imperfectly until we know his society. A distinguishing characteristic of the traditional novel is the detailed presentation of the environment of the characters. When one contemplates La Chartreuse de Parme, The Ambassadors, Middlemarch, one is struck by the large amount of information these books contain about . . . the manners of the society.¹⁷

¹⁷ Scott, op cit., p. 70.

The area of interest of a novel is the social world. For the novelist's search to be interesting he needs, as James says, a "thick social texture," with a strong and complicated tradition of manners. The novelist was, therefore, under an obligation to satisfy his reader with such details of the story as the particulars of the times and places of the characters' actions, manifested in exact and detailed description. In Flaubert's Madame Bovary, for example, the subject is Emma Bovary in the first place. She is the centre of all, certainly. But why is she there? Flaubert chooses to place her in a certain provincial town full of odd characters. It is not "a town quelconque," not a generalised town, but an individual one. The conditions Emma find herself in give her the best opportunity of disclosing who and what she is. This town explains her better than another would have done. Emma's world could not be other than it is; she could not be shifted into "richer and larger conditions" without destroying the whole point and purpose of Flaubert's novel.¹⁸

The main concern of the traditional novelist, then, was to give an air of complete authenticity. The traditional novelist dealt with what Kenner calls, "the portion of [the individual] attested to by cartes d'identite."¹⁹

¹⁸ Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York: Peter Smith, 1947), pp. 78-80.

¹⁹ Kenner, op cit., p. 22.

This was the daylight man, the man surrounded by people, by a society. The individual had no significance if removed from the particular environment he was brought up in. It is enough to read the opening chapters of Le Rouge et Le Noir or Le Pere Goriot to see the importance which Stendhal and Balzac attach to the environment in their total picture of life.²⁰ On the other hand, one reads a whole Beckett novel without acquiring the information he would get in the opening chapter of a traditional novel, concerning the environment of the characters. Once the novelist's confidence in the "significant import" of his world is broken, he will try to get rid of it. Beckett is such a novelist, and his fiction, therefore, is closest to the mental world of his characters than to any other reality. The Beckett hero does not belong to a society. He is, by definition, "an outcast." It is thus into his mind, and not into the interior of his house or of his social circle, that the author takes us (as the traditional novelist did). We get to know him through the tormented questions, concerning life in general and himself in particular, that he constantly asks himself. His preoccupation with "trivial" things, like buttons and sucking-stones, does not bore us in the least. It creates, on the contrary, a genuine interest in us, for it is of genuine interest to a human being that we are getting to

²⁰ Watt, op cit., p. 27.

know.

The best illustration in the trilogy of a society become "artificial" and rigid is in the section devoted to Moran, protagonist of the second part of Molloy. Moran is a typical bourgeois-society man. He inhabits a world of villas, farms and churches; he is a wage-earner: "For I knew I was wretched, at six pounds ten a week plus bonuses and expenses."²¹ Moran has a social identity: "My name is Moran, Jacques. That is the name I am known by."²² Moran is fussy and insists on punctuality. He prides himself on "being a sensible man," on "reining his thoughts within the limits of the calculable so great is his horror of fancy." He is of course very scrupulous about religion, assiduous in his attendance at mass and troubled if he misses his weekly communion.²³ Moran respects decorum, so he does his best to bring up a good son, that is, an obedient son — obedient to his father, of course, who in his turn obeys society — who goes to church every Sunday, and does his best to do well in school. Moran also "inclined his young mind towards that most fruitful of dispositions, horror of the body and its functions."²⁴ All of these would produce a citizen acceptable

²¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 107.

²² Ibid., p. 92.

²³ Fletcher, op cit., p. 127.

²⁴ Beckett, op cit., p. 118.

to most people, or to society and its expectations. Moran gives his son instructions without allowing him to ask any questions. (Is he consciously imitating and thus taking revenge on his master?) He is a man of principle, and as long as he can give "pleasure, without doing violence to my principles, I do so gladly."²⁵ This is what he claims at least. He is meticulous and "calm in the main," "so patiently turned towards the outer world as towards the lesser evil."²⁶

Moran is a petty-minded and precise individual. Yet Molloy, with all his failings, is altogether more humane and sympathetic. It is when Moran ends up a tramp like Molloy, with a stiff leg and crutches, that he takes on a more authentic countenance; he is now truer to his own nature than to society. He is sensitive to the "challenge of existence;" he has started questioning things and does not accept them simply because everybody else around him does so. He questions creation, for example:

Certain questions of a theological nature preoccupied me strangely. As for example.

1. What was God doing with himself before the creation?
2. Is it true that Judas' torments are suspended on Saturdays?
3. How much longer are we to hang about waiting for the antichrist?²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

He also questions his identity:

But I asked myself other questions concerning me perhaps more closely. As for example.

1. Why had I obeyed the order to go home?
2. What would become of me?
3. Would I go to heaven?²⁸

The Moran, then, who ordered his son about is no more the Moran on his way back from his search. These questions show a new awareness in him. His life now, though that of a tramp, is more meaningful, as he is now conscious of himself and of life, as he was never before:

I had a sharper and clearer sense of my identity than ever before, in spite of its deep lesions and the wounds with which it was covered.²⁹

The social Moran has thus been defeated; he has been replaced by a creature, who, though deprived of his stockings (two pairs) his shirt and hard collars, and reduced to having to use his umbrella for both shelter and support,³⁰ is preferable to the "well-shaven and perfumed" Moran, "proud of his intellectual's soft white hands."³¹ Thus, although he has made some improvement, Moran is still far from having found an answer to "the question." He still asks himself: "Does this mean I am freer now than I was? I do not know. I shall learn."³²

²⁸ Ibid., p. 167.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 170.

³⁰ "Was I to go on leaning on my umbrella and get drenched or was I to stop and take shelter under my open umbrella?" (Ibid., p. 171).

³¹ Ibid., p. 170.

³² Ibid., p. 176.

The "social Moran" has been defeated. Society fails, as, instead of helping the individual to fulfil himself, and giving him an awareness of life, it usurps his identity and allows him to act only according to certain values it has adopted. If the individual wants to be fully accepted and approved by his particular society he will be a slave to "social obligations" and will have no opportunity to "know" and fulfil himself, thus, making his existence more meaningful.

The Beckett hero has still not acquired a full sense of his self, his identity. These being the pictures of the society that surrounds him, and the God ruling supreme over mankind, how can man be expected to have any trust in either? Man, thus, feels lost in a world in which the only reality seems to be suffering and torture. Yet, Beckett's world is not a world of complete and utter despair; some hope remains. This is why we "wait for Godot," though, ironically enough, sure that Godot will not come. This is also why *The Unnamable* still "goes on," after his long search has led to nothing. This hope, then, is not the hope of achieving the impossible, of reaching Godot, or of "finding" an identity; it is the hope of finding, in the very act of grappling and struggling with impossibilities, "a new synthesis of the self."³³ Even if he

³³ Richard N. Coe, *Beckett* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964), p. 5.

reaches nowhere, the individual still finds fulfillment in struggling itself. The "progress" he makes is not towards an eternal glory, but towards a certain awareness of oneself as one is. "Going on" is necessary, even though one never reaches one's goal. Yet, not attaining the goal is enough to drive one to despair. The very concept of despair, however, implies the existence of hope. Why should one despair if he is not aware of the existence, or the possibility of the existence, of an answer, a "Paradise" perhaps (not in the strictly religious sense). One cannot help feeling, on the other hand, that an awareness of the existence of an answer, coupled with an awareness of the impossibility of attaining it, makes man's existence even more dreadful, miserable and desperate. The only alternative left is struggling and searching (which in Beckett become synonymous with suffering). Struggling for the impossible maybe; yet, the very fact that one does not give up and "waits" or "searches," is an indication that he is not in "Hell."³⁴ Since there is life there is the illusion of meaning. This is why Beckett's heroes never commit suicide. Most of them

³⁴ The inhabitants of Beckett's world are far from being Christians. They have no faith in a God, let alone a Christian God. They are, on the other hand, also far from being atheists. If they had been atheists, then their problems would be solved; they would know where they stood and where they belonged. It is precisely this uncertainty that

contemplate it at one time of their suffering, but none ever commits it. Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot contemplate the possibility of hanging themselves from the tree, but they give the idea up as undesirable and "impossible." Similarly, the thought of suicide seems to have little hold on Molloy: "Ah yes, my asthma, how often I was tempted to put an end to it, by cutting my throat. But I never succumbed."³⁵ In one instance, Molloy goes as far as taking the vegetable knife from his pocket to set about opening his wrist:

But pain soon got the better of me. First I cried out, then I gave up, closed the knife and put it back in my pocket. I wasn't particularly disappointed, in my heart of hearts I had not hoped for anything better.³⁶

Suffering, then, seems to be the one incontrovertible fact of life. It is existence; it is the proof that "something is taking its course." This "angoisse" of suffering permeates all Beckett's work, and it is an awareness of this suffering that gives meaning to existence. Not existing, not

gives them a sense of loss. The fact that Beckett's fiction abounds with references — very often ironic and disrespectful — to the Christian "myth" is probably due to his heavily religious Irish background, and also, as Hoffman affirms (op cit., p. 149), to the fact that any treatment of the human condition must account for God, He being so much part of our tradition.

³⁵ Beckett, op cit., p. 79.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

being born at all, would be preferable to a suffering existence; but once born one has to endure. Life is perhaps a punishment for the crime of being born. So love is never a beautiful thing in the Beckett world. All the love relationships are hideous and nasty. Love needs a body, and what his characters have are mere vestiges of human bodies. "Love creates new beings to endure suffering, and, for Molloy, the word 'mother' is [thus] the obscenest swear word in his vocabulary."³⁷ Love is "regarded as a kind of lethal glue" in the "brief rimes of curious structure" that Macmann begins to compose for his mistress, Moll, towards the end of their idyll, "for he felt she was drifting away from him."³⁸ Love in Beckett is best represented by this disgusting pair. The body and its sexual appetites are ridiculed; Macmann and Moll are caricatures of people in love. Beckett gives us a most hideous description of their love-making:

The spectacle was then offered of Macmann trying to bundle his sex into his partner's like a pillow into a pillow-slip, folding it in two, and stuffing it in with his fingers.³⁹

Moran, we remember, never failed to instruct his son in "the horror of the body and its functions." Love, then, is never a beautiful thing in Beckett. As a matter of fact, no rela-

³⁷ Coe, op cit., p. 56.

³⁸ Beckett, op cit., p. 262.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 260.

tionship or attempt at a relationship with another human being is ever successful.

The tramp is the best illustration in Beckett of the general human condition. He lives outside the limits of society and is often neglected and ignored by it. If society ever takes interest in him, it is in the form of charity. Charity, however, offered by society, does not help ameliorate his condition. Society gives him charity "on an average once every two years,"⁴⁰ which, nonetheless, proves a failure. This charitable society is best represented in the trilogy by Lady Pedal. In the last of his stories, Malone tells us about the inmates of Saint John of God's, a lunatic asylum, who were invited for an excursion to "the islands" by a Lady Pedal, who was "well-off and lived for doing good." She wished to bring "a little happiness into the lives of those less fortunate than herself, who was all right in her head and to whom life had always smiled or, as she had it herself, returned her smile."⁴¹

After arriving rather late for the promised excursion, she asks her guests to sing to make "most of the glorious day! Banish your cares, for an hour or so!" She calls them

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 281.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 280.

"hearties" to show she is not superior, but none responds. One seemed to be vomiting, another shivering, and the rest employed in similar occupations. The excursion ends with Lemuel, the leader of the group, killing two of the inmates; Lady Pedal falling and breaking "her hip perhaps, old ladies often break their hips,"⁴² and the rest drowning in the water:

This tangle of grey bodies is they. Silent, dim, perhaps clinging to one another, their heads buried in their cloaks, they lie together in a heap, in the night.⁴³

making the attempt at bringing joy into the lives of the miserable, a failure.

Charity does not help. Yet "against the charitable gesture there is no defence, that I know of,"⁴⁴ says Molloy, when a social worker, a big fat woman, holds out to him "on an odd saucer, a mug full of a greyish concoction which must have been green tea with saccharine and powdered milk,"⁴⁵ when he is taken to the police station for an infraction of traffic rules. When social workers or kind ladies ("the Salvation Army is no better"⁴⁶) "offer you, free, gratis and for nothing, something to hinder you from swooning, which

42 Ibid., p. 287.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 24.

45 Ibid., p. 23.

46 Ibid., p. 24.

with them is an obsession, it is useless to recoil, they will pursue you to the ends of the earth, the vomitory in their hands."⁴⁷ For, "to him who has nothing it is forbidden not to relish filth."⁴⁸ Charity becomes synonymous with filth. For "our cult of sympathy then, a quality that does little to remedy human suffering, Lucky's angry kick is the best commentary."⁴⁹

Beckett's heroes, then, cannot get into communication with the people around; the failure of any relationship seems to be preordained. Molloy's encounters with persons end with irritation. Conversation is unspeakably painful to him because the understanding of the meaning of the words takes place some time after the registering of the sounds of the words.⁵⁰ Having a sensitive ear, Molloy can hear sounds distinctly, but he hears the words a first, a second, sometimes a third time, as pure sounds, bereft of all meaning. All speech, as a matter of fact, in the form of dialogue between two persons, fails. A good illustration of this is Molloy's

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ David I. Grossvogel, The Blasphemers: The Theatre of Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, Genet (New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 139. The reference, here, is to Lucky — in Waiting for Godot — kicking Estragon, when the latter approaches to help him wipe his tears with a handkerchief.

⁵⁰ Fletcher, op cit., p. 143.

encounter with the charcoal-burner in the forest. "A long dialogue ensued" between the two, "interspersed with groans." Molloy, somehow, "grew eloquent" and managed to ask him the nearest way out of the forest. "His reply," however, "was exceedingly confused. Either I didn't understand a word he said, or he didn't understand a word I said, or he knew nothing."⁵¹

It must be, then, that what we really want to know is not communicable by speech. For example, if we ask somebody who he is, we will probably get a name for an answer; but to what extent will that name have answered our question? Moran, for example, knew Gaber's name, but he "knew" absolutely nothing about Gaber.

Talk, then, in the Beckett universe is a mode of behaviour.⁵² It does not satisfy the "strange need," any more than Malone's strange visitor, who draws his attention by a "violent blow on the head." He remains with Malone for "seven hours at least," standing by the bed watching him without uttering any sounds. Yet, "his mouth opened, his lips worked, but I heard nothing. He might as well have said nothing."⁵³ Saying something (like the charcoal-burner) or moving the lips without saying anything (like Malone's visitor) amount

⁵¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 84.

⁵² Kenner, op cit., p. 177.

⁵³ Beckett, op cit., p. 269.

to the same thing. Language is an inadequate means of communication. The little that speech can communicate is not what we are dying to know. Whenever faced with something alive, eloquence fails, as it does with Mrs. Rooney, in All That Fall, when she faces death.

A mind trained in the principles of logic, hence in the use of an orderly language, cannot satisfy the Beckett hero's urge to "know". "No system for selecting the sucking stones can fully appease Molloy's fierce appetite for order,"⁵⁴ for example. Molloy tries to devise a system for sucking his sixteen "sucking stones" in turn. Beckett, here, uses very orderly and precise language, that is, he uses the devices of reason and precision to undermine reason itself. His language is on the surface logical; yet, by its very logicity it renders absurd logic itself:

I had say sixteen stones, four in each of my four pockets these being the two pockets of my trousers and the two pockets of my greatcoat. Taking a stone from the right pocket of my greatcoat, and putting it in my mouth, I replaced it in the right pocket of my greatcoat by a stone from the right pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my trousers, which I replaced by a stone from the left pocket of my greatcoat, which I replaced by the stone which was in my mouth, as soon as I had finished sucking it.⁵⁵

This solution turns out to be unsatisfactory, as "the four

54 Kenner, op cit., p. 188.

55 Beckett, op cit., p. 69.

stones circulating thus might always be the same four."⁵⁶
Any solution does, in fact, prove to be unsatisfactory, as
this other one:

All (all!) that was necessary was to put for example,
to begin with, six stones in the right pocket of my
greatcoat, or supply-pocket, five in the right pocket
of my trousers, and five in the left pocket of my
trousers, that makes the lot, twice five ten plus six
sixteen, and none, for none remained, in the left
pocket of my greatcoat, which for the time being re-
mained empty, empty of stones that is, for its usual
contents remained, as well as occasional objects. . . .
Now I can begin to suck.⁵⁷

After spending six pages on the different possibilities,
that is, after exhausting all logical possibilities, Mol-
loy throws all the stones away:

And the solution to which I rallied in the end was
to throw away all the stones but one, which I kept
now in one pocket, now in another, and which of
course I soon lost, or threw away, or gave away,
or swallowed.⁵⁸

Similarly, "no sequence of sentences can approximate
the ultimate statement The Unnamable yearns to make, since
every sentence must begin somewhere and end somewhere else
. . . and no choice of a beginning or an ending can fail to
exclude a thousand others."⁵⁹ The "ultimate statement", is

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 74.

⁵⁹ Kenner, op cit., p. 188.

a definition of the Self; and language, when faced with the ultimate, fails. It is good enough for "traditional" needs of communication, but not adequate to define the Self, or lead us to a knowledge of the Self.

Language, then, fails in Beckett's world, as it is based on a rational system; what his characters are in search of something that goes beyond or lies beneath reason. The "self" for example, is like $\sqrt{2}$; it must exist, we know it exists, yet it can never be found. It is only the end, the final term in the series, that will give reality to the self or Godot. The Self and Godot are at the end of the decimal; they will determine the sense of all the rest. Yet Godot, or the Self, will never be reached, though, they exist.⁶⁰

Molloy tries to get into communication with Mrs. Lousse, the lady whose dog he runs over, but he fails, she talking to him, and he interrupting her only to ask what town he was in. Molloy, therefore, leaves her, accusing her "without ill-feeling of having drugged my food and drink with noxious and insipid powders and potions."⁶¹ She picks up a tramp, and the tramp, Molloy, somehow takes the place of the dog he had killed. Molloy could have lived comfort-

⁶⁰ Coe, op cit., p. 88.

⁶¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 53.

ably with Mrs. Lousse till the end of his days, being fed, lodged and taken care of; but he leaves her and goes back to his wandering, without knowing where exactly he was going. After leaving Lousse he : "wandered about the town in search of a familiar monument, so that I might say, I am in my town, after all, I have been there all the time."⁶² It is not the protection of a Mrs. Lousse, therefore, that Molloy needs. He needs something beyond that. "If I have a warm place, it is not in their hearts."⁶³

The Beckett hero fails to find identity in society; communication with people seems to be doomed to failure; love is never a beautiful thing. On the other hand, he also fails to find identity in a "God," a transcending power, that would protect him and give him a sense of security. This "God," if he exists, is more malevolent than benevolent. Attempts to come to terms with both society and God having failed the Beckett hero continues his search for identity.

⁶² Ibid., p. 60.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 331.

CHAPTER III

The search for identity is the central theme in the trilogy. The first novel, Molloy, has two parts. The first part tells of the journey of Molloy in search of his mother. Although Molloy is in his mother's room when the novel opens: "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there;"¹ we are justified in assuming that he never reaches his destination, as the narrative ends leaving him alone in the forest, his bicycle gone and his body decayed to the point where he can scarcely crawl, all hope and desire abandoned. When we next take him up he is Malone sitting in bed writing stories.

The second part tells of the search of Moran for Molloy, ordered by his "chief" Youdi. Moran, unlike Molloy, who is an old tramp, is a "respectable" bourgeois, belonging to Youdi's "vast organisation." Again unlike Molloy, Moran is a rational thinker; he puts everything in order before he goes on his search. "Punctuality" and "decorum"² are the key words of his existence. He sets out on his journey accompanied by his son. When they reach Bally, however, the "Molloy country,"

¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 7.

² Ibid., p. 102.

Moran's body, like Molloy's, begins to decay. He sends his son to buy a bicycle, which in its turn disintegrates and eventually disappears. In short, Moran, half staggering, half crawling, like Molloy himself, at last reaches home again, his mission unaccomplished. Moran, the "respectable bourgeois domestic tyrant," ends up with a stiff leg and all the characteristics of Molloy. "Killing" his old self, and bringing his unconscious self to light, he leaves society and goes on crutches to "endure the long anguish of vagrancy and freedom."³

From the start, Moran had resolved that his "natural end" would be the same as Molloy's. He, however, who thinks he knows who he is, knows several Molloys:

The fact was there were three, no, four Molloys. He that inhabited me, my caricature of same, Gamber's and the man of flesh and blood. To these I would add Youdi's . . . a fifth Molloy.⁴

So, when Moran "becomes" Molloy in the end, we are not so sure he knows who he is, as he could conceive of five different Molloys, although he claims knowledge of himself:

And to tell the truth I not only knew who I was, but I had a sharper and clearer sense of my identity than ever before.⁵

³ Tindall, op cit., p. 23.

⁴ Beckett, op cit., p. 115.

⁵ Ibid., p. 170.

It would be wrong to say that Moran completely fails to accomplish his mission. He sets out to find Molloy; he of course, never finds the "man of flesh and blood," but he himself "becomes" Molloy; therefore, he "finds" Molloy, by taking on himself a new identity, an identity which is meant to be preferable to his old self, as his former "arid intellectuality" is transcended by the "rich and unforgettable humanity of Molloy."⁶

Molloy, on the other hand, fails to accomplish his mission, as he never reaches his mother. Why does Molloy want to go back to his mother? She, of course, has given birth to him, something he will never forgive her for. He knows "she did all she could not to have me, except of course the one thing."⁷ Yet Molloy forgives her, "though she is my mother," for having "jostled me a little in the first months and spoiled the only endurable, just endurable, period of my enormous history."⁸ Even after he is "reduced to looking for a meaning to his life" Molloy "sticks" to his mother, that is, he goes in quest of her, "the mess of that uniparous whore." Had he found his mother Molloy would have found himself, thus making his journey fruitful. When asked for his mother's name

⁶ Coe, op cit., p. 56.

⁷ Beckett, op cit., p. 18.

⁸ Ibid.

by the police official, he cries out:

Molloy, I cried, my name is Molloy. Is that your mother's name? said the sergeant. What? I said. Your name is Molloy, said the sergeant. Yes, I said, now I remember. And your mother? said the sergeant. I didn't follow. Is your mother's name Molloy too? said the sergeant. I thought it over. Your mother, said the sergeant, is your mother's — Let me think! I cried. At least I imagine that's how it was. Take your time, said the sergeant. Was mother's name Molloy? Very likely. Her name must be Molloy too, I said.⁹

Molloy fails to find his mother; he thus fails to find himself.

"With Malone Dies the questions of identity, pre-figured in Molloy, become the overriding preoccupation of Beckett's fiction; it can in fact safely be said that the last novels are chiefly concerned with the investigation of the pronoun 'I'."¹⁰ Molloy's search had taken the form of a journey; Malone seeks to know himself through writing fiction. He states very clearly that he has created Macmann in order to be able to "slip into him . . . in the hope of learning something."¹¹

Malone sitting in bed, waiting to die, is the Molloy

⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁰ Fletcher, op cit., p. 168.

¹¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 226.

we left crawling in the forest. He does not remember how he got there: "In an ambulance perhaps, a vehicle of some kind certainly."¹² It should not surprise us that this is a direct quotation from Molloy:

I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. Perhaps in an ambulance, certainly a vehicle of some kind.¹³

Furthermore, Malone recalls that all his life he has "been walking, except the first few months and since I have been here."¹⁴ Having probably lost consciousness somewhere, Malone recovers his senses in bed:

As to the events that led up to my fainting and to which I can hardly have been oblivious, at the time, they have left no discernible trace, on my mind.¹⁵

A little later he says: "But perhaps I was stunned with a blow, on the head, in a forest perhaps, yes, now that I speak of a forest I vaguely remember a forest."¹⁶ Malone also sometimes misses "not being able to crawl around any more."¹⁷ "A forest" and "crawling" immediately bring Molloy to our recollection. The references to Molloy are, in fact,

¹² Ibid., p. 183.

¹³ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

too obvious to need much commenting. Malone is Molloy under a different name.

Molloy was in constant motion; Malone is in constant rest. He cannot use his legs anymore, as they are both stiff now, and thus has to stay in bed. A stick serves as an extension of his body; it is with the help of this stick that he rummages in his possessions heaped up in a corner of his room, and draws to him his two pots — his soup and his chamber-pot: "What matters is to eat and excrete. Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles."¹⁸ It is thus in bed, telling himself stories while waiting to die, that Malone passes the time. He uses his exercise-book and his two pencils, the one English and the other French — he never gets to use the French one though — for three things: an account of his present state, to tell stories, and make an inventory of his possessions.¹⁹ His design yields in practice to a disorderly shifting about among his three distractions, all of which, however, are centered upon himself, directly or indirectly; for he himself is his problem. A section of fiction alternates, until the end, with a section

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁹ His possessions are those one would expect a "re-incarnation" of Molloy to have: the cap of his bicycle, a sucking-stone, a little silver knife, a clus stained with blood, and a half-crutch, the remains of those he used to walk with.

of self-examination. "Somehow, [Malone] can never lose himself wholly in his alternative identities; continually he is dragged back into himself, Malone."²⁰

Malone, then, is Molloy under another name, writing stories about himself under other names. Though the characters, the "personae," he creates are claimed to be efforts to escape himself, they merge into him and become, on the contrary, efforts to discover himself. All his senses seem to be trained full on himself, no matter what he talks about. He constantly interrupts his stories with: "I wonder if I am not talking yet again about myself. Shall I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject?"²¹ He does, in fact, seem to be incapable of doing so. He himself realises this and says:

I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say. . . . I slip into him, I suppose in the hope of learning something.²²

Malone starts off by calling this creature Sapo, short for Saposcat. Midway in the story, after Sapo grows up, however:

No, I can't call him that any more, and I even wonder how I was able to stomach such a name till

²⁰ Coe, op cit., p. 65.

²¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 189.

²² Ibid., p. 226.

now. So then for, let me see, for Macmann, that's not much better but there is no time to lose.²³

Macmann finally merges into Malone himself by ending up in an institution, not unlike that in which Malone appears to be confined, and dying simultaneously with him. Macmann is "fiction" to the extent that he is not Malone. Yet, he is "reality" in that he is a character, a "persona," invented by Malone, to tell him something about his reality, and thus, in a way, taking the place of his reality, his existence. On the one hand Macmann is an invention of Malone, a story, a "fiction," representing one aspect of his "I"; on the other hand, Macmann is inextricably involved with Malone, making it difficult for the reader to separate the two.

Macmann and Sapo are the only masks which Malone uses in seeking his own identity. Where there was only one Molloy, there can now be two or more Malones, to whom Beckett gives different names, for the sake of convenience: Malone, Saposcat, Macmann. Each of these is, in a way, related to the Self, but none is the Self. Molloy was Molloy. Malone is not committed to being Malone; he has thus clearly moved one step further in losing his identity, in his efforts to find it. The Unnamable will move even further. "The trilogy is, quite simply and superficially stated, a portrayal of the loss of Self."²⁴

²³ Ibid., p. 229.

²⁴ Hoffman, op cit., p. 128.

With his death, Malone claims that "it will be over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloys, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on beyond the grave."²⁵ Whatever has preceded Malone in Beckett's fiction, then, is all invented by Malone, a claim also made by The Unnamable, the protagonist of the last novel of the trilogy. Malone himself becomes a creature in a story told by another, The Unnamable. The Unnamable indeed seems to be at once all or any of the characters that have come before him. At first he says: "I believe they are all here, at least from Murphy on, I believe we are all here, but so far I have only seen Malone."²⁶ He sometimes "wonders if it is not Molloy" though, who, in his turn, could very well be The Unnamable himself: "Bally . . . this being the place, according to them, where the inestimable gift of life had been rammed down my gullet."²⁷ Bally, as we know, was Molloy's town; it was the "Molloy country" of the first novel.

As the novel proceeds it becomes more and more impossible to distinguish between him and these "personae," "these sufferers of my pains."²⁸ They, however, help him

²⁵ Beckett, op cit., p. 236. These are the names of characters in Beckett's fiction.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 293.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 298.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 303.

little in "finding" himself, and so he decides to talk no more about them. "Nothing then but me, of which I know nothing."²⁹ This resolution is soon broken, and he feels obliged to invent more stories:

Perhaps I shall be obliged, in order not to peter out, to invent another fairy-tale, yet another, with heads, trunks, arms, legs and all that follows.³⁰

In one instance, in an effort to say "what he is," he decides to say what he is not:

I am neither, I needn't say, Murphy, nor Watt, nor Mercier, nor -- no, I can't even bring myself to name them, nor any of the others whose very names I forget, who told me I was they, who I must have tried to be, under duress, or through fear, or to avoid acknowledging me.³¹

Yet, each of these characters is he in a way. They "told me stories about me, lived in my stead, issued forth from me, came back to me, entered back into me, heaped stories on my head."³² The Unnamable, then, is lost in a mixture of personal pronouns.³³ He creates characters which in turn make up stories of their own, each, however, referring to himself as "I", making it impossible to know who "I" is, and, thus, diminishing the certainty of self-definition:

²⁹ Ibid., p. 304.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 307.

³¹ Ibid., p. 326.

³² Ibid., p. 309.

³³ Tindall, op cit., p. 31.

But enough of this cursed first person, it is really too red a herring, I'll get out of my depth if I'm not careful. But what then is the subject? Mahood? No, not yet. Worm? Even less. Bah, any old pronoun will do, provided one sees through it.³⁴

We see, therefore, how far removed we are from Molloy. When Molloy said "I," he meant "Molloy." Malone referred to Macmann as "he," and only to "Malone" as "I." The Unnamable refers to himself, as well as to the "personae" sometimes, as "I". "I" could, in fact, refer to various "I's"; the subject matters little: "Sometimes I say to myself, they say to me, Worm says to me, the subject matters little."³⁵ In another instance, The Unnamable says: "The subject doesn't matter, there is none."³⁶

Later still, the "I" dissolves into "you" and "they" and "we," all equally inadequate: "Someone says you, it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that."³⁷ He thus decides never to say I again:

I shall not say I again, ever again, it's too farcical. I shall put in its place, whenever I hear it, the third person, if I think of it. Anything to please them. It will make no difference. Where I am there is no one but me, who am not.³⁸

³⁴ Beckett, op cit., p. 343.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 351.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 360.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 404.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 355.

The Unnamable, then, cannot be defined; he is unnamable. The great scandal is that he has no identity. He does not recognise his own photograph when "they" show it to him:

But my dear man, come, be reasonable, look, this is you, look at this photograph . . . make an effort, at your age, to have no identity, it's a scandal, I assure you, look at this photograph, what, you see nothing.³⁹

The Unnamable refuses to recognise himself, however, knowing it is another of their tricks to deceive him. He knows it was never he that stirred or did anything; so, how could the photograph and the record⁴⁰ attached to it be his. He

³⁹ Ibid., p. 377.

⁴⁰ The record is in fact "an elaborate parody of official patterns of self-identification, of naming and numbering. The Unnamable, in not being able to answer any of the questions, testifies to his own anonymity and to the falsehoods of official procedure": (Hoffman, op cit., p. 136).

Look, here's the record, insults to policemen, indecent exposure, sins against holy ghost, contempt of court, impertinence to superiors, impudence to inferiors, deviations from reason . . . does he work, good God no, out of the question, here's the medical report, spasmodic tabes, painless ulcers . . . does he drink, good God yes, passionately. (Beckett, op cit., p. 377).

As far as society is concerned, these are the things that identify a person: his name and birth date, the names of his father and mother, the condition of his health, the number of times he has broken social decorum etc. These "badges of identification . . . are a cover for a vast anonymity and nondescriptness. What 'they' want him to be isn't enough: 'I must understand, I'm doing my best, I don't understand.'" (Hoffman, op cit., p. 136).

knows it is all lies and therefore resists the temptation of saying it was he, an affirmation which would resolve his problem by giving him a definite identity. He knows it is all lies:

No, all lies, they know it well, I never understood, I haven't stirred, all I've said, said I've done, said I've been, it's they who said it, I've said nothing, I haven't stirred.⁴¹

He has not stirred, not because he did not want to, however, but because he could not, although they think, or pretend to think, that it was because he did not want to. How could he stir when they have usurped his identity, wanting, however, to make him recognise it as his own? The "chief threat to his selfhood," then, comes from these creatures, who absorb themselves into him: "Mahood. Before him there were others, taking themselves for me."⁴² When this creature, Mahood for example, is away, The Unnamable tries to find himself; but even then, the voice continues and prevents him:

When he was away I tried to find myself again, to forget what he had said, about me, about my misfortunes But his voice continued to testify for me, as though woven into mine, preventing me from saying who I was, what I was, so as to have done with saying, done with listening.⁴³

The tyrants are also constantly scheming to amalgamate him

⁴¹ Beckett, op cit., p. 378.

⁴² Ibid., p. 315.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 309.

with another;⁴⁴ they require him to be another, before allowing him to be himself:

It's a lot to expect of one creature, it's a lot to ask, that he should first behave as if he were not, then as if he were, before being admitted to that peace where he neither is, nor is not."⁴⁵

The Unnamable, then, struggles in vain against this tyrant, this voice, which usurps his identity, but which nothing can check:

A voice like this, who can check it, it tries everything, it's blind, it seeks me blindly, in the dark, it seeks a mouth, to enter into, who can query it, there is no other, you'd need a head, you'd need things, I don't know, I look too often as if I knew, it's the voice does that, it goes all knowing, to make me think I know, to make me think it's mine."⁴⁶

Being aware of all this, The Unnamable sets about inventing stories in an effort to discover his true identity. All that precedes The Unnamable becomes his own invention: "All these stories about travellers, these stories about paralytics, all are mine, I must be extremely old."⁴⁷ All the characters he invents, however, are all basically one character; The Unnamable, in fact, refers to himself by any of the preceding names, or any pronoun; "he" in the following passage is The Unnamable speaking about himself:

⁴⁴ Fletcher, op cit., p. 189.

⁴⁵ Beckett, op cit., p. 334.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 410.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 412.

Then he says I, as if I were he, or in another, let us be just, then he says Murphy, or Molloy, I forget, as if I were Malone, but their day is done, he wants none but himself, for me, he thinks it's his last chance, he thinks that, they taught him thinking, it's always he who speaks, Mercier never spoke, Moran never spoke, I never spoke, I seem to speak, that's because he says I as if he were I, I nearly believed him, do you hear him, as if he were I . . . you don't know why, you don't know whose, you don't know against whom, someone says you, it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no name for me, no pronoun for me.⁴⁸

The Unnamable is then literally "unnamable." The only thing he knows at the end is that he is not "I": "It's not I, that's all I know."⁴⁹ In spite of all the struggling and the suffering he is still not sure of his identity; he still does not know who he is, or what he is. He tried to find himself through others, but the experiment failed; these others merely wasted his time:

All these Murphys, Molloys and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone.⁵⁰

"Speaking of me alone," however, is impossible, as he does not know who this "me" is. "I, of whom I know nothing."⁵¹ This "me" is inextricably involved with the Murphys and the Molloys:

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 403-404.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 414.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 303.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 304.

Am I clothed? I have often asked myself this question, then suddenly started talking about Malone's hat, or Molloy's greatcoat, or Murphy's suit.⁵²

The Unnamable, then, fails to find an answer to "who am I?" "I. Who might that be?"⁵³ He, however, does not give up. He determines to go on. The trilogy ends:

Where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.⁵⁴

What, then, is the Self? Being unattainable, it cannot be defined and must, therefore, be beyond the grasp of the limited mind. Movement from the corporal to the intellectual has not secured an identity for The Unnamable. The "personae," on the other hand, each promising to bring him nearer to his goal, have also failed. The Unnamable invented them in an effort to discover himself, but they simply "wasted his time." Though his efforts fail, the Beckett hero does not give up, for he knows that the Self exists. His body and senses may decay, but his awareness of himself continues, for he goes on struggling. The only certainty in the Beckett universe is this struggle, this search, which his heroes carry on in expectation of reaching the "ultimate."

⁵² Ibid., p. 305.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 336.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 414.

And even though they never reach it, the hope of reaching it is there whether we acknowledge or deny its existence:

"You must go on, that's all I know."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beckett, Samuel. Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965.
- _____. Murphy. London: John Calder, 1963.
- _____. Watt. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1959.
- _____. Waiting for Godot. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1955.
- _____. Endgame. London: Faber and Faber, 1958.
- _____. All That Fall. London: Faber and Faber, 1957.
- Coe, Richard N. Beckett. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1964.
- Esslin, Martin. (ed.). Samuel Beckett: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965.
- Fletcher, John. The Novels of Samuel Beckett. London: Chatto & Windus, 1964.
- Grossvogel, David I. The Blasphemers: The Theatre of Brecht, Ionesco, Beckett, Genet. New York: Cornell University Press, 1965.
- Hoffman, Frederick J. Samuel Beckett: The Language of Self. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1964.
- Kenner, Hugh. Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study. London: John Calder, 1962.
- Scott, Nathan A. Samuel Beckett. London: Bowes & Bowes, 1965.
- Tindall, William York. Samuel Beckett. New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1964.

Descartes. Discourse on Method. London and Tonbridge:
Whitefriars Press Ltd., 1962.

Lubbock, Percy. The Craft of Fiction. New York: Peter
Smith, 1947.

Watt, Ian. The Rise of the Novel. London: Chatto &
Windus, 1957.

Hassan, Ihab. "The Literature of Silence: From Henry
Miller to Beckett and Burroughs," Encounter,
(January, 1967).