Relativity, Quantum Theory, and the Novels of Samuel Beckett

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RELATIVITY, QUANTUM THEORY, AND THE
NOVELS OF SAMUEL BECKETT

By

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Samuel Beckett is a twentieth-century evangelist whose mission is to convert his readers to a belief in the total chaos of the world. Discoveries of modern physics in this century tend to confirm his belief that the universe and man are weird cosmic accidents, and that the so-called laws of nature are only temporary human constructs erected to hide nature’s most fundamental law—chance. The world, therefore, is absurd, humanity’s cosmic trap. No divine, creative word was ever uttered over the deep. Consequently, the artist’s impossible task is to find an artistic form to approximate such a vision. To this end, Beckett’s novels portray universal disorder by approaching asymptotically the limit of incoherence. In novel after novel his characters obsessively ride, walk, or crawl across interminable space until, mired in interminable time, they murmur scrapes of stories to themselves, thus hoping to force time finally to cease.

Until about 1900, classical physics pictured the world as a marvelous mechanism operating in accordance with precise natural laws which human reason could formulate after careful observation of natural phenomena. However, discoveries of modern physics have all but sabotaged the classical machine. At its macro- and micro-frontiers, the cosmos of modern physics more nearly resembles chaos. Relativity theory fuses the former classical absolutes of space, time, mass, and energy into interdependent variables of the field, their relative fluctuations governed by the absolute speed of light. Space-time curvature of the universe varies constantly, depending on the masses in the field and their velocities in the outward motion that began with the primordial explosion of the initial super-photon. Thus, the relativity universe is one of constant flux.

While Relativity theory undermined much of the foundation of classical physics, it still retained a belief in determinate laws of nature. Quantum theory, which explores the elementary particle world of the pions and neutrinos, finds that, at this sub-nuclear level, deterministic laws dissolve into probability laws, or in other words, laws of chance. Particle-wave distinctions disappear. Particles vibrate like energy waves, while energy shoots out in disparate particles of various sizes—quanta. Furthermore, the ultimate law governing the weird microphysical world is the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, that is, that the precise measurement of both the position and velocity of any elementary particle is impossible. The sub-nuclear world is therefore random—absurd. Even the nature of matter and energy is a mystery which quantum research has so far succeeded only in compounding. In pursuit of the elusive quark, the primary building block, it is thought, of atomic nuclei, scientific research is nearly as complicated as would be an attempt to disassemble and examine the parts of a grand piano made of ice with only a blow-torch and a crow-bar as tools.
Throughout Beckett's fiction it is evident that modern physics, however parodied, is a dominant factor in his cosmology. In his teakwood rocker Murphy accelerates to the speed of light, leaving his mind to subside into the random zone of the elementary particles. Mr. Knott's relativity house unhinges Watt's mind and lands him in an insane asylum, a precise microcosm of the absurd universe of relativity and the quanta. The hero of the trilogy abandons hope of cosmic rationality to undertake the pursuit of himself, only to discover that the self also resists rational formulation in words, despite the most intense introspection, because it, too, like all else that exists, is a space-time tesseract, an ego-field in perpetual flux. Finally, the Beckett creature of How It Is persists in his futile ego research, crawling across a world of liquid mud and torturing progressively attenuated versions of his field-ego out of the procession of his past selves.

Beckett's depiction of what he terms the "mess," therefore, derives to a large extent from his understanding the far-reaching implications of the writhing flux of the relativity world and the random, plasmic world of quantum theory. Insanity alone would make human life bearable in a universe so ill-contrived and incomprehensible. The sane man can only contemplate it with sadness and write novels of quiet desperation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>BIBLIOGRAPHY</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TITLE ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE PROBLEMS OF BECKETT'S FICTION</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE MYTH OF COSMIC ORDER</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE MYTH OF PSYCHIC ORDER</td>
<td></td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molloy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malone Dies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Unnamable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE MYTH OF THE WAVE-EGO</td>
<td></td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories and Texts for Nothing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How It Is</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

Every writer who creates a fictional world assumes a certain body of knowledge in his readers that will enable them to understand it. Justifiably or not, Samuel Beckett assumes that his readers are aware of the revolution in modern thought caused by the discoveries of relativity and quantum theory, and how these theories have virtually demolished the common-sense world of classical physical theory, the beautifully ordered cosmic clock of Newton. The world in which Beckett's variously maimed creatures are living, or rather dying, is, at its most basic level, a world composed of discrete particles buzzing around in weird patterns inconceivable to the imagination, powered by energy waves that are not waves at all, but rather electromagnetic chunks of assorted sizes, and presiding over this cosmic chaos is a law of chance called the Uncertainty Principle. It is also a world of relativity, the principle that welds together space and time, matter and energy. Beckett's characters are condemned to wander dazed in this absurd world and tell their incoherent stories. Though they may not understand how modern scientific theories have made their world incomprehensible, Beckett expects his readers to understand.

Except in passing, I do not attempt to point out the sources of Beckett's scientific knowledge. However, there is
little doubt that he was well aware of the discoveries of modern physics long before his great creative period between 1946 and 1950. Writers such as P. W. Bridgman, Bertrand Russell, Arthur Eddington, Sir James Jeans, and Albert Einstein published non-technical works on relativity and quantum theory prior to 1930, well before Beckett's first novel, *Murphy*, published in 1938.

The basic theories of modern physics and their astonishing implications are not too difficult for the general reader to grasp, although experts in science may disagree with attempts to translate into words concepts that require complex mathematical equations. However, the basic problem is to prove that modern physics has, in fact, affected Beckett's world-view and, consequently, his art. Beckett's novels are admittedly complex and leave open a wide range of interpretation. I do not intend to quarrel with other interpretations, but rather to explore a major dimension of Beckett's art that has not, to my knowledge, received attention thus far.

I am grateful to Dr. Joseph Wolff and Father Edward Maziarz for studying my preliminary work and encouraging me to continue what must have seemed a weird and implausible interpretation of Samuel Beckett's novels. I am also indebted to Mrs. Barbara Noller for her generosity in working on the manuscript.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr</td>
<td>Proust</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>More Pricks than Kicks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mu</td>
<td>Murphy</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Watt</td>
<td>1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>Molloy (in <em>Three Novels by Samuel Beckett</em>, 1965)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma</td>
<td>Malone Dies (in <em>Three Novels by Samuel Beckett</em>, 1965)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un</td>
<td>Unnamable (in <em>Three Novels by Samuel Beckett</em>, 1965)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td><em>Stories and Texts for Nothing</em> (1967)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td><em>How It Is</em> (1964)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Except for *More Pricks Than Kicks* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1934), all page citations are from the Grove Press editions. The dates given refer to the date of publication by Grove Press. The original dates of publication may be found in the bibliography.*
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEMS OF BECKETT'S FICTION

Beckett's Artistic Vision: The Problem

Although a literary work may not have a thesis, or at least not one easily reducible to a theoretical statement, it cannot exist without premises. Literary artists like Samuel Beckett are engaged in depicting visions of existence. Needless to say, visions, unlike theses, are hardly matter for debate. They quite simply are. Consequently, to state as the primary purpose of this study of Samuel Beckett's fiction that it will be to determine some of the major premises governing his cosmological model and to show how they derive from relativity and quantum theory, is not to claim that Beckett is some sort of literary quantum physicist engaged in pushing a thesis. His works are "essentially concerned with conveying their author's sense of mystery, bewilderment, and anxiety when confronted with the human condition, and his despair at being unable to find a meaning in existence."¹ The absurdity and randomness characteristic of Beckett's vision of human existence derive, in

large part, from theories of modern physics which contribute to the pervasive unintelligibility, the discontinuity, and the amorphous flux so obvious in his work.

Briefly, the world of Beckett's vision is one of utter chaos. It is a world without structure or purpose. It appears uncreated, plasmic, analogous to Murphy's mental zone three in which Murphy's mind floats like a particle in the plasmic quantum flux in a quasi-Brownian "tumult of non-Newtonian motion." (Mu 113) Significantly, furthermore, the stars of the macrocosm later appear to Murphy, not as astrological life guides, but as superfluous caricatures of his own ideal of absolute indeterminism. To Arsene, attempting vainly to warn Watt against the hopeless effort to discover a principle of order in Mr. Knott's establishment, the earth is described as a formless mass of sublunary "excrement," a "turd." (W 47) In Beckett's latest novel, How It Is, the world is liquid mud. Neither Murphy, Watt, nor any of the later creatures detect any trace of order or form in the world.

Not only is the physical world disorderly and random, but the sub-human specimens that inhabit it are, generally, ill-assembled, smelly, degenerating solipsists. It is true that Murphy and Watt betray some semblance of common humanity, some distinctive personal characteristics, and some initial hope of reducing chaos to order. However, the later characters of the trilogy descend toward physical and mental non-being in a series
of progressively discontinuous and apparently causeless leaps. It would appear that, not only is the macrocosmic quest for order doomed, but also man's researches into his own nature. He seems to be a creature without essence, or if he has one, it is dwindling and elusive. His frantic research to detect a definitive ego in *Three Novels* achieves nothing but an asymptotic approach to an absolute limit of néant. In both *Unnamable* and *Texts For Nothing* there seems ultimately to be no adequate pronoun to express a fluid self. It is little wonder that the world is problematic when the very consciousness grappling with it is equally so. Personal chaos is also mirrored in the Beckett uniform—at least until the stark nakedness of *How It Is*: battered derby, a stiff, ankle-length overcoat, and unmatched, tattered shoes. Furthermore, it becomes increasingly clear that the series of heroes variously named Watt, Molloy, Malone, *et al.*, is actually the same smelly hero slowly dissolving from one novel to the next, and that Beckett is pursuing the "tiny creature of many disguises" to his penultimate lair, never to capture the truly final abortion.² Contrasting his people with those of Kafka, Beckett remarked:

The Kafka hero has a coherence of purpose. He's lost but he's not spiritually precarious, he's not falling to bits. Another difference. You notice how Kafka's form is classic, it goes on like a steam roller—

almost serene. It seems to be threatened the whole time—but the consternation is in the form. In my work there is consternation behind the form, not in the form.\(^3\)

By "consternation" Beckett may mean both the personal emotion that powers his mythic visions and the mounting unreliability of stories composed by progressively fragmenting narrators. It is noteworthy that Beckett presents this degenerative process as a discontinuous, random process, and not a causal sequence of losses. It is a reversed series of evolutionary jumps down a chain of being. Also, whereas Kafka's creatures have been guilty of some primal fault which, though they are unaware of its nature, they frantically try to discover and expiate, Beckett's characters are grotesques thrown into a world in which the primal fault is the sin of birth, a sin which is essentially inexpiable, a sin as meaningless as human existence itself.\(^4\)

Causality, in the sense of personal responsibility, is absent from Beckett's world of the victim. Not only is this victim alienated from the macrocosmic world, from a creator, and from any belief in teleology, but, what is worse, he is alienated from himself. No name, no pronoun fits him. He is literally unnamable—an amorphous blob somehow in existence, fading away


fitfully into entropic stasis. This human surd is a giant, amorphous, frightening creation, whose image dominates every word Beckett has written. This omnipresent figure should be referred to as Malone, Molloy, Estragon, Watt, etc., only in specific contexts. In its omnipresent whole it contains their composite identities, and it must be equally omnipresent in the reader's mind, seen as hovering vastly over the shoulders of its fragmented personalities. In the unpunctuated pages of Comment c'est it is referred to as a "quidam"—that ambiguous figure defined by Webster as a "somebody; one unknown."

It is this shred of human consciousness that still survives in the vegetal narrator known as Unnamable, a mysterious being in a mysterious space with time oozing away only because he has still enough awareness to question his own existence as a consciousness.

What is true of the universe and the ego is true also of the events chronicled in Beckett's novels. There is a nightmare quality in the action of the novels: the events are random and discontinuous, without evident causality. It may be that the narrators' perceptions of events are erroneous, and that the pervading uncertainty arises from the faulty constructs based on faulty observation, as in the case of the Gall piano-tuning, or the hallucinatory vision of the nun or priest in Watt. In any case, there is no apparent logic or causality in what


happens to the characters as they pursue obsessive quests that have little or no motivation or purpose. If stories such as these present "the dream-life of a civilization, the nightmares and visions of an age," it is necessary to examine the premises underlying the visions. Aside from such quotidian events as eating and excreting, most of the happenings have one essential quality in common: a radical distortion of what are trivial experiences, often rendered in mathematical terms and smothered in irrelevant details. Plot, motives, and language fall to pieces in the stories. There is no clear causality and continuity in the random crippling of Beckett's heroes, nor do they appear particularly disturbed by their bodily losses, as one would normally expect. As in the case of Lucky's sudden muteness and Pozzo's blindness in Waiting for Godot, the

châtiment dantesque d'être tenu figé dans une stagnation sans limites alterne avec la stupéfaction d'avoir été le jouet soudain de changements irrémédiables qui sont des dégradations et des souffrances, et auquels on n'a pas pris part.8

Thus, the sequence of events of the novels as well as the plays is shot through with a fundamental note of discontinuity, a lack of causality, and an uncertainty which plagues the whole Beckett cosmos, where the reliability of a witness is always open to question. For the very existence of the celebrated Godot we have really only


the word of the two boys, whose testimony is in other respects less than satisfactory; and if dubiety of this order can infect a play, where we can see many things for ourselves, we should expect the reliability of the fiction to be still lower.\(^9\)

It is, indeed, of a very low order.

In addition to the inability of the interior monologuists to penetrate the meaning or even the reality of the cosmos, the self, and their own experiences, they ultimately resort to the absurd device of telling themselves stories in order to give themselves the illusion of existence and their lives some sort of fictive structure. If all else is indeterminate, however, so also are the stories of the fictive selves living out their fictive lives—or rather, certain discrete segments of their fictive lives. Thus, the stories appear generally structureless and random, without beginning or end. There can be no Aristotelian beginning, middle, or end, since that would presuppose a rational structure ordering the self and the events that constitute a life. However, any such structuring imposed on chaos would falsify reality. It is true that most men lead more or less ordered, but superficial lives, at least from Beckett's point of view, fundamentally because they consciously or unconsciously evade the reality of internal and external disorder. Any literature depicting this disorder cannot afford such evasion and must let the chaos into its structure insofar

as this is compatible with art. Thus, we have pseudo-stories which depict the lives of pseudo-men lost in a pseudo-cosmos.

Generally, in Beckett's fiction there is a flattening out of time, action, and values. From Watt on, time becomes increasingly confused and discontinuous in the novels, and vaguely recalled past events constitute discrete fragments of a life so far removed from the present state of the narrator, that they are, in effect, segments of the lives of utterly different persons. Secondly, there is virtually no subordination of action. All action is equally vain or futile, including the final introspective quest of narrators for their own egos. All action is random, lacking logic, probability, credibility. Finally, all values vanish. The most trivial actions and speculations dominate the narratives--with special attention lavished on the most sordid, as a metaphor for human existence generally. 10

Finally, there is the problem of language. Besides the absurd actions and reactions of Beckett's characters, the language describing their experiences gradually disintegrates toward a limit of incoherence and inarticulateness. It would seem that rational language and sentence structure implicitly deny the irrationality and uncertainty of actual experience. Therefore, structured language represents yet another false

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construct which must be exposed as fraudulent before authentic art is possible. If the novel is to mirror reality, therefore, it must struggle to express the cosmic chaos that man's gratuitous systems succeed only in masking. Consequently, by the time Beckett reaches his sixth novel, How It Is, he seems unable to punctuate a sentence, let alone construct one. More and more deeply he penetrates the heart of utter incompetence, where the simplest pieces, the merest three-word sentences, fall apart in his hands. He is the non-maestro, the anti-virtuoso, habitué of non-form and anti-matter, Euclid of the dark zone where all signs are negative, the comedian of utter disaster.\textsuperscript{11}

All the characters compulsively talk, ultimately as though the sound waves were the only structural material available to build a conscious self. In fact, in two plays, Embers and All That Fall, the sounds of nature assume an importance equal to the sounds of speech. It seems that "articulate sound, language, is somehow equated with the inarticulate sounds of nature. In a world that has lost its meaning, language also becomes meaningless buzzing,"\textsuperscript{12} like the droning of insects.

What conceivable cosmology--or absence of one--could account for the radical uncertainty, the apparent disorder, and near-incoherence of Beckett's fiction? What are Beckett's sub-men searching for? What is the source of their constant frustration? Why is the man in the bed writing a process-novel

\textsuperscript{11}Kenner, Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett, p. 77.

\textsuperscript{12}Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 43.
depicting his own degeneration? What final compulsion drives him to crawl through the mud in order to stab a fellow crawler into utterance with his can-opener?

This modern anti-hero is at the mercy of alien and unpredictable forces. Everything he experiences, including himself, is ambiguous. He is ill-equipped to unravel the mystery of existence. But then, if even science is baffled in its attempt to understand material reality, how can he hope to achieve spiritual stability and identity if order and stability appears largely lacking even in matter itself? Baffled as he is by the nature of matter and energy, the modern physicist is also confronted by the essential opacity of the world, the randomness of which, at the nuclear level, makes it appear to a large measure absurd and lawless to human reason. To an extent difficult to assess exactly, contemporary science has contributed to the loss of belief in the power of human reason to grasp reality, and this agnosticism lies behind some of the weird visions conjured up by the modern artist to express a chaotic world and a chaotic self. Gone is the Laplacian ideal of a cosmos governed by immutable scientific laws embedded by the clock-maker in natural phenomena, there to be deciphered step by step by human reason.

Theoretically, the structure of reality as discerned by common sense is actually a construct or a series of constructs derived from sense data or metrical data. In any ultimate
sense, the only essence the mind can contact directly is itself, but in Beckett even this contact with the hypothetical self results in an evanescent construct. Since the mind builds the internal and external constructs it calls reality out of its own fleeting data, it is the mind that imposes intelligibility and order on phenomena.\textsuperscript{13} Deny this power to the mind, as does Samuel Beckett, and reality then becomes radically unstructurable. In this connection, William York Tindall thinks that what modern physics is revealing about the structure of the cosmos has affected the structure of the modern novel:

The fiction of cause and effect. . . declined because the universe it celebrated died. Pure mathematics took the place of mechanism and biology, determinism with all its causes and effects gave way to atomic free will and statistical probability. No longer a machine, the universe became a thought, matter a wave, and wave a fiction. Time complicated space, which unimaginably curves. In short, the universe of the engineer-physicist, where Darwin's creatures grew, gave place, if there is a place, to the universe of the mathematical physicist and he alone can think it; for he alone can multiply the time-space continuum by the square root of minus one, which does not exist. This unthinkable universe is the creation of Max Planck, whose quantum theory (1900), all but destroying cause and effect, made nature discontinuous, and of Einstein, who in 1905 welded space with time, energy with mass and velocity. . . . Since, as Jeans observes, this universe is mysterious, news of it took time to descend from the laboratory and thinking-room to literary circle.\textsuperscript{14}

Although some of the influence of the new physics on art is

\textsuperscript{13}C. E. M. Joad, \textit{The Philosophical Aspects of Modern Science} (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1932), pp. 30-1.

undoubtedly indirect, occasionally it is direct, as in the case of a Beckett or a Joyce. Tindall points out that such phrases in *Finnegans Wake* as "Eins within a space," and "whorled without aimed," are direct references to the relativity cosmos and mark the end of the Newtonian. Tindall concludes that "there is nothing odd about the appearance of a discontinuous literature in the age of physical discontinuity."\(^{15}\)

In the universe of contemporary physics modern man must face the unsettling fact that the absolute laws he formerly associated with scientific research are now reduced to the status of more or less educated guesses.

Nature fundamentally defies reason; she goes her own erratic way, producing regularity through the law of sheer numbers, by sheer exhaustion of alternatives for aberration. Law, strictly, is an illusion, and in the midst of this universal play of chance, man is a creature endeavoring successfully to make the best of things, betting on the basis of probabilities.\(^{16}\)

Discoveries in relativity and quantum theory have forced scientists to abandon the older, mechanist models of phenomena, which were adequate for classical, Newtonian physics, in favor of mathematical models, pure abstractions. Relativity theory relies on the equations of the field, and quantum theory relies on probability mathematics. Hugh Kenner has observed that the modern novel has, in some cases, become a closed field with a

\(^{15}\) *Forces in Modern British Literature*, p. 152.

finite number of discrete counters (words), and that it is written in accordance with its own special laws, which are quite foreign to oral discourse. It is noteworthy that both science and literature turn to mathematics for structure—and from not dissimilar reasons. Kenner further insists that

the conditions of the closed field have been infiltrating our thought processes for some decades, and that the analogy I have been proposing . . . has already become the dominant intellectual analogy of our time. We use it to lend structure and direction to our thoughts, as the Victorians used biology and as the men of the Enlightenment used Newtonian physics. . . . Let me put this as flatly as possible: the dominant intellectual analogy of the present age is drawn not from biology, not from psychology . . . but from general number theory.

Thus, modern literature turns from the familiar world of everyday experience to explore more or less arbitrarily selected and ordered sets of experiences. However, the price one pays for thinking in general number theory is imaginative penury. The mathematical field is an arbitrary quasi-order imposed on minute areas of experience. It does not structure very much of the cosmic mess.

Although the question will be treated in more detail later, to maintain that Samuel Beckett understands how modern physics has enormously complicated the formerly neat universe of classical physics and what used to pass for common sense, is not to say that he holds any brief for science. It has certainly


done little to uncomplicate what Beckett uncompromisingly terms the "mess." The contempt he feels for all systems, theological or philosophical, includes science. Thus, for example, Beckett's Murphy is appalled at the efforts of the psychiatrists at Magdalen Mental Mercyseat to restore blissful psychotics to a state of sane misery amid the "glorious world of discrete particles," (Mu 177) in an obvious allusion to the chaotic micro-world of quantum mechanics. Beckett sees art alone, not science, as capable of encompassing reality, however inadequately. In an unpublished paper he specifically rejects all systems of knowing, except art, because they assume a priori that system exists, and hence beg the essential question. On the other hand, the task of art is to pose questions concerning the human experience of reality, not to provide answers. The artist, therefore, does not seek to impose order on chaos. He surveys it, rather, and reports his findings, or he simply exteriorizes his inner tensions, his disgust at the vision that obsesses him.19 In effect, Beckett rejects all models of physical or psychological reality as gratuitous. The only valid model for the world of his imagination is an art that approximates chaos.

The discoveries of modern physics, particularly in relativity theory and quantum theory, have complicated the

world for layman and scientist alike. It is a process-world of randomness, discontinuity, indeterminacy. Its new laws are probability constructs, open-ended and not absolute. It is necessary, therefore, to discuss the new physics, but only insofar as it applies to Beckett's fiction, and only with the degree of detail required by what I believe to be its influence on the subjects and structure of the novels. Intricacies that require modern mathematics are outside the limitations of this discussion. Moreover, some concepts of modern physics, such as curved space and massless particles, virtually defy imagination, and hence, can only be approximated by language in its present form. If my argument is valid that the cosmic model of Samuel Beckett's vision derives to a considerable extent from the discoveries of modern physics and their implications, then some attention to these theories is a necessary preliminary to a discussion of the fiction.

Artistic vision is refracted by the way a culture tends to view its world. One characteristic of twentieth century culture is a steady drifting away from the stable world of substance governed by absolute physical laws toward a mobile, plastic world of phenomena in which substance (mass) is a packet of trapped energy pulsating in macrocosmic or microcosmic space-time fields in accordance with principles which are only imperfectly understood. It seems clear, for example, that most of the problems that baffle Watt during his service in
Mr. Knott's establishment derive from modern physics and its philosophical consequences, especially indeterminacy and the apparent absence of causality. He hopes to find a world of immutable law and finds, instead, a world in a state of perpetual and unpredictable metamorphosis. If it can be said that "Beckett's aesthetic is determined in great part by his epistemology," and that "a man's sense of the world of time and space affect both his theory and practice of writing," then it is equally true that his ontological views will also affect his art.

Reason, logic and common sense seem violated by the universe unveiled by modern physics. Reason, it appears, was wrong in its previous certainties. Thus, science no longer conveys, as formerly, a reassuring impression of irresistible progress, but rather a new sense of the formidable mystery of the universe. Beckett's vision of the "mess" must be closely examined, as well as the way he permits "chaos to enter the formal structure of his art without destroying it." We are primarily concerned with the two great theoretical systems largely developed between 1900 and 1927: quantum theory, dealing with the basic units of matter and energy, and the theory of relativity, dealing with mass, space, time, and the


structure of the universe. To those reared in a Newtonian universe, the new theories must indeed seem a mess. In contrast to the present paradigm, the Newtonian construct of the *Principia* was a marvelous system:

a great machine operating according to inexorable laws with a uniform, steady, repetitive motion, a perpetual orderly pulse with all the purity of numbers themselves, the harmony and rightness of things. . . . Newton's theory provided for a perpetual universe that would never run down. . . . [so that] the energy of this clockwork system was conserved. The planets and moons in their perpetual fall through frictionless space neither gained nor lost energy. The springs of this mechanism were natural laws and once wound could never unwind.²²

Today, scientists have abandoned the mechanist concepts of classical physics as too crude and rigid. Instead, they describe physical phenomena in terms of a much more fluid medium, that of mathematics. A classical physicist like Lord Kelvin felt that he could not understand physical theories unless he could visualize them in terms of mechanical constructs. The weird, Rube Goldberg, gyroscopic contraption he used to illustrate the function of the non-existent ether is a case in point. However, no longer do scientists stray far from mathematical models. Sir James Jeans observes that "the making of models or pictures to explain mathematical formulae and the phenomena they describe is like making graven images of a

spirit." Pure mathematics is not concerned with material reality at all, but with pure thought. The mathematician creates thoughts and constructs abstract symbols to picture them. Curiously, however, the abstract thought of the mathematician often turns out to be extremely useful to the physicist. Thus, Riemann's geometry was a mathematical curiosity for a half-century after 1854 until Einstein used it in his relativity equations to describe space curvature. There is some reason, then, to credit the notion that "the universe can best be pictured, although still very imperfectly and inadequately, as consisting of pure thought, the thought . . . of a mathematical thinker." 24

However, though science has transcended sensory perception, visual models, of the macro- and microphysical universe in favor of abstract, mathematical symbols, it has done so only at the expense of what Einstein termed "an emptiness of content." 25 Man can be said to know only what his senses perceive. If he loses the world reported by his senses to a world translatable only by mathematical abstractions, he has little left to contemplate, certainly little that is comprehensible except to the minority of mankind schooled in modern mathematics.

24 Ibid., p. 147.
Therefore, it might well be said that modern physics, by its reliance on mathematics as its unique language, has shot the visible universe full of holes—at least at its two extremities. Nevertheless, mathematics is the language of modern physics. Through it, physicists structure an analogy of reality, though not reality itself. Since science is a system of ideas necessary for the organization of selected phenomena, it is not simply to be equated with truth and reality in their brute totality. Furthermore, scientific laws are human mental constructs; they do not exist in nature, nugget-like, to be mined and classified by men.26

The Special and General Theories of Relativity developed by Albert Einstein are significant in that they have destroyed the former absolutes of classical physics: space, time, mass, energy. At the outset, however, it should be kept in mind that relativity does not mean total subjectivity, as is sometimes supposed. Rather, it is a corrective for subjectivity in scientific method, particularly by the use of transformation equations which compensate for the variations of measurement by observers on different inertial systems:

Relativity is not relativism. . . . Einsteinian physics does not leave knowledge in doubt, subject to the vagaries of personal perception or social conditioning. While it builds the observer into its observations, it provides stable formulae for "transforming" measurements from any one frame of reference into any other. In fact,
the Einsteinian enterprise may be considered a search for invariants—like the relation of mass and energy, or the speed of light—which do not change their value with the frame of reference. 27

The Special Theory states, regarding the laws governing light and other electromagnetic phenomena, that all laws of nature are the same for all systems moving uniformly relative to each other. There is no absolute frame of reference, no stationary point in the universe, by which to measure motion. The motions of systems can be measured only relative to each other. And since the velocity of light (c) is constant, i.e., unaffected by the motion of inertial systems, it cannot be used to determine the speed of systems. 28 The General Theory extends the principle of relativity to the universe and states that the laws of nature are uniform for all systems, regardless of their state of motion: uniform or non-uniform. Gravitation and inertia are equivalent forces; one cannot distinguish gravitational from inertial forces, as in sudden acceleration or recoil. 29

In short, one cannot trust his own unaided perceptions to give an accurate report of phenomena observed. There is no privileged observer anywhere in the universe. Space-time motion affects all observation of physical phenomena, rendering

28 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, p. 39.
29 Ibid., pp. 70, 77.
it subjective, or relative. However, while relativity theory denies objectivity to physical phenomena and observation, it transfers objectivity to the laws of nature, which are regarded as invariant.

Innocuous as such a bald, summary statement of relativity theory may appear, it meant that the concepts of the modern world would have to be reconstructed from their very base. Man and his world henceforth cease to be relatively static entities and become dynamic entities, ceaselessly metamorphosing, interacting process-structures. The primary impact of relativity theory was philosophical rather than technological, and best sellers by Jeans, Eddington, and Whitehead between the two world wars were concerned primarily with the change of vision brought about by the new physics. Furthermore, theoretical physicists began to realize that the reconstruction of the physical world would not be completed until "modern man's conception of the humanities and its humanistic philosophy had been transformed also."30 The old, common sense concepts of absolute space, time, and mass gave way to thinking of them in terms of relationally defined entities and events in an interacting field, such that a change in one value inevitably changes all the other values and the entire character of the field itself. Relativity theory calls attention to the fact

of sensory unreliability in observation by finding that all objects, properties, and events given by mere observation are not external objects or events in public space and time but are, instead, relative to the perceiver, his various sense organs, and when and where he stands when he looks at natural phenomena.\footnote{Northrop, \textit{Man, Nature and God}, p. 203.}

Regardless of the observer's sensory unreliability, however, the many-termed, relational, postulationally constructed laws of natural knowledge remain constant, or, in other words, invariant, through all the relativity to the perceiver, his sense organs, and the place where he stands or to which he refers his empirical observations.\footnote{Ibid.}

Therefore, the world revealed by the senses is not quite the real world, but rather a grid-construct of phenomena one step removed. Intellect is required for its interpretation. Thus, the senses are analogous to a bank of minute electronic sensors all of which are wired to a bank of light bulbs, such that a hand placed on the sensors produces a hand-image of lighted bulbs. The image itself resembles the real hand less and less the more closely it is examined and requires careful interpretation to compensate for its inadequacies.

In many ways relativity theory and its implications challenge common sense. On systems in motion, such as trains (Einstein's favorite device for illustration), a yard-stick shrinks and a clock retards by the precise amount, Beta, according to the Lorentz transformation equations, which

\footnote{Ibid.}
calculate changes caused by the motion of masses in space-time. Nevertheless, common sense continued to find that a pound weighed sixteen ounces, a yard measured three feet, an hour lasted sixty minutes. How could railroads avoid chaotic traffic snarls if the engineer's watch and the station-master's registered variant times? How could eclipses be predicted accurately if the time computed from the moving platform of earth were not uniform in terms of the differing inertial systems of the sun and the moon? Later experiments, nevertheless, strikingly confirmed Einstein's theory. Naturally, ordinary measurement is quite accurate at the normal level of experience in relatively slow-moving inertial systems. Let the velocities approach the speed of light, however, and the space-time relativity corrections then become crucial.

In defense of his theories, Einstein himself suggested an experimental proof that mass and energy are equivalent (the famous \( E = mc^2 \)) when he predicted in 1911 that light beams from distant stars would be deflected in their passage near the sun, and that the amount of deflection would measure 0.83 seconds of an arc. The solar eclipses of 1919 and 1922 proved him right: the star-light was deflected by the mass-force of the sun, thus proving that energy possesses mass.\(^{33}\) Furthermore, this experimental confirmation extended to other, apparently paradoxical, implications about space and time.

Energy possesses mass, therefore, and is subject to non-Euclidean curvature by masses in space. So also, all matter in the universe in whatever mass and velocity exercises inertial distortion in its space-time field, or, in other words, causes curvature. Thus, the total effect of all these masses is an over-all curvature of the space-time continuum, the combined distortions causing the universe to bend back on itself in a gigantic and irregular cosmic curve.\textsuperscript{34} It is somewhat analogous to a gigantic expanding bubble, of which the skin is the universe, a universe composed of space-time with warpings or wrinklings on its irregularly expanding surface to represent masses in inertial motion. Without these masses in motion, space-time would not exist. Mass, space, and time, therefore, are all welded together into an expanding bubble-continuum--the universe.

With regard to space, Newton's clockwork universe surrenders to Einstein's in the sense that the universe of relativity theory is not a "rigid and immutable edifice where independent matter is housed in independent space and time; it is on the contrary an amorphous continuum, without any fixed architecture, plastic and variable, constantly subject to change and distortion."\textsuperscript{35} Obviously, such a conception defies capture in a mechanist model, though not in a mathematical, or even, perhaps, a polyphonic model. Even abstract art can approximate

\textsuperscript{34}Barnett, \textit{The Universe and Dr. Einstein}, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 81-2.
it only imperfectly insofar as it cannot capture non-repetitive motion (except for mobiles). Space, then, is simply a perpetually changing, relative order of masses in inertial motion, and not a Newtonian infinite void housing regularly and repetitively orbiting clock-like astronomical systems.

Whereas relativity theory was an attempt to make the observation of macrocosmic events more precise, and was, accordingly, forced to abandon the absolutism of classical physics, it did not deny the existence of causality and determinate physical laws of nature. The theory simply aims to establish invariant values. In this sense, it is really an extension of classical physics, sharing with it the assumption that the universe is a deterministic, continuous structure. At the same time, however, the traditional structure of the cosmos at the microphysical level began to disintegrate under the research of quantum theory into atomic and nuclear phenomena. What was once conceived as indivisible atoms, minute galaxies composed of protons and planetary electrons, now appeared to be a plasmic mass of discrete particles (or waves) of matter (or energy). Science here seemed at last to be penetrating into the ultimate lair of reality. Yet, each new construct based on quantum research, besides eliminating older, less valid theories, itself underwent constant modification and refinement. It seemed that a principle of relativity, or rather, of uncertainty, was a constant factor governing scientific "laws" of microphysics.
In 1958 Niels Bohr illustrated the quandary of quantum theory when he commented on a fellow scientist's unorthodox theory of the behavior of particles. He said that he and his colleagues were less concerned about the absurdity of the theory than about whether it was sufficiently absurd to stand a chance of being correct.  

Quantum theory deals with the apparently random sub-cosmos of matter-energy. Data from this world fed into the mind does not yield anything even remotely resembling model solar-system atoms. On the contrary, the micro-world can only imperfectly be visualized or controlled in experimentation. Scientists themselves find it difficult to describe the findings of quantum physics in intelligible terms ever since Max Planck discovered in 1900 that energy is not emitted or absorbed in continuous waves, but rather in discontinuous spurts of quanta, much like machine-gun bullets of energy.

In sharp contrast with relativity theory, quantum theory is largely indeterministic, or probabilistic. Generally, the theory of causality means that a complete description of a prior set of conditions will enable an observer to predict or bring about a determined effect. And, conversely, observation of an effect enables one to deduce a cause or causes. However, a radical inability to measure nuclear phenomena with sufficient

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accuracy defeats attempts to predict the effects of experiments carried on at sub-atomic levels. So far as the quantum physicist is concerned, it is not too much of an overstatement to say that the sub-atomic world is, therefore, random and dominated by chance—or probability statistics, which is the same thing. He is unable to construct rigid laws and must be content with probability laws. He can neither describe the present state of any micro-system precisely, nor, consequently, predict its future states. This does not mean that future states of micro-systems are not, in principle, determined by their present states. It is just that the present state is, in principle, unknowable. Heisenberg's thought-experiment devised to illustrate his famous Uncertainty Principle shows why a perfect description of a micro-physical event is impossible. If one electron is admitted into a box, the problem is to describe it perfectly: that is, to pinpoint its position and its velocity precisely. But this is impossible. An energy source must be used by the observer for the purpose of making the measurement. The energy source—say a single quantum of energy, a photon—so interacts with the hypothetical electron that only the position or the velocity of the electron can be precisely determined, but not both. The margin of uncertainty in any attempt to compute both values is precisely Planck's constant \( h = (6.55 \times 10^{-27}) \). Such an infinitesimal fraction of an erg-second is negligible on the macrocosmic level, but it is an
important unit of power on the nuclear level. Consequently, the
world-line of the electron, or of any other elementary
particle, cannot be determined precisely, and hence neither can
its history. The same principle applies to all sub-nuclear
particles, whose paths and sometimes even existence can be
destroyed in the act of measurement. Furthermore, the path of
an elementary particle constantly vibrates in wave motion, so
that the particle can be localized no more precisely than its
wave-length. It could be anywhere between crest and crest, or
trough and trough.

The physicist thus finds himself in a world from which
the bottom has dropped out; as he penetrates deeper and
deeper it eludes him and fades away by the highly
unsportsmanlike device of just becoming meaningless. 37

In the indeterminate micro-world of the quanta, modes of thought
and speech appropriate to the Newtonian world are inadequate.
It can best be described in terms of probability mathematics.
Thus, a fundamental discontinuity in the movements of elementary
particles and in the absorption and emission of energy quanta is
mirrored in the scientist's inability to detect an intelligible
pattern in the behavior and structure of nuclear matter. The
classical universe of well-behaved billiard-ball matter moving
as if on tracks and the obedient ether carrying electromagnetic
waves through infinite space does not at all correspond to the
bewildering complexity of the reality unveiled by the new physics.

37P. W. Bridgman, "The New Vision of Science," Harpers,
CLVIII (March, 1929), p. 450.
Einstein was deeply disturbed by these implications of quantum theory. He expressed the hope that the statistical methods of quantum physics with its indeterminacy and probability postulates would not be permanent constructs because he could not bring himself to believe "that God plays dice with the world." He thought that science must not be surrendered without a struggle to the laboratory operationalist content merely to measure and describe. If physics is to be a science, it must be able to formulate laws. Otherwise, it becomes a sophisticated gambling game played with clouds of errant particle-waves of matter-energy.

Nevertheless, it is possible to interpret the indeterminacy principle more hopefully. Implications of this principle reinstate in the physical world a creative process constantly elaborating new structures out of the randomness of matter. A deterministic "block" world is actually a static world. In short,

the objectivistic interpretation of the principle of indeterminacy implies the end of the belief in the static world of Laplace and his contemporaries. It means the reinstatement of becoming in the physical world.39

The indeterministic world is a world of process, and the

38 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, p. 29.

The indeterministic world is a world of process, and the only status which a future can have in the dynamical world is that of possibility or potentiality; and possibility, if it is not a mere word covering our ignorance (as determinists say it is), implies the genuine ambiguity of events not yet realized. This is what the modern process philosophers from James to Whitehead are intensely aware of.  

A final and fairly obvious physical principle underlying Beckett's fiction is that of entropy, the stasis of energy in equilibrium. A graph of energy expenditure in the form of heat, light, sound, and motion would describe a diminishing vertical spiral approaching a static limit-point, the vanishing point of energy differential. Together with energy diffusion, in space-time there is a corresponding disappearance of mass. Until the twentieth century, the classical conservation laws of mass, energy, and momentum were considered axiomatic. In the famous Einstein equation the conservation of mass-energy is fused complementarily. However, it now seems that, on the astronomical level, the galaxies of the cosmic system are retreating at immense speeds from some unknown center in a cosmic detonation which occurred perhaps ten billion years ago, more or less. Cosmic mass-energy, therefore, is dissipating itself ceaselessly:

All the phenomena of nature, visible and invisible, within the atom and in outer space, indicate that the substance and energy of the universe are inexorably diffusing like vapor through the insatiable void.  

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40 Capek, The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics, p. 356.

41 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, p. 99.
Entropy, the heat-death of the universe, is therefore the final state of stagnation, the cosmic equilibrium of energy. The energy of the first law of thermodynamics is indeed conserved, but in accordance with the second law, it will be, in time, totally and equally diffused. At this point, "time itself will come to an end. For entropy points the direction of time. Entropy is the measure of randomness." All semblance of order will vanish, there will be no more motion to measure, and time, as a measure of point-events in space, will no longer have any meaning because "events" will have ceased forever.

Georges Lemaître, in his cosmology, links quantum theory and relativity theory. According to his theory of the universe, world history began with the detonation of an immense concentration of pure energy in the form of a primordial super-photon, and the development of the universe consists in the subsequent centrifugal fragmentation and dispersion of this titanic mass-energy throughout space-time. He reasons that energy of constant total amount is distributed in quanta, and that the number of distinct quanta is constantly increasing. Reversing the process to the beginning of time, Lemaître would postulate a few original quanta, or even a unique quantum mass of energy. There are three consequences of this theory: (1) as in relativity theory, the super-photon theory fuses mass and energy. Radioactive elements still in existence are small-scale

42 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, p. 100.
replicas of the initial disintegration that began cosmic history.

(2) Space-time is fused with its physical content, mass, and the initial atomic explosion and the expansion of space are aspects of a single process. As galaxies recede, space curvature constantly increases. (3) Space, time, and mass-energy are fused. Time is co-extensive with the expansion of the field of mass-energy in space-time. This expansion is unidirectional and irreversible. Nevertheless, the process is not deterministic, since the original quantum was subject to the Uncertainty Principle. Time, finally, the space-measure of this expansion, will end when the world-lines of the quanta reach zero inertia. 43

Having thus cursorily examined relativity and quantum theory, it is necessary to survey the general influence of these theories on the world of Beckett's fiction, reserving the more detailed examination for the later analysis of each novel in turn. In brief, Beckett's world is like an alien planet peopled by alien beings. His vision of their lives is a highly stylized construct achieved by the gradual shearing off of most of the quotidiien elements of normal experience. As a myth-maker, he is depicting his idea of the human predicament, and this idea is characterized throughout his fiction by the qualities of indeterminacy, discontinuity, random flux, and entropy—all implications of modern, as opposed to classical physics. Thus,

43 Caper, The Philosophical Implications of Contemporary Physics, pp. 351-56.
when Beckett claims that he does not understand philosophy, he is really aiming at a more general target. He is attacking all systematizations of human experience as gratuitous and false. Experience cannot be ordered, and every ordering--his own included--is a temporary and dissolving construct. It can never be true, and it can never be complete.

In Beckett, the signs of order or form are more or less continuously presented, but always with a sign of cancellation; they are resources not to be believed in, checks which will bounce. Order, the Christian paradigm, he suggests, is no longer usable except as an irony; that is why the Rooneys collapse in laughter when they read on the Wayside Pulpit that the Lord will uphold all that fall.44

The collapse of the classical, Newtonian universe and the subsequent fragility of all physical laws is mirrored in the virtual nullus ordo depicted in Beckett's writings. Regardless of whether one believes in divine providence or not, contemporary physical evidence supports the view that chaos is at the heart of the matter. Indeed, after Watt, research into the cosmos is abandoned in favor of research into the ego.

A universe in the perpetual process of becoming is radically unknowable in any final terms. Consequently, for Beckett, thought is useless mental motion and absolute truth unattainable.

All ultimate truth is forever beyond the compass of the human mind; and therefore truth does not, in effect, exist. It is this hopelessness and

helplessness in an alien and incomprehensible universe that leads Beckett to the savage purity of his pessimism. 45

Increasingly, time and space become indeterminate. In the trilogy, Molloy, Malone Dies, and Unnamable, the alternations of day and night slowly merge into one interminable, gray, retarded present. As the narrator penetrates more deeply into his consciousness, time as a sequence of point-events loses all meaning because there are virtually no external events by which it can be measured. In effect, time halts as space narrows to the infinitesimally small enclosure of the problematic ego. In addition, Beckett's creatures gradually lose mass as their space-time being shrinks. Molloy has only one good leg; Malone is paralyzed; Mahood ends as a human trunk in an urn; Unnamable is an eyeless, mouthless, earless blob of protoplasm resting in what seems to be a bowl. Space-time has an extremely entropic effect on this shrinking human mass. In one sense, the shrinkage of Beckett's humanoids is an obvious consequence of their zero inertial motion, since mass is directly proportional to energy.

One mystery revealed by quantum theory is that of time-reversal. Elementary particles know nothing of the inexorable time arrow of the second law of thermodynamics. In this connection, Beckett's trilogy can be read, on one level, as a

journey backward through a human space-time geodesic beginning with Molloy's resolve to travel back to his mother and ending with the mucilaginous human foetus named Unnamable, lodged in his mother's womb at the earliest stages of gestation, a rudimentary foetus with a fully developed consciousness that probes itself despairingly in an attempt to discover its own ego. Having abandoned a universe which was never properly created in the first place, the narrator savagely labors at his own de-creation.

Beckett's world is a-causal. Perhaps Murphy's quantum mental zone three is the most accurate image of a chance-dominated cosmos. It caricatures the idea that there exists a correspondance between the structure of the outer world and that of the human mind, a correspondance which enables man to comprehend reality. However, at both the physical and psychic level quantum randomness is the ultimate law. It is little wonder that Murphy's ideal is to melt away anonymous and peaceful amid the other elements of the periodic chart. Just as Robbe-Grillet departs from the Newtonian universe of unchanging, essential things to that of a universe of things in flux, so also does Beckett when he portrays the Newtonian Watt


baffled by the fluctuations of Mr. Knott and his constantly rotating house furniture. An Einsteinian universe requires an Einsteinian mind-set. To a classical, Laplacian mind, it can only appear irrational.

Together with the attenuation of physical reality in the universe, the human personality likewise becomes a shrinking field of consciousness thinly strewn with fragmented and unrelated experiences. The self is an enigma, and likewise, identity, as all memory of its past states fades away. Phenomenon-man, thus, has no definable essence. He is a process in process. No wonder his ambition is to achieve the status of non-existence.

Like all of physical reality, man is an inertial mass in compulsive motion in space-time. Just as the values of the space-time field vary constantly, so also does the psychic field. However, the relativity field is a continuum, and if there is anything constant about the egos of Beckett's characters, it is their disconcerting space-time discontinuity, a discontinuity further complicated by physical and psychic entropy. They are quantum beings characterized by random external motion and, that failing, by random interior monologue. A fundamental principle is, therefore, that of indeterminacy. The mystery of consciousness "is the meaning of his stories within stories, his plays within plays, his characters within characters."48 In this

sense, the controlling concept connecting these apparently
disconnected series of selves and their stories is quantic
discontinuity. Though there is nothing novel in the concept of
a discontinuous stream, or more precisely, wave, of consciousness,
which may be seen in the ideas of David Hume or William James, it
has received reinforcement from the implications of quantum
theory. Thus, "the stream of consciousness is as discontinuous
as the stream of quanta." It is perhaps partly for this
reason that Beckett remarked in a conversation that "if anything
new and exciting is going on today, it is the attempt to let
Being into art." Reality is enigmatic and so is man. He thinks
that one's ego is a mystery to most men. "Somewhere perhaps,
Beckett believes, is an 'abortive self,' a being somehow
stunted, undeveloped, but more real, more authentic than the
public man, who seems closer to the second or third person than
to the first." It might be remarked that to let being, so
conceived, into art is synonymous with admitting chaos.

Such a position follows in part from his rejection of
the Christian point of view, and with it any possibility
of either original or posthumous fulfillment, in part
from a quasi-religious sense of "fulfillment" through
privation, and in part from the philosophical idealist's
feeling for the unreality of the world of the senses.


50 Harvey, "Samuel Beckett on Life, Art, and Criticism,"
P. 556.

51 Harvey, "Samuel Beckett on Life, Art, and Criticism,"
P. 550.
Relativity denies the absoluteness of matter, which quantum theory sees merging with energy at its deepest level, and all that once seemed solid is now in flux. The identity of the ego is similarly Protean. Just as matter, so also is the self porous and plastic, as random and errant as the quanta. Nothing is constant. The Beckett character, who cannot understand the laws of being,

nor identify himself, nor truly encounter other identities, nor discover in reality either the form or essence of anything he does encounter, desires above all things to cease.52

In order to convert his experiences into understandable terms in fiction, the process field-ego who is the narrator, an observer locked inside his field of observation, would need transformation equations. In 1949, Herman Broch, a German novelist, wrote that he had been trying for thirty years to solve this problem by trying to view reality as the physical scientist does, always carefully defining the position of the narrator. Since the narrator-observer is locked into his own private inertial field, so to speak, he would need fictional transformation equations to rectify errors of observation caused by his special point of view, or position.53 In a 1936 essay entitled "James Joyce and the Present," an essay of which


Joyce was well aware, Broch observed that Joyce presents the narrator together with his observations so that the reader can gauge the relative reliability of the narration and apply his own transformation equations. Beckett, a frequent visitor at the Joyce household between 1930 and 1940, may have been aware of Broch's work also.

The narrator mediates experiences as refracted by his values and assumptions. It is in Watt and the trilogy that the relativity cosmos and self most clearly show the lack of transformation equations to aid the highly unreliable narrators. In this connection, Lawrence Ferlinghetti in his 1960 novel Her, presents a character who views life through a relativity ego he terms his "fourth person" singular. This means that the "I" realizes that he is in a relativity field with a set of values and relationships which condition his experiencing. The "I" must constantly define his observational position in order accurately to assess experience. However, in Beckett's Unnamable, the narrator's field-ego is unreeling with such speed that there is a perpetual time-lag between the reality of the self and the words used to express it. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of any Beckett narrator nimble enough to fix the

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flux with even the most high speed computer programmed for utterance.

Events in Beckett's world virtually cease in the later fiction. Point-events cease, replaced by word-events. And since being and events require words, whenever silence occurs, as it does frequently in Beckett's drama, being and time also cease momentarily—if by being and time we understand a sequence of word-events. The use of painstaking detail in the novels is, therefore, ironic in that it serves only to intensify the impression of unreality. In any case, words derived from a stable world of being are ill-suited to express the chaotic events of a dissolving, relativity world. Either the narrator's perception of events errs, or the words used to transcribe them err, or the fragmented sequence of events is denounced by the narrator as a pack of lies invented to pass the interminable time. Beckett's novels are a reductio of the humanist's concern with verisimilitude attained through minute attention to detail, since "nineteenth century liberalism certified the novel's preoccupation with people preoccupied by trivia as art's truest note, a proper human compassion."\(^{56}\)

The novels do have some semblance of fictive order, though it becomes more and more gratuitous in the later novels. However random the structure may appear, it would seem that it is less so than the fluctuating world and the self it vainly

\(^{56}\)Kenner, Samuel Beckett, p. 69.
tries to express truthfully. The random and disjointed novels of a disintegrating narrator commenting on his state as dispassionately as if he were a stranger to himself tells fragments of tales of his past (or fictive) selves that lack any but the most tenuous connection, tales which he tells for want of something better to do as he lies paralyzed in some unknown point of space-time. If the past is a series of meaningless discontinuities, the present is a meaningless continuum paradoxically punctuated by discontinuities. The novels are a mimesis of formlessness both of the cosmos and the self.

Language fails by its very nature to depict the process-self living (rather, dying) in a process-cosmos. Aryan languages tend to split the experience-continuum into parts, thus failing to capture the plasticity of perpetual process. Consequently, the narrators grope for the non-existent proper words, or whittle their assertions until virtually nothing is left of the simplest assertions of fact. Or the narrators contradict and dismantle what they say almost in the next breath. In an absurd universe of flux, one that is irrational at its minute atomic core, perhaps no statements utter the reality so well as contradictory statements. Perhaps, as Unnamable hopes, he may happen by chance on the right, liberating, words if only he perseveres in talking incessantly. In the meantime, he utters word-fields like a computer programmed at random. Watt depicts the incident of the Galls, piano-tuners, but realizes that his words are not a
faithful rendition of the incident, and that any hypotheses he constructs to explain what he may have observed are vitiated at their base. Consequently, he constructs a series of hypotheses in the hope of chancing on one that will be true. In a sense, it is this labor of Sisyphus that plagues all the narrators from Watt on: vain attempts to impose at least a provisional meaning on experience.

In Beckett's world meaning is merely an appearance of order which man imposes on his experience to make it tolerable. Thus, Estragon and Vladimir wait for Godot; Watt tries to fathom the mysteries of the Knott household and its master. The question is whether or not one can make experience manageable by the use of human reason.

Art is the one form of ordering, even an art of ordering a vision of life's incoherence. But the paradoxical barrier seems to be the shaping medium itself: words. Words tend to get in the way of describing and exploring experience: they warp experience, distort it, rather than render it faithfully. 57

Indeed, the warping and distortion arise from the nature of language itself. It cannot capture the experience of a continuum using discrete words that implicitly assume stable essences.

After Watt, written in English between 1942 and 1944, Beckett wrote the following plays in French: Eleutheria, Waiting for Godot, Endgame, and the novels Mercier and Camier, Molloy, Malone Dies, Unnamable, Stories and Texts for Nothing, and How It Is. Neither Eleutheria nor Mercier and Camier have

been published. Martin Esslin thinks that a major reason for
Beckett's decision to write his most important work in French
after 1945 was that it lent him discipline in his struggles with
meaning and language by cutting him off from the accretions of
association and connotation of his native language that tend to
wrest control from the writer. Thus, "Beckett insures that his
writing remains a constant struggle, a painful wrestling with
the spirit of language itself."58 However, Beckett's conviction
that the world and human experience is a chaotic flux and hence
essentially inexpressible in any structured language is also
partly responsible for his language shift. There is no adequate
idiom to express a process universe of relativity flux and
quantum randomness, and Beckett's adoption of a foreign
language is thus analogous to his conviction that art must labor
constantly to express itself in ever-renewed terms, and that
despite the inherent impossibility ever to succeed in framing
any final form to contain the formless. Art is an infinite
regression, an infinitesimal calculus, that may approach, but
never attain its limit: fidelity to the reality of total
chaos.

The process world is refractory to depiction in
language, and physicists have abandoned its description in
terms of words and mechanist models in favor of the mathematics

58 The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 9.
of the field and probability statistics. Beckett, however, parodies this scientific language with his peculiar mathematical games devised to induce a specious order into such trivialities as Murphy's biscuit consumption, Watt's croaking frogs, or Molloy's rotation of sucking-stones. Perhaps the only art that might most nearly approximate the reality of process existence would be an endless, cacophonous symphony perpetually and randomly composed on a bank of computers to be played by an orchestra of mad and tone-deaf musicians. This is perhaps one reason that the last addenda item in Watt, before the disclaimer of symbolism, is a wordless musical fragment ending inconclusively on A-sharp. This world is "unspeakable," (W 85) literally.

With regard to the fidelity of the English translations to the original French, Beckett either translates his own work or carefully supervises translation. The translations are virtually equivalent to the originals, and only an expert bilingual reader can discern shades of verbal difference--always excepting colloquial idioms.

Turning now to consider Beckett's interest in the problem of the modern artist facing a new world vision, it should be noted that, generally speaking, modern artists are aware of the mysteries of the scientific cosmos revealed by relativity and quantum theory. Modern non-representational, or abstract, art follows the lead of modern physics in probing
space-time and matter, and in envisioning its ultimate structure as a plastic flux. In short, both science and art have abandoned the mid-cosmos of familiar forms and Euclidean perspectives to examine the twin enigmas of the macro- and microcosmos. Thus, modern art concentrates on fractured forms, amorphous egos, and the discontinuities of space and time. Structure and event lose their causal sequence and appear as random and absurd as the apparently lawless behavior of sub-nuclear particle-waves.59 For instance, one school of modern sculpture builds random assemblages out of pieces of junk welded together however chance or mood may happen to dictate. Or a Jackson Pollock relinquishes control of the paint-brush and gives chance a major role in distributing the paint-spatters on the canvas.60 Conceivably, a literature inspired by the views of quantum physics might more properly be composed with sets of words in subject, verb, and complement combinations and fed into a computer programmed to make random choices.

Beckett pointed out the dilemma of the artist confronted by this chaotic universe. An artist orders his materials, but to what extent can he order chaos? Therefore, Beckett sees as the major problem to "find a form that accommodates the


Regarding his own vision of life, Beckett also said that the confusion is not my invention. We cannot listen to a conversation for five minutes without being acutely aware of the confusion. It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. It is not a mess you can make sense of.

Men generally avoid this confrontation either by distraction or by imposing a factitious order on his experience. However, Beckett is convinced that the existence of a "mess" must be apparent to anyone who objectively examines his own experiences. It will be the experience of a "non-knower, a non-can-er. The other type of artist--the Apollonian--is absolutely foreign to me." Clearly, then, the artist is at an absurd impasse. If he is to be honest, his goal must be either to fail repeatedly to depict reality with some sort of form, or he must reach a limit of incomprehensible nonsense. When Beckett was once asked if the secret system of his art was the absence of system, he replied: "I'm not interested in any system. I can't see any trace of any system anywhere."

In quoting a statement of James Joyce to Padraic Colum, Beckett summarized

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62 Ibid., p. 22.
64 Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," p. 3.
his own personal "Uncertainty Principle" when he said that "birth and death were exciting enough to him but how to pass the interim if we are unsure of all else and therefore incapable of willing or of doing." 65

A certain sense of shock at the flawed creation (or non-creation) is one of the major forces in anti-realistic art. It proposes as an ideal to create its own worlds, which, however chaotic they may appear, would be distinct improvements on this one. Thus, Beckett entitles a 1945 essay on the paintings of the van Velde brothers in Cahiers d'art: "La Peinture des van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon," using the joke of a tailor's botched work on a pair of pants as contrasted with the botched work of creation, a joke he repeats in Endgame. The ironic contrast of the joke

sets a botched world against the painstaking, if less ambitious, product of man's craft. It draws a parallel between God the artist and compares the macrocosm, as Murphy calls it, to the little world of the art work. 66

Beckett, naturally, opts for the little world of art.

Beckett is interested in the abstract art of the van Veldes because their art of the impossible parallels his own. Bram van Velde departs from the daylight world of surface and form to paint his own mental microcosm. He is trying to


immobilize space on canvas, while his brother, Geer, is trying to immobilize time—both impossible tasks in the relativity universe of the constantly expanding space-time continuum. To succeed in such a task, the universe would have to regain its former Newtonian stability. Today, however, the artist is faced by a "macrocosme secoué par les frissons du temps,"67 in Beckett's own terms, indicating his realization that space, time, and mass are inseparable field correlatives.

Thus, both brothers, by opposed means seek to know the unknowable, to see the unseeable, to nullify the root condition of human existence, man's privation, his loss of contact with ultimate reality. Both seek to fathom the mystery of substance with eyes and minds attuned to the accidental. And, of course, so does the poet, novelist, and playwright named Samuel Beckett.68

We have already noted the quandary of the modern physicist unable to conceive verbal or pictorial descriptions of the irregularities of expanding space-time, the structure of the atom, or the elusive nature of matter. The bewilderment of the artist attempting an analogous task stems from the same source. In the universe of the new physics there is no cosmic constancy or solidity.

In his 1945 essay Beckett describes Bran van Velde's paintings as an attempt to capture the chaotic flux of space forms on canvas in these words:


68Ibid., p. 549.
In this impressionistic description, Beckett is portraying the plasmic flux of van Velde's painting in terms suggesting the micro-cosmic world of the quanta. If the world is essentially unknowable in its ultimate essence, as most quantum theorists suspect, then the mental world of the artist is likewise in a state of constant flux, so much so, that the labor of the artist is a perpetual beginning anew, "un dévoilement sans fin, voile derrière voile, plan sur plan de transparences imparfaites, un dévoilement vers l'indévoilement, le rien, la chose à nouveau." Consequently, the artist must, like the quantum physicist, penetrate the veils shrouding being at its deepest level, even though the reality itself may prove too elusive to grasp. In any case, surface reality is a sham, as Beckett pointed out when he derided the efforts of the so-called realist sweating before his canvas trying to paint a static waterfall, a scene that defies visualization.

Samuel Beckett cites the two causes for the modern artist's indeterminate and abstract vision of the world. They are rooted in the nature of the observer and in that of the

object: "l'empêchement-objet et l'empêchement oeil." One type of modern artist claims, "Je ne peux voir l'objet, pour le représenter, parce qu'il est ce qu'il est." The other says that "Je ne peux voir l'objet, pour le représenter, parce que je suis que je suis." It should be observed that this is a Heisenberg Principle applied to art. All being is a state of flux; the observer, himself in flux, is locked into his field of observation, affects it and is affected by it. Fixing such plasticity on canvas is as elusive a project as spotting Heisenberg's hypothetical electron within its wave vibrations.

Therefore, Beckett sees the originality of the painter brothers van Velde to lie in their having "accepted as starting point the absence of relationship, the unavailability of the object. Thence to the representation of the conditions that mask the object, to space-internalized, immobilized by Bram, and to time-accelerated, made visible by Geer." Beckett realizes perfectly well the impossibility of immobilizing the fluctuating field that is Einsteinian space. Also, does he realize the quixotism of accelerating time to get it to hold still for its portrait. Such an ideal of spatial and temporal stasis can, as we have seen, occur only at the point of universal entropy when all motion, and hence time, will have ceased forever.

Beckett also points out that the relationship between the artist and the object is unavailable because both exist in a space-time flux such that the work of art always suffers from the inevitable time-lag between the conception and the work itself that can never be bridged. Time and space are errant pawns of light. The only authentic art in a process-cosmos is thus a process-art with the artist chained to his easel painting furiously, hopelessly, perpetually.

That Beckett is well aware of the nature of this species of infinite regression is evident in his brief book on the painting of Bram van Velde:

Two things are established, however precariously: the aliment, from fruits on plates to low mathematics and self-commiseration, and its manner of dispatch. All that should concern us is the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all it excludes, all that it blinds to. The history of painting, here we go again, is the history of its attempts to escape from this sense of failure, by means of more authentic, more ample, less exclusive relations between representer and representee, in a kind of tropism towards a light as to the nature of which the best opinions continue to vary, and with a kind of Pythagorean terror, as though the irrationality of pi were an offense against the deity, not to mention his creature.73

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this comment. In the first place, the "invalidity" and the "inadequacy" represent the frustration of the artist in his vain attempt to

synchronize conception and execution before both he and his subject change state. The work of art is unavoidably invalid the instant the paint touches canvas. In addition, Beckett alludes to the mystery of light, a major conclusion of both relativity and quantum theory. Yet, in a very real sense, the mystery of light is what the artist is trying to paint. Finally, Beckett challenges the classical, artistic Pythagoreanism that cannot endure a disorderly process-world with his reference to the irrational, pi, the irreducibility of which is equivalent to the irreducibility of reality to any final form through art. Georges Duthuit sees van Velde painting the "absurd with its fangs drawn, chaos managing in the end, as if by a miracle to stick to the canvas." Beckett goes on to say that van Velde

is foundering in an abyss, a chaos: an aborted geometry. Coordinates build up, topple, and rise again. A blind, deaf universe, . . . one which at first seems impenetrable but yet in the end cracks and splits open. Beckett claims that van Velde's great merit is that he accepts the absurd metaphysical limitations of the world, and that he submits to

the incoercible absence of relation, in the absence of terms or, if you like, in the presence of unavailable terms, the first to admit that to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and to shrink from it desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living.

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And yet, this very failure, inevitable in the portrayal of process-reality, becomes "a new occasion, a new term of relation," and the artist continues his Sisyphean labor. The work of art inevitably falls short of perfection, and art may be defined, in the last analysis, as "the perfect non-doing of what cannot be done."  

Beckett's evaluation of the van Velde art of failure applies to his own work. As he excavates more and more deeply into the nucleus of the psyche, his writing becomes more difficult for him to compose and for his readers to understand. Far from any intellectual habit of abstraction or systematization, his "art is concerned with the unique and elementary," that which resists rational ordering.

I am working with impotence, ignorance. I don't think impotence has been exploited in the past. . . . My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable— as something by definition incompatible with art.

The "zone of being" is the unique mental microcosm and its visions of a reality more real than the flow of the outer process-world. If it too flows, nevertheless the degree of impotence and ignorance is less acute than in an art which

77Ibid.
78Kenner, Flaubert, Joyce, Beckett, p. 76.
80Quoted by Shenker, "Moody Man of Letters," p. 3.
assumes stability and constancy on the cosmic scale.

Paradoxically, the daylight world is a realm of blindness where the myriad masks of temporal succession hide the permanent reality (if it exists) of the essential subject. Veiled beneath its accidental surfaces, caught up in becoming, ultimate being escapes man.\(^1\)

Beckett's art is a series of questions thrown out at being, but it despairs of answers, and that quite properly, given the concept of process-being which can only yield provisional, unsatisfactory pseudo-answers at best. Consequently, Beckett remarked in a 1962 conversation that words and syntax cannot express being:

> Being is constantly putting form in danger, just as form violates the nature of Being. True art is like building a man out of a pile of dust.\(^2\)

He is not, therefore, merely squandering his great talents "for the sole purpose of reducing his readers to a state of tired disgust and exasperated boredom."\(^3\) He is stripping away conventions of cosmic and psychic order which he believes false to reality. He sees no rational order in existence and refuses to compromise with readers who either cannot or will not suspend their disbelief in cosmic chaos, or who consider his vision of chaos wilfully perverse and harsh. Richard Coe observes that

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81Harvey, op. cit., p. 548.
83"They Also Serve," *Times Literary Supplement* (February 10, 1956), p. 84.
the "bourgeois" world was the reflection of a certain order of beliefs and values, and these values Beckett no longer accepts. In the context of infinity, time and space themselves, let alone man, his visions and his property, are meaningless; and it is precisely this new awareness of the infinite—once comfortably conceivable—that mathematicians and scientists have now deposited, as it were, upon our very doorstep. Around us on every side, in space, lies the void; behind us, before us, in time lies the Void. . . 84

In his 1931 essay *Proust*, Beckett emphasizes that the central theme of *À la Recherche* is that the decantation of personality in time frustrates the fulfillment of the Proustian characters' desires, all of whom are modern Tantaluses whose delicately tortured lives represent "the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin, . . . the sin of having been born." (Pr 49) Only the involuntary memory of the Proustian narrator enables him to achieve an occasional epiphany by freezing fleeting fragments of the past into immobility. The flow of time constantly decants man's ego so that day by day "the world of our own latent consciousness and its cosmography has suffered a dislocation." (Pr 3) Time is the deformer of the self. The ego, thus, has no permanent reality, and any object of desire can never satisfy it because neither has stability. In Proust's fiction character is "a retrogressive hypothesis," (Pr 4) false to the ever-shifting present reality. Analogous to relativity theory, both the observer-narrator and the observed object are like mobile

84 Samuel Beckett, p. 3.
fields in disparate states of motion without any available transformation equations for synchronization:

The observer infects the observed with his own mobility. Moreover, when it is a case of human intercourse, we are faced by the problem of an object whose mobility is not merely the function of the subject's, but independent and personal: two separate and immanent dynamisms related by no system of synchronization. (Pr 6-7)

Whether or not Beckett was conscious of this implicit allusion to the role of the Lorentz-Fitzgerald Transformation equations used to synchronize the metric variations of observations made on systems in differing states of motion, the coincidence seems much too close to be fortuitous. In any case, the Proustian ego, like those of Beckett's creatures, is a field of flux in space-time, and only the twin forces of habit and selective memory lend the ego an illusion of a constant, structured being.

It is only when personality changes become acute that "the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being." (Pr 8) The field-ego surrenders its illusion of constancy "with wailing and gnashing of teeth. The mortal microcosm cannot forgive the relative immortality of the macrocosm. The whisky bears a grudge against the decanter." (Pr 10) The alleged self is a series of ego-constructs, "a series of individuals," (Pr 8) some of whom are preserved in the unconscious memory, and "in that gouffre interdit à nos sondes is stored the essence of ourselves, the best of our many selves and their corrections that simplists call the world." (Pr 18-19) Both Proust, and later Beckett, plumb these depths, the former with some success. For
Proust the frustration of love is caused by the flux of personality in time and space: "We imagine that the object of our desires is a being that can be laid down before us, enclosed within a body. Alas! it is the extension of that being to all the points of space and time that it has occupied and will occupy," and to attempt to embrace this being would require occupying all the space-time points of its world-line geodesic because a "being scattered in space and time is no longer a woman but a series of events." (Pr 41) There is not one, but many women masquerading under the same name, observed by an equally Protean narrator.

The Proustian novel, therefore, chronicles a series of states of characters between whom there can exist only an illusion of communication since their personalities have no more permanence than the surface of a "cataract." (Pr 47) The artist must become a conscious solipsist, and his art depth analysis: "the only fertile research is excavatory, immersive, a contraction of the spirit, a descent," (Pr 48) and this descent has for its object the essential core of one's own being, an obviously abortive quest in view of its infinite regression (or progression) in space-time existence. Thus, the novel evolves just as "the object evolves, and by the time the conclusion--if any--is reached, it is already out of date." (Pr 65)

Proust's fiction, therefore, is relativity art whether or not the author was aware of the new physics and its role in
the disintegration of our concepts of absolute reality. In this connection, Henri Peyre thinks it improbable that Proust, any more than Giraudoux, Virginia Woolf, or Franz Kafka, was aware of the new physics and its implications for the structure of the novel and art generally. But Beckett cannot have been unaware.

Perhaps only the art of music could adequately embody the process-world of process-personalities. Thus, Beckett concludes his essay by commenting on the role of music in the fiction of Proust:

Schopenhauer rejects the Leibnitzian view of music as "occult arithmetic," and in his aesthetics separates it from the other arts, which can only produce the idea with its concomitant phenomena, whereas music is the idea itself, unaware of the world of phenomena, existing ideally outside the universe, apprehended not in Space but in Time only, and, consequently, untouched by the teleological hypothesis. (Pr 70-1)

In this way, Beckett resolves the paradox of an artist whose attraction to music attests "to his unbelief in the permanence of personality and the reality of art." (Pr 71)

It is, therefore, apparent that Beckett knew both the theories of the new physics and their implications for art. The analysis of his fiction that follows will attempt to prove how deeply the implications of the new physics affect his own work.

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CHAPTER II

THE MYTH OF COSMIC ORDER: MURPHY, WATT

I. Murphy

Generally speaking, both Murphy and Watt are quests for order in the world. Murphy is in full retreat from the order of society, in particular from a society which pursues an absurd cycle of appetites and their temporary satiation. He hates work as merely a variation on the prostitution work of his love, Celia. Furthermore, its only justification appears to be to perpetuate the absurd "quantum of wantum" (Mu 57) system, the pursuit of gratification. Murphy successively sheds all systems as spurious with one exception: his mental zone three where he can enjoy the pure absence of system in his mental microcosm of plasmic flux. Murphy and Watt both discover that the world is indeterminate, and that it is utterly random, both on the microcosmic and the macrocosmic levels. At the mid-cosmic level, that of ordinary human intercourse, all order is therefore a gratuitous impertinence to which the rest of the universe gives the lie. In Murphy's case, chaos in the form of gas triumphs when he explodes in the asylum accident. In Watt's case, mental chaos triumphs after his quest into Mr. Knott's world twists his mind and lands him in an insane asylum.
An analysis of **Murphy** shows clearly that all the attempts of Neary, Wylie, Cooper, and Miss Counihan to find Murphy are defeated by the operation of chance or accident. Murphy is a random wanderer, a surd-like person, and therefore outside the operation of any rational plans his pursuers can devise. His ideal refuge is the quantum-like mental zone three, which he reaches by rocking furiously in his teakwood chair. There he is an absolutely free mote floating in a sea of becoming. The core of the novel is, therefore, chapter six: the description of Murphy's mind.

The method of analysis will be to contrast the methods and assumptions of order that defeat the Pythagorean, Neary, with the random motion of Murphy in his efforts to escape a job in London. Ultimately, all system fails and chaos conquers, as it must in an indeterminate universe. Nor is there any ultimate order in the lives of Neary and his cohorts. They are no more invariant or determinate than Murphy, since their one constant is desire or lust for ever-shifting objects. Their so-called plans are simply improvisations to attain their ever-changing ends. On his part, Murphy's hegira random-ward is strewn with parodic systems which he discards one after another until his incinerated ashes scatter on the pub floor amid the saw-dust and cigarette-butts.

Whereas quantum theory with its principle of randomness is at the core of **Murphy** because it is the image and likeness of
Murphy's mind, the problem of Watt is to analyze the mysteries of the Knott microcosm in the light of relativity and probability theory. The house of Knott demonstrates no rationale or teleology other than perpetual process. Watt's hope of discovering a clock-work paradigm in Knott's house is thus blasted, as is his sanity. The relativity universe of process is incomprehensible to him.

It might be objected that such an apparently frivolous novel as Murphy, or the much denser, but still highly comic novel, Watt, can hardly be burdened with such arcana as modern physical theory. Nevertheless, to a large extent, their vision of chaos derives directly from these theories. As Richard Coe observes:

The major themes and convictions of Beckett's work rarely appear on the surface; they lie hidden away behind a smoke-screen of parody and apparently disconnected symbols, and the clues to their existence are often no more than half-quotations, passing allusions or the intrusion of an unexpected name.  

Again, it might be objected that, even though modern physical theory serves to confirm Beckett's conviction that reality, in the last analysis, is definable as chaos, he consistently parodies it along with any other attempt to reduce phenomena to some approximation of intelligible system. Yet, it must be admitted that parody, if it is to be successful, presupposes a high degree of knowledge. Furthermore, Beckett uses humor to

1Coe, Samuel Beckett, p. 27.
disparage learning. Learning presupposes order, and hence has little to do with penetrating absurdity. At bottom, all learning is pretence, and therefore, one of the main functions of Beckett's immense personal achievement in scholarship is to suffer a grotesque transmutation into pedantry, and so to furnish the predominant element of humour and his comic style." 2 The acrid comedy of sending such patently inept creatures as Murphy and Watt in search of order in a cosmos that taxes such minds as those of Einstein, Planck, Heisenberg, and Bohr is a grim commentary on the possibilities of human comprehension at the level of material reality, let alone any other. Little wonder, then, that both heroes wind up in insane asylums. At this point, therefore, it will be necessary to examine relativity and quantum theory in somewhat greater detail to the extent that these theories and their broader implications have relevance to the reading of Murphy and Watt as abortive quests for rational order.

We have already discussed in general terms some aspects of the impact of relativity theory and quantum theory on the Newtonian, mechanist world-view, as well as some of their implications for Beckett's fiction. The Einsteinian world is a process world of mass-energy in constant space-time motion, and its language is the mathematics of the field. However innocuous may appear the bald statement that the laws of nature are uniform for all inertial systems, the implications of the

2Ibid., p. 12.
theory are revolutionary. Mass, energy, space, and time are fluctuating, mutually interacting field-forces, neither constant nor absolute. Theoretically, they should not even have different names. Thus, the universe of relativity is a vast, variously distorted, fluctuating field in expansion outward ever since the primordial cosmic explosion, and it may more accurately be described as a junk-yard than as a clock.

The relativity world, however, is a classical garden compared to the microcosm revealed by quantum theory. Here, the fundamental law is the Principle of Indeterminacy, or randomness. At this level, laws are probability statistics. Ultimately, in quantum theory matter disappears, virtually indistinguishable from energy. The micro-world of quantum mechanics is a process world composed of events, not particles and energy.

In 1887, with the announcement of an experimental failure in measuring light velocity through the ether, the whole structure of the Newtonian universe quietly collapsed, even though no one noticed its disappearance until 1905 when the Special Theory of Relativity was published. The Michelson-Morley experiment was an attempt to measure the effect of the ether drag on the speed of light. It was thought that a light-beam aimed against the rotation of the earth would be slowed by the ether. It was not. Regardless of direction, the speed of light remained 186,284 miles per second. Yet, since light, and electromagnetism generally, was propagated by wave motion, it was thought that an
ether had to be postulated as a carrier of these waves. However, the experiment showed no ether to carry electromagnetic fields of force. The result of the experiment seemed to challenge common sense as well as classical physics. In effect, it meant that a motorboat should be able to travel at the same speed upstream as downstream, regardless of the speed of the current.

Einstein proposed that the results of the experiment be accepted, regardless of classical theory. His first postulate, therefore, was that the velocity of light is constant, and his second, that no experiments made on an inertial system can detect its motion. Motion on a system is relative and can only be detected by reference to other systems in different states of motion. 3 We already have noted some of the implications of the theory whereby masses in space-time mutually interact in the field continuum. They are in no sense absolute and unchanging values. The relativity universe is a weird construct where space is measured in terms of light, time by a unit equal to a second multiplied by the square root of minus one, and mass varies with its speed in space-time. 4

Along with absolute space, Einstein rejects the notion of absolute time, recognizing that time duration is a matter of perception. Time may be considered a relative measurement of an order of events in terms of motion in space. We use a series of


point-events, or seconds, as ticked off by the motion of a set of clock-gears to measure time. Thus, the order of events in a man's life can be associated in sequence and duration only by ordering them relative to a set of clock-events or any other regular set. Consequently, time is a relative set of events, and the time-arrow is irreversible (though not in quantum theory). On earth it is a measurement of the relative motion of our planet in space. An hour is a measurement of earth motion: fifteen degrees of rotation on its axis, or about a thousand miles. A year is the distance of the earth's orbit around the sun. On other inertial systems, time would be a radically different measurement of space motion. For instance, Mercury orbits the sun in eighty-eight days. That is its solar year. However, during the same period it rotates only about once on its axis. Therefore, on Mercury a year and a day are nearly the same.\(^5\)

Certain aspects of time relativity affront common sense, which tends to assume a constant regularity in nature. For instance, a clock on an inertial system slows down in comparison to a relatively stationary clock by a precise amount, Beta, in accordance with the Lorentz transformation equation. This retardation effect destroys the classical unity and continuity of absolute time. Time flow is, therefore, discontinuous. However, time on moving systems is always lengthened (i.e., retarded),

\(^5\) Barnett, *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, pp. 40-41. In 1965 experiments in radar astronomy proved that Mercury turns on its axis once every fifty-nine days, not eighty-eight days.
never the reverse. World-lines are irreversible, except in the case of elementary particles, which we will consider later. As we have seen in connection with the concept on entropy, the time-arrow moves, however slowly, in only one direction. On an inertial system accelerated to speed of light, and only at that impossible speed, would time equal zero. Looked at from another point of view, the mass of that hypothetical system would attain infinity at c, as well as its accompanying force-field. Since gravitational-inertial force fields slow down time measure, an infinite field would freeze all other motion on the system. Furthermore, Whitehead, following ideas of Bergson and Poincaré, thought that time should be conceived as discontinuous pulsations of quantum units and not in the mathematically continuous terms of classical physics.

While it is true that an observer on a moving system would not notice the retardation effect of velocity on time measurement, a stationary observer would. Shortly after the publication of Einstein's theory, a conservative German physicist, shocked by this challenge to classical physics, proposed the famous paradox of the twins. Would one of the twins relatively stationary on earth age more rapidly than a twin sent out into space in a high-velocity rocket? Einstein is said to have reflected on the fact that the heart is a kind of clock and

\[ 6 \text{Capek, The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics, p. 192.} \]
answered that the earth-twin would indeed age more rapidly. In fact, at .85 \( c \) (about 160,000 miles per second), the traveling twin would age only half as fast as the stationary twin. That the relativity dilatation of time is real and not imaginary was first proved conclusively in 1941. Elementary particles moving at speeds near the speed of light have dramatically longer life-spans than their stationary counterparts. For instance, a meson thus accelerated has a life-span fifty times that of a motionless meson.

The relativity of mass solved one of the enigmas of Newtonian physics, the error in the prediction of Mercury's orbit. Einstein's equations showed that, as Mercury approaches the sun, its mass increases in proportion to its increased velocity, and it was this increase of mass omitted in the Newtonian equations which accounted for the apparently lawless behavior of this planet. Thus, Einstein's field equations corrected the orbit error of forty-three seconds of an arc per century which had long puzzled astronomers. Consequently, mass is a relative function of velocity and is not constant.

Finally, the conservation of mass, as well as energy and momentum, joins the limbo of the other absolutes of classical physics. Mass is converted into energy according to the famous


equation, $E = mc^2$. Conversely, energy is directly related to the disappearance of mass. In other words, only mass-energy fused together in the field is conserved. As in the case of Mercury, space-time motion affects mass, changing its value. In short, a change in one value involves relative changes in all other values of the field. Consequently, mass and energy are transitory states of a field: mass accelerated to the speed of light becomes energy, and mass is therefore concentrated energy, as atomic power proves. Materialism is dealt a mortal blow by relativity theory, as well as by quantum theory:

Matter is not conserved. The concepts of matter and substance lose all meaning. In the light of other branches of modern science, we can describe matter as a kind of electromagnetic condensation. We retain the concept of mass, as we retain length and time, but with the equivalence of matter and motion in mind.9

Relativistic space-time is not absolute, but fluid in structure, varying from place to place and from moment to moment depending on the position and velocity of masses producing a variable curvature of the field. Its shape is, therefore, Protean. The universe must be conceived as a relational becoming, not as stable being in any absolute sense. It has been suggested that a more accurate terminology for this concept of a space-time universe would be "four-dimensional process," or

"extensive becoming."\textsuperscript{10} Being, it would seem, must be defined as becoming.

Relativity theory is designed to make observations of phenomena more precise by making the sensory perception of the observer more precise, and this is the purpose of the Lorentz Transformation Equations. The human observer suffers from certain inherent limitations of perception. For example, the human eye can distinguish only wave-lengths from the red to the violet lines of the electro-magnetic spectrum (between $7^{-4}$ and $4^{-4}$). In effect, it is virtually blind to the vast spectrum of radiation between the short cosmic rays ($10^{-13}$) to the enormously long radio waves ($10^{6}$). This infinitesimal range of human perception is one reason for the necessity of mathematical models to picture reality. Nevertheless, it is an obvious paradox of physics that "with every improvement in its mathematical apparatus the gulf between man the observer and the objective world becomes more profound."\textsuperscript{11} An apparent difference in interpretation of an auditory phenomenon by two observers in different states of motion, for example, is the Doppler effect for an observer in a train approaching a crossing bell, as opposed to the same bell heard by a stationary observer. The apparent variation of pitch is an observational distortion caused

\textsuperscript{10}Capek, \textit{The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics}, p. 255.

\textsuperscript{11}Barnett, \textit{The Universe and Dr. Einstein}, p. 14.
by the passenger's motion. Yet, the same two observers would see no change in the velocity of a light at the same crossing, whether they were stationary or moving. In another illustration of the effect of motion on the perception of observers, Einstein uses another train. If two lightning flashes strike the front and back of a train simultaneously, they will be seen as such to an observer stationed on the ground at a point exactly in the middle of the passing train. However, to an observer on the roof of the train equipped with two-way mirrors, the front flash will appear to strike a fraction of an instant before the rear flash. His state of motion differs; therefore, his observation differs. Both observe accurately, but differently. Obviously, if the train could move at the speed of light, the observer on the train roof would never see the rear flash. Therefore, transformation equations are absolutely necessary to make apparently contradictory observations equivalent.

As we have previously noted, the scientist avoids mechanical models and favors mathematical models which lend precision to his descriptions of realms beyond the reach of ordinary sense perception and ordinary language. Furthermore, contemporary language and mechanist models derive from earlier eras and from outmoded concepts of reality. The movement towards mathematical abstractions began in 1900 with Max Planck's successful mathematical explanation of the radiant energy of heat. He showed that radiant energy does not flow in a
continuous wave-stream, but in discontinuous tiny packets of energy he called quanta. Conversely, energy is absorbed in definite, discontinuous quantum amounts. Between these definite, quantified amounts energy can neither be absorbed nor emitted. In effect, the energy levels are discrete steps, up and down which an atom or an elementary particle tumbles, and there is no regularity in the various levels, even though they can be precisely determined.

Here was a scientific field in which dynamic regularity was not the norm; its laws resulted, strictly speaking, as anomalies resulting from the chaotic interplay of large numbers of molecules. Chance governs the individual; what appears as lawful behavior is merely a sequence of chance-produced composite states having abnormally large probabilities.

Randomness or discontinuity in energy emission is also evident in radioactive matter. In a series of experiments dealing with alpha-rays emitted by radioactive substances, Rutherford in 1912 showed that they were emitted at random in accordance with mathematical probability, and that such unpredictable radiation from the core of the atom showed that "randomness was present in the heart of matter." Therefore, anyone listening to the random series of clicks emitted from a luminous watch-dial on a

12 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, p. 16.
Geiger counter is tuning in on microcosmic chaos. No one can predict which atom will disintegrate, nor when.

Following Planck's postulate of thermodynamic energy quanta, Einstein extended the theory to all forms of radiant energy. Heat, light, x-rays, all are quanta bombardments by discrete packets of energy that vary in strength according to their wave-lengths. Einstein substantiated his theory with the photoelectric effect by which violet light focused on a metal plate ejects showers of electrons. Einstein, therefore, postulated that light must be composed of quantum particles he called photons. They strike the plate like bullets and cause electrons to rebound. However, while light quanta could be regarded as particles, other experiments (diffraction) showed light behaving like waves. The exact nature of light, therefore, is a mystery which research has yet to resolve. The electromagnetic photon is neither wave nor particle, simply, but probably a totally different self-consistent entity altogether.

Another quantum mystery was revealed by the Bohr atom, although this solar-system model oversimplified the similarity between microcosm and macrocosm. There was one striking dissimilarity between the micro- and the macro-solar systems. During the absorption or emission of radiation, it was found that electrons "jump" from one well-defined orbit to another depending on the precise but discrete chunks or quanta of energy absorbed.

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15 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, pp. 18-19.
or emitted. Since between these orbital jumps the electrons are
lost to observation, no continuous description of the state of an
atom is possible. Furthermore, in its "ground" or stable state a
hydrogen atom, for example, has its electron rotating in orbit \( \ell \).
In its "excited" state, energized by a precise quantum of
ultraviolet radiation, the electron shoots to an outer orbit. It
does not roll out through 2 \( \ell \) and 3 \( \ell \), but rather from \( \ell \) to 4 \( \ell \).
Energized further, the electron vanishes from 4 \( \ell \) and reappears at
9 \( \ell \). The next set of orbital apparitions are at 16 \( \ell \), 25 \( \ell \), and
36 \( \ell \); each orbit demanding a definite chunk of additional energy.
It should be noted that the macrocosmic continuum of relativity
field theory is thus not duplicated in the micro-world of the
atom. There is a radical discontinuity of space, time, energy,
and motion at this level. Hence, the very states of the atom
have an element of unpredictability. 16

In 1925, De Broglie suggested that the electron behaves
more like a wave-system than like a particle. Thus, the
mechanist model (Bohr's) depicting a solid nucleus orbited by
planetary electrons proved inadequate. Further, it no longer
seemed that the electron could be regarded as the ultimate
building-block in the structure of matter. Deeper subsequent
probing showed the capriciousness of the electron. Its position
in orbit was indeterminate. Because of its wave motion, at any

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16 Capek, The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary
Physics, pp. 230-51.
given moment it could be assigned only a probability position in the atom. Also, it behaved like light. But then, other nuclear particles also behaved like light when diffracted. With once solid particles behaving as waves, the old matter-energy duality no longer served to describe physical reality. The once solid universe dissolved into energy, and the "old-fashioned spherical electron was reduced to an undulating electric charge, the atom to a system of superimposed waves." 17 The physicist's hunt for the ultimate particle was a mirage. 18

In 1932, heavy nuclei were subjected to high frequency radiation. A positive electron (positron) and an electron were produced. Thus, radiant energy was transformed into particles. This materialization of energy, or creation of matter by energy, was another confirmation of Einstein's mass-energy equation. Also, it was another step in obliterating the matter-energy duality. 19 The positron and the anti-proton were the basic components of anti-matter, the building blocks of a mysterious anti-universe that may exist somewhere in outer space, a region where all charges are reversed.

Thus there is cumulative evidence that microphysical entities do not have properties even remotely similar

17 Barnett, The Universe and Dr. Einstein, pp. 21-23.
18 Capek, The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics, p. 251.
19 Ibid., pp. 256-57.
to those of macroscopic bodies. What are still being called "particles" or "corpuscles" by contemporary physicists do not have corpuscular properties at all. In a sense, the world has dematerialized.

We have already noted how Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy defines an essential limitation for the observation of microphysical events because the energy sources interfere with precision of measurement. This uncertainty principle marks the advent of an indeterministic physics in which the laws governing microphysical phenomena are reduced to probabilities.

In effect, the principle clearly implies that the ultimate law of the universe is chance, and that physical phenomena are fundamentally random and unpredictable. The implications of the Uncertainty Principle range far beyond nuclear and atomic physics. It seems that

the world of events, the world of nature is indeterminate. The behavior of the particle is uncertain and therefore the behavior of the atom is an uncertainty. The behavior of the atom can be predicted only to a degree of probability. The behavior of an aggregate of atoms is therefore only a probability and not a certainty. And it is no use saying that the degree of uncertainty is too small to effect events on the ordinary scale, for the notion of determinism is similarly based on the fundamental determinism of the individual molecules, multiplied many times to become the world of nature.

Laplace thought that, in principle, if a supreme intelligence could compute all the forces affecting all the masses in the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{20}Capek, The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics, p. 285.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}Schneer, Evolution of Physical Science, p. 364.}\]
universe at a single instant, then, not only could all past
states be described, but that all future states could be
predicted for all time. This is an extreme statement of classical,
Newtonian, deterministic law ruling the physical universe. Now
that the physicist must renounce, in principle, the possibility
of determining the position and velocity of even one particle in
the universe, the inescapable conclusion is that, for all
practical purposes, at the heart of matter resides chaos. The
probability statistics used to describe microphysical events are
derived from gambling. Thus, laws of chance may, without much
exaggeration, be termed the ultimate laws of nature. Nature
would, therefore, appear to be without discernible plan or
purpose.

Briefly stated, the new view is a view of chaos beneath
order—or, what is the same thing, of order imposed
upon a deeper and more fundamental chaos. This is in
startling contrast to the view developed and solidified
in the three centuries from Kepler to Einstein, a view
of order beneath chaos. . . . Particles are found to
have a transitory existence; empty space is a bee-hive
of disordered activity; laws of probability have
replaced laws of certainty; an isolated particle is
engaged in a constant frenzied dance whose steps are
random and unpredictable; a principle of uncertainty
prevents too close scrutiny or precisely accurate
measurements in the world of the very small.22

Quantum theory undermines the twin pillars of classical science:
causality and determinism. In their place we have probability
and indeterminism. However, it would probably be more accurate

22 Kenneth W. Ford, The World of Elementary Particles
to say that the new physics merely substituted a more flexible
causality and concept of physical law to replace the more rigid
classical versions.

Physicists, however, are divided on the question of
whether or not Heisenberg's principle destroys scientific law
and surrenders phenomena to chance. Max Planck holds that the
inadequacy of the observer is the cause of uncertainty. He
believes, against the Copenhagen School of Heisenberg, that
physics must at least postulate the existence of laws—strictly
causal laws. Niels Bohr proposed a way out of the dilemma of
modern physics with his Principle of Complementarity: different
phenomena require different methods of observation. Therefore,
he would propose two experiments for Heisenberg's electron: one
for position and another for velocity. Some would regard this
procedure as a form of scientific agnosticism on the ground that
it admits contradictory elements, dichotomies, to explain
scientific phenomena. Since Planck's constant ($\hbar$) is the precise
measure of the microcosmic uncertainty, physicists should seek
to discover the law behind the uncertainty and not simply
surrender the concept of laws for microphysics. 23

It is, perhaps, a mistake to assume that an electron-
event is like a particle in a box. And if Heisenberg's box

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23 Ian Barbour, "Indeterminacy and Freedom: A
Reappraisal," Philosophy of Science, XXII (January, 1955),
PP. 9-11.
shelters a micro-event and not a particle at all, then it cannot have a position or a velocity any observer could detect. To observe events on this level is surely to destroy what is to be observed in the act of observation. In addition, both Heisenberg and Bohr have expressed the idea that "electron-waves must be regarded merely as a sort of symbolic representation of our knowledge as to the probable state and position of an electron. If so, they change as our knowledge changes, and so become largely subjective." Niels Bohr, likewise, thinks that the scientist must be prepared for a "constant extension of the frame of concepts." Fundamentally, all laws must be regarded as provisional, open-ended constructs capable of constant modification.

Scientists have become increasingly modest about the limits of their knowledge. The Uncertainty Principle indicates the inherent limitations of any attempt to discover the ultimate nature of matter-energy. Consequently, physicists have steadily moved away from research into why things happen, or even how they happen, and tend rather to describe, as far as possible, what happens. Whether this modesty is a form of defeatism or agnostism, it is surely far from the arrogance sometimes ascribed to scientists. The scientist now recognizes and admits the

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presence of mystery at the heart of reality, a mystery which may, for a long time to come, and perhaps forever, retreat ever more deeply inside nuclear and sub-nuclear reality, however deeply he may be able to probe.

It is possible that a unified field theory may be developed whereby fields of force and particles may be united in the one concept of the field alone, with particles being considered as exceptionally high values of the field. The determinism and continuity lost in quantum theory would then be recovered, and the abyss between quantum and relativity theory bridged. However, Einstein labored twenty-five years to synthesize these antithetical theories under a single set of laws, but without success. The relativity field equations still exhibit breaks. This means that one must postulate the existence of matter at these points. A successful field theory, on the other hand, one that could be rendered in equations without these breaks, would describe every physical situation—macrocosmic and microcosmic—in terms of field or energy alone. Thus, relativity stops abruptly at the surface of matter:

The equations of the field stop abruptly at the surfaces of material particles. Such surfaces form a kind of discontinuity, a kind of hole in the field—a region not governed in its entirely by the same natural laws.26

In a very real sense, modern physics has revealed an absurd world. A fundamental problem is to construct some sort of model, or paradigm, that will picture it. Even for simple perception of forms, as Gestalt psychology has shown, a man must have some sort of paradigm if reality is not to appear the blooming, buzzing confusion, in William James' phrase. For the scientist himself, the paradigm, or theoretical construct, is essential for any kind of investigation. Paradigms provide a common body of agreements about the nature of reality for the solution of common problems. In this sense, science is deductive: theory precedes experimentation and guides it. However, if the mind has only a set of pointer-readings, measurements, and lacks direct sense data, the whole problem of paradigmatic world-building becomes enormously complicated. Man the observer is locked into his single point of view and blocked by the omnipresence of unobservables in phenomena. Reality is multi-layered, infused with irrational elements which defy attempts at model-building.

As has been observed previously, the scientific paradigm most successful in encompassing quantum and relativity concepts of the universe has been pure mathematics, and it would seem "beyond dispute that in some way nature is more closely allied to the concepts of pure mathematics than to those of biology and

27 Thomas S. Kuhn, Structure of Science Revolution, pp. 10-29.
Rather than a massive clock, the universe is more like a vast thought. However, it is not necessarily a human thought. Our thinking exhibits a quality of continuity and dependence on causality not observable in the quantum world. Consequently, it may be that there is no correspondence between the structure of our thinking and that of reality. It may be not so much the structure of thinking, but habits of thinking that must be changed. Terminology such as particle, position, and motion belongs to older, Newtonian habits of thought. Unconsciously such terms dominate thinking despite the fact that they derive from models of reality which are no longer valid.

It is epistemologically intolerable, at least in the long run, to retain a Newtonian and Democritean subconscious which is entirely incompatible with our conscious convictions and verbal utterances. Yet, this uncertain oscillation between subconscious Newtonianism and its conscious rejection seems to be a characteristic attitude on the part of a great number of physicists today.

Language is a serious barrier in the attempt to describe concepts of modern physical theory. While it is difficult to think without visual models and to rely on pure mathematics, nevertheless, "radical abandonment of visual and imaginative models in modern


physics is absolutely imperative if the meaning of the present crisis in physics is not to escape us entirely."\textsuperscript{31}

What is needed are models of process analogous to those of musical composition. A symphony is not merely an atomic assemblage of independent tones. All the notes of the work are interdependent and interacting, and depend, for their total effect, on their relative succession in time. The closest approximation to field theory is the auditory, tonal field.\textsuperscript{32}

And it is this auditory field that Beckett more and more approximates in his fiction after the failures of Murphy and Watt to discover order either in the mid-cosmos of human society or in the macrocosmic model that is Mr. Knott's establishment.

It is in this strangely contorted world of modern physics that Murphy endures his erratic existence, attempts to evade the absurd rigmarole of daily work, and pursues his ideal of nirvana in his rocker.

I have already suggested that Murphy's aversion to work is motivated by a conviction that the mass of men who work for a living never truly live. To Murphy, their lives constitute an absurd interlude between two nothingnesses: "from the spermarium to the crematorium." (Mu 68) The plot of Murphy is a trivial, but complicated pursuit of Murphy by five people who are convinced that he is, in one way or another, essential to their

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 235.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.
happiness. Celia, a prostitute, loves him, and before he leaves to go to work in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat insane asylum, she lives with him. Neary, a school-master of the occult from Cork, first wishes to locate Murphy in order to discredit him with a Miss Counihan so that he can satisfy his lust. Later, Neary abruptly shifts his affections to Murphy himself, though as a friend, not a lover. Miss Counihan quite simply lusts after Murphy. Wylie, an erstwhile student of Neary's, agrees to help his master pursue Murphy, but his intention is to circumvent Neary and enjoy Miss Counihan himself. Neary's alcoholic man-of-all-work, Cooper, pursues Murphy because Neary is his only means of support. Finally, Murphy also pursues Murphy, but a psychic rather than a physical Murphy, a Murphy who is a mote floating in a plasmic nirvana.

The only thing Murphy was seeking was what he had not ceased to seek from the moment of his being strangled into a state of respiration—the best of himself.
(Mu 70-1)

The pursuit, which ranges from Dublin to London, fails because of the intervention of gas, identified etymologically by Murphy as "chaos." Orderly planning must inevitably fail when the object it pursues is a human surd drifting randomly in a surd-world.

The narrative is omniscient, with frequent authorial intrusions which serve to signal the disdain Beckett feels for so-called realistic fictional conventions. He introduces an episode and claims to present it duly "expurgated, accelerated,
improved and reduced." (Mu 119) He refers to the sexual relations between Murphy and Celia as "music," commenting that "this phrase is chosen with care, lest the filthy censors should lack an occasion to commit their filthy synecdoche." (Mu 76)
The author describes Murphy's system of defrauding a restaurant of .83 of a cup of tea and advises the reader "to try it, gentle skimmer." (Mu 84) Speaking of Cooper, mourning over his firing by Neary, the author remarks that "all the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except Murphy, who is not a puppet."
(Mu 122) Murphy was therefore written, less to tell a more or less comic story than to describe the hero's mental refuge in chapter six, and his equation of this idyllic state of mind with the state of the alienated psychotics of the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat. Both states parallel that of the insane creation itself.

Murphy's most pressing problem, therefore, is to find a system that will translate him permanently out of the contingencies of the world of space and time into the mental fantasy that gives him the sense of being a particle-ego floating in a plasmic state of will-less, random motion. The only way, in other words, to attain harmony with the chaotic world of relativity and quantum theory is not to attempt to order it, but simply to surrender to it. Although he fails, Murphy's condition is less desperate than that of his pursuers. When Murphy escapes them through the gas explosion, they hurry from the crematorium
in pursuit of other gratifications. Their "quantum of wantum" is an insatiable cycle.

Neary and his academy parodies the effectiveness of theories that seek to control and manipulate random reality. He has learned a system of heart-stoppage which he used "when he wanted a drink and could not get one, or fell among Gaels and could not escape, or felt the pangs of hopeless sexual inclination." (Mu 3) Yet, he fails to attune Murphy's irrational heart. Furthermore, when Neary later is desperate with lust for Miss Counihan and far from the groves of his Cork academe, he himself loses the power. Refractory reality does not bend to fit the procrustean theories devised by systems-makers insulated in the controlled conditions of the schools. At this time, Neary is a Pythagorean, and he believes that mathematics is the perfect model of the ideal world, of which the real world is a crude approximation. The existence of surds, of which Murphy is a human example, cannot be tolerated because they are an affront to the rationality of the creator and his creation.

Whereas Neary thinks of life as a series of women's faces standing out "against the big blooming buzzing confusion," (Mu 4) Murphy thinks it a "wandering to find home," (Mu 4) his mental refuge. Currently, the reigning face-Gestalt dominating Neary's "ground" is his tetrakyt, Miss Dwyer. To the Pythagorean, the ten-dot pyramid, or tetrakyt, was a symbol of perfection. Neary is, thus, an obvious eclectic. For him, all theories serve
to lend a factitious order to his random lusts. In contrast, Murphy is well aware that no theory can order Neary's shifting desires. Even if Neary succeeds in seducing Miss Dwyer, Murphy sardonically comments that it would be "back to Teneriffe and the apes." (Mu 5) He is referring to a series of experiments with the apes of Teneriffe to test Gestalt field theory in problem solving. Hungry apes learned to gather bananas, which were placed out of reach, by fitting together socketed sticks. They seemed to reach the solution, not piecemeal, but by sudden flashes of insight.33 It should be noted that Gestalt psychology was strongly influenced by relativity field theory, and that it maintains that the mind and senses configure fields of perception and cognition as totalities and not as isolated parts. It is opposed to considering the contents of the mind or the senses as disparate, atomistic elements.34 Neary's configurations are a succession of lusts. Murphy's mind, on the other hand, remains an atomistic chaos of blooming, buzzing confusion. Neary assumes that a principle of order exists for experience, or at least a principle of ordering. Murphy does not believe chaos can be ordered; it can only be enjoyed within the mind.

Some time later, another Gestalt figure replaces Miss Dwyer in Neary's ground, and he is consumed with a desire for

34Ibid., p. 205.
Miss Counihan. Wylie finds the frustrated Neary hammering his head against the buttocks of a statue of Cuchulain in the Dublin Post Office because it appears to be mocking his insatiable desire. Neary's reigning tetrak yt, Miss Counihan, is inaccessible because her reigning tetrak yt is Murphy. Neary pours out his woes to Wylie over rounds of Irish coffee, warning him of the fate of the renegade Pythagorean, Hippasos the Akousmatic, who was drowned in a puddle "for having divulged the incommensurability of side and diagonal," (Mu 47) the existence of surds. Neary, bent upon gratifying his latest itch, wishes to suppress any recognition of irrationality which might foredoom the plans he and Wylie are hatching to find Murphy, the key to Miss Counihan, as well as to insure secrecy for these plans.

Neary describes to Wylie how each configuration recedes into the surrounding ground to become a "morsel of chaos," (Mu 48) to be replaced by the next configured woman. Suggested here is a constantly shifting psychic field composed of successive desirable women. It is, however, also a foreshadowing of the central problem of the Three Novels: the frustration of attempting to pin down a self which is a ceaseless flux. In Neary's case, lust is the one constant that determines the series. It should also be noted that the Gestalt psychologist, Kurt Koffka, to whom Neary writes for an explanation of the transience of his woman-figures, acknowledges the influence of relativity field theory on psychology, stating that "if the
locus of behavior is the physical world, then the field concept which is so powerful a tool in physics must be applied to behavior." The extent of Neary's eclecticism in his efforts to attain order is evident in his blending of immiscible theories. The Pythagorean and Newtonian ideals postulate a stable, determinist cosmos of harmony and unalterable law. Gestalt is a theory of constant shifts in the field of cognition. Relativity theory postulates fluctuating fields of masses in space-time welded together by the ultimate surd, the imaginary square root of minus one. If Neary understands his theories, as perhaps he does not, then he is an intellectual schizoid.

Neary explains to Wylie that Miss Counihan is obdurate and will remain so until one of three conditions of Murphy can be certified beyond reasonable doubt: his death, his failure in his London career, or his infidelity. Neary demands that Wylie now palliate the life he has saved and help him find Murphy.

"I greatly fear," said Wylie, "that the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary." (Mu 57)

Wylie is no Newtonian. We have already seen that quantum physics cannot fully account for the discontinuities exhibited by such phenomena as the discrete electron orbits of the Bohr atom, or the discrete packets of energy, the quanta of Planck.

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Although it is observable that the electron can only occupy orbits 1, 4, 9, for instance, depending on the absorption or emission of precise amounts of energy, there is no rationale to explain the quantization of just these orbits and energy levels. The system is closed, but inexplicable. Changes occur as sudden jumps, not gradually or steadily. Miss Counihan is a closed system with a sexual constant, presently satisfied by Wylie, though lusting for Murphy. Similarly with Neary's discharges of sexual energy, so to speak, a new orbit is established, or, in field theory terms, a new figure emerges from the ground to keep the absurd system closed. Since Neary's "quantum of wantum" has no rationale, Wylie is right in advising that he deal with one symptom at a time and not with the whole refractory system termed life.

From Dublin, Neary, later followed by Wylie and Miss Counihan, goes to London to find Murphy. Cooper had found him, but went on a drunken spree and lost him in the interim during which Murphy's tenement was demolished. Fired by Neary, Cooper locates Celia's apartment and reports to Wylie and Miss Counihan. However, his cherchez la femme tactic fails because Murphy has already left Celia to work at MMM as Ticklepenny's replacement. All these events are dominated by chance. Plans do not cope adequately with such contingencies as slum-clearance projects, Cooper's thirsts, or chance encounters.
Neary, in London, is lying in bed thinking of his latest "voltefesse" by which Murphy replaces Miss Counihan as an object of desire. He wonders if, in his dynastic series of pruritic desires, there is never to be a final "Keyflea."

(Mu 201) A determinist, he still believes in some sort of teleology of desire. If he is a process being in a process world, however, there can be no rest from a ceaseless expenditure of energy "until the system is dismantled."

(Mu 58)

It was from just this consideration that Murphy, while still less than a child, had set out to capture himself, not with anger but with love. This was a stroke of genius that Neary, a Newtonian, could never have dealt himself nor suffered another to deal him. There seems really very little hope for Neary, he seems doomed to hope unending. (Mu 201)

In short, there are no absolutes of any kind, and he is doomed to spend his life scratching "himself out of one itch into the next." (Mu 202)

Neary is not aware of the signal failure of Newtonian mechanics to account for the anomalies uncovered by discoveries of quantum theory. He still believes that all phenomena can be observed and controlled. However, Murphy the surd is radically uncontrollable. Nonetheless, Neary the Euclidean believes that he and his treacherous partners will find Murphy because "there is no triangle, however obtuse, but the circumference of some circle passes through its wretched vertices." (Mu 213) He is assuming that Murphy behaves according to pattern, and concludes that Murphy, "from a means to a trivial satisfaction, the
contingent, as he himself would say, of a contingent, is become
in himself an end, the end, my end, unique and indispensable."
(Mu 216) Wylie, however, sees Neary "as a bull Io, born to be
stung, Nature's gift to necessitous pimps." (Mu 216) What Miss
Counihan and the others do not realize is that Murphy does not
suffer from the "psychosomatic fistula," precisely because he
finally rejects all illusions of order in favor of his zone three
mental chaos. At the MMM mortuary where Celia identifies
Murphy's charred body by the birthmark on the buttocks, Neary is
forced at last to admit that "life is all rather irregular,"
(Mu 271) as he rushes off in pursuit of Celia, now the dominant
configuration in his lust field.

Randomness, especially as embodied in the surd, Murphy,
dominates human existence. Plans and systems split upon this
rock by assuming a priori, and in the face of abundant evidence
to the contrary, that human relations and movements are orderly.
Neary never succeeds in configuring the chaos of the ground; he
merely distracts himself from universal confusion by fixing on
transient sex-objects. Murphy, on the other hand, gradually
sheds all systems—except the rocking system that propels him
into his mental chaos.

The novel opens with Murphy fastened to his rocking-
chair with seven scarves. The sun is in "the Virgin again for
the billionth time" (Mu 2) to measure another arbitrary solar
day while
somewhere a cuckoo-clock, having struck between twenty and thirty, became the echo of a street-cry, which now entering the mew gave Quid pro quo! Quid pro quo! directly. (Mu 2)

Clock time, the economic cycle based on daily work, and the rotation of the sun are all specious forms of order which Murphy has rejected in favor of the rocker motion which releases his spirit. He rejects the macrocosm in favor of his microcosm, released from "the big world where Quid pro quo was cried as wares and the light never waned the same way twice; in favor of the little, as described in section six, where he could love himself." (Mu 6-7) In the expanding universe of relativity, contrary to appearances, the macrocosmic flux varies ceaselessly, regardless of the habits of cuckoo-clocks and men. The velocity of the rocker also suggests that Murphy's trip to Nirvana derives from relativity theory. It is a parody of the timelessness, the deliverance from the absurd cycle of clock-time, achieved at the impossible speed of light:

The rock got faster and faster, shorter and shorter, the iridescence was gone, the cry in the mew was gone, soon his body would be quiet. Most things under the moon got slower and slower and then stopped, a rock got faster and faster and then stopped. (Mu 9)

His gaze is fixed on the cornice which shrinks and fades with the speed of his rocking, recalling the shrinkage of the metric observation of space-time on inertial systems in states of high velocity.

Celia's task is to entice Murphy out of his rocker and look for a job so that she can abandon her street-walking and be
his wife. Murphy, however, considers work no less a degrading bodily rental than that of prostitution. When Celia first picks up Murphy, he is absorbed in studying the stars with the aid of an astrology chart. He has long since abandoned his study of theology, and he is now seeking guidance for his life-long strike through the cosmic determinism of star positions. At this point, it is the only system he claims to trust except his own rocking system. Consequently, in order to keep Celia, whom his body craves, he agrees to work, but only if guided by a horoscope which he is to buy for sixpence from Ramaswami Krishnaswami Narayanaswami Suk. It is perhaps coincidence that Murphy's personal "planet par excellence" (Mu 31) is Mercury. It was the erratic, apparently random orbit of Mercury which first aroused speculation about the accuracy of the Newtonian laws of motion. It also provided the General Theory with important verification when Einstein's field equations corrected the Newtonian error by calculating the relativistic increase of mass at the perihelion when Mercury's speed increased. Certainly, the erratic reputation of Mercury makes it fitting that it should be Murphy's planet. Furthermore, reliance on a horoscope implies a macro-cosmic order which is supposed to remove contingency from the life of man, whereas, in fact, the celestial expansion outward in space of all bodies in the universe indicates definitely that they, too, are only relatively non-contingent and only apparently orderly.
Murphy is delighted with Suk's casting because it postpones embarking on any new venture until the following year. To Celia's shrill cry of despair, Murphy neatly turns Suk's "corpus of incentives" into a corpus of deterrents from seeking work. Nevertheless, he agrees to look for work rather than sacrifice the nightly "music" with Celia, whom his body craves. He fears losses, however: Celia, his body, and his mind. In this, he is prophetic. Furthermore, some of the conditions of the horoscope are not in his power to fulfill. He is forced to start his desultory search one year too soon, and he lacks a lucky amethyst or diamond. Above all, there is the disharmony between his rocking system and the "procuring and pimping for moneybags, one's lecherous tyrants the money-bags" (Mu 76) decreed by the only other system that still claims his residual allegiance.

Murphy obviously prefers non-system to pseudo-system. He is a former theological student who was, perhaps, revolted by the cosmic joker who organized the universe so haphazardly that any impartial observer would have to conclude that only a being with "an imperfect sense of humour could have made such a mess of chaos. In the beginning was the pun. And so on." (Mu 65) Murphy's primary goal is psychic harmony with chaos. He began well. At birth, his cry of shock in coming into the world was not the "proper A of international concert pitch, with 435 double vibrations per second, but the double flat of this." (Mu 71) After such a discordant beginning, his death by gas ("chaos") will
be a fitting coda. Prospective employers unanimously regard Murphy as a "surd," (Mu 77) which is little wonder when his mental zone three is a "matrix of surds." (Mu 112) Unable to fit his surd-existence into the pseudo-systems of society, a favorite resource of Murphy, as of the various narrators of the later trilogy, is to re-live his life. This reverie Murphy calls his "Belacqua fantasy," (Mu 78) after the slothful penitent in The Purgatorio (Canto IV) who is condemned to repeat the cycle of his indolent life before being admitted to Paradise. But Murphy finds this supine system inferior to his rocking system, which does not require the exertion of memory.

Murphy, however, is not incapable of outwitting the systems of the quid-pro-quo world with his own systems. The "seedy solipsist" enjoys a "triumph of tactics in the face of the most fearful odds" (Mu 82) by defrauding tea-shops of 1 83 of a cup of tea. Another absurd system occurs to Murphy as he prepares to eat his lunch of five assorted biscuits. He usually eats the ginger biscuit first and the anonymous last and the other three in no particular order. However, he reflects that this prejudice confines his consumption of biscuits to only twenty-four permutations of his order of consumption, whereas if he could "overcome his infatuation with the ginger, then the assortment would spring to life before him, dancing the radiant measure of its total permutability, edible in a hundred and twenty ways!" (Mu 96-97) Unfortunately, the world reasserts its essential
randomness, and Murphy's speculative micro-system is destroyed when a rutting dachshund devours the biscuits. Chance is the implacable enemy of all system.

Order does not correspond to the nature of reality.

Murphy meets Rosie Dew in the park. She is a medium whose spiritualist system consistently fails to achieve communication with the dead through her control, Lena, a panpygoptotic Manichee of the fourth century. Nor is Miss Dew any more effective with the park sheep, who refuse to eat the lettuce she tries to feed them. Sheep, as well as spirits, resist her efforts.

During his half-hearted search for work, Murphy happens to meet Austin Ticklepenny, a homosexual asylum attendant and reformed drunkard. Ticklepenny fears the onset of insanity if he continues in his job at Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, but he needs the money. Murphy is instantly struck by two coincidences with his horoscope: his eye has power to control lunatics, and one of the recommended jobs is that of a custodian. Consequently, on the strength of these coincidences, he offers to replace Ticklepenny in the asylum, confident that "their union made the nativity appear as finely correlated in all its parts as the system from which it purported to come." (Mu 93) In addition, unlike Ticklepenny, Murphy would welcome insanity: "To those in fear of losing it, reason stuck like a bur. And to those in hope . . . ?" (Mu 94)
The heart of the novel is the description of Murphy's tri-level mind, "the gravemen of these informations." (Mu 107)

It is an exact replica of the universe outside except that it transcends space and time:

Murphy's mind pictured itself as a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without. This was not an impoverishment, for it excluded nothing that it did not itself contain. Nothing ever had been, was or would be in the universe outside it but was already present as virtual, or actual, or virtual rising into actual, or actual falling into virtual, in the universe inside it. (Mu 107)

This mind is a Leibnitzian monad with three zones, a windowless micro-cosmic flux at its deepest level, exactly mirroring the flux of the macrocosm. Its upper two levels are improvements on the actual world of space-time events, whereas the lowest level is the random, lawless micro-world of atomic events, a plasmic mess of matter-energy. It is like a tiny model of the seething world of the super-photon before any putative creator intervened to induce a spurious order. Murphy's intense happiness at this level is a measure of his indictment of creation and of any assumption of cosmic order whatever.

The seven scarves that bind Murphy while he rocks himself into timelessness suggest both the bondage of the mind to the body and a shackling of the body itself which enables the mind to escape. Hugh Kenner traces this body-mind dualism to the 17th century Belgian Cartesian, Arnold Guelincx, the "doctrine of a 'body-tight' mental world, around which, or perhaps attached to
which, the body performs its gyrations according to laws the mind need not attempt to fathom. "36 Murphy recognizes the split and assumes the operation of some sort of occasionalism superintending body-mind intercourse, but he is not interested in the problem:

Thus Murphy felt himself split in two, a body and a mind. They had intercourse apparently, otherwise he could not have known that they had anything in common. (Mu 109)

A purely spiritual mind in a purely mechanical body raises the problem of interaction. The pineal gland solution is weak, and the occasionalist solution relies on God to cause the interaction. In a world bereft of God, even this causality vanishes. The self is isolated, and man's mind can act on itself only, not on the external world. 37 Murphy's rocking into his mental chaos parodies the Einsteinian absolute speed limit, that of light, which shrinks the space-time interval to zero. Only in this way can Murphy come alive in his mind, because "motion in this world depended on rest in the world outside." (Mu 110)

The first two zones of Murphy's mind lead progressively to the total randomness and indeterminacy of his quantum zone. The first, the zone of light, is a commentary on the ill-ordered cosmos the creator so exquisitely botched.

Here the pleasure was reprisal, the pleasure of reversing the physical experience. Here the kick the physical Murphy received, the mental Murphy gave." (Mu 111)


37 Coe, Samuel Beckett, p. 29.
It is the re-creative zone where the painful and absurd events of real life are re-ordered and transformed into ideal events. "Here the whole physical fiasco became a howling success."

(Mu 111) The second zone, that of the half light, consists of unparalleled forms in perfect order. It is, in short, a perfect creation, a zone of pure, non-representational art, absolutely autonomous. "This system has no other mode in which to be out of joint," (Mu 111) and therefore requires no corrective. The mind enjoys a "Belacqua bliss" of pure contemplation. It is an Eden-world before the Fall.

The third zone, the dark zone, parallels pre-creation chaos before the cosmic command that created light and space-time motion billions of years ago:

The third, the dark, was a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms. The light contained the docile elements of a new manifold, the world of the body broken up into the pieces of a toy; the half light, states of peace. But the dark neither elements nor states, nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change. Here there was nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion. Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He did not move, he was a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line.

Matrix of surds.

It was pleasant to kick the Ticklepennies and Miss Carridges simultaneously together into ghastly acts of love. It was pleasant to lie dreaming on the shelf beside Belacqua, watching the dawn break crooked. But how much more pleasant was the sensation of being a missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion. (Mu 112-13)
The dominant concepts underlying this lowest mental zone derive from the quantum microcosm. It is clearly the random, indeterminate micro-universe of quantum theory in its perpetual flux of becoming, without a trace of the constancy or continuity assumed in the older, Newtonian universe of matter in ordered motion. It is the micro-world of Planck, Bohr, and Heisenberg with chaotic fields of plasmic matter-energy in absolutely random, "non-Newtonian" motion. It is utterly free, a world of micro-events governed by no "intelligible principle," or any law other than the lawless Uncertainty Principle. It is without familiar elements or states because it is in a constant state of collision and fluid becoming. Space-time point-events are meaningless at this level since there is no possibility of discovering any regular motion by which they could be measured. In any case, the very term "events" would imply movements of determinate entities. Certainly determinism has nothing to do with the surging chaos where Murphy enjoys the sensations of an absolutely free nuclear particle in its "tumult of non-Newtonian motion."

Murphy is most attuned to the irrationality, the absurdity, at the heart of the universe when in this mental state. Any assumption of structure or system, either social or cosmic, ignores underlying chaos. Happiness for Murphy is attunement to the microcosmic randomness of all reality, all superficial appearance of order to the contrary. The Nearys of the world can impose a factitious order on the cosmic "mess" only by
adapting a series of constructs which gratuitously envision reality as Pythagorean number harmony or Newtonian mechanism. The truth is that no conceivable construct can serve as a model for the essence of a process universe, half formed, half formless. It refuses to hold still for its picture.

At night after work at MMM, Murphy refuses to look at the sky, "cold, tired, angry, impatient and out of conceit with a system that seemed the superfluous cartoon of his own." (Mu 189) The system here referred to is not simply astrology, but the expanding macrocosm in its physical sense. All reality is indeterminate, rendering any system spurious at any level of existence. All being is surd-being, sheer a-teleological process, irrational motion. Murphy's mind is his refuge from the absurd system of perpetual motion for the purpose of sating the "quantum of wantum" that obsesses everyone he meets.

Murphy has been grudgingly accepted as Ticklepenny's replacement and given lodging in a garret that has no heat. On Murphy's insistence, Ticklepenny contrives a jerry-built maze of tubes and fittings for a dilapidated gas-heater, "step by step, typically, from the furthest-fetched of visions to a reality that would not function." (Mu 171) He forgot a source of gas. There is a disused gas-jet below in the water closet. It is high on the wall and operated by a double-chain arrangement, as is the toilet flusher. By chance, either chain may be pulled, as happens on the night Murphy is blown up. However, the significance of
The heating device is that it sets Murphy's thoughts wandering on the etymology of gas--chaos:

. . . henceforward gas would be chaos, and chaos gas. It could make you yawn, laugh, warm, cry, cease to suffer, live a little longer, die a little sooner. What could it not do? Gas. Could it turn a neurotic into a psychotic? No. Only God could do that. Let there be Heaven in the midst of the waters, let it divide the waters from the waters. The Chaos and Waters Facilities Act. The Chaos, Light, and Coke Co. (Mu 176)

This parodic paraphrase of Genesis derides the notion that an omnipotent God could be responsible for the chaos of the universe. Instead of a material firmament, it would have been an easy matter simply to create heaven in the first place, rather than the chaotic material reality He did create.

Murphy reaches his garret by a ladder which he detaches so that he can draw it up after him. This is an echo of Wittgenstein's warning about the uselessness of metaphysical speculation: "Do not come down the ladder, they have taken it away," (Mu 188) a warning Arsene repeats in Watt. Speculation about teleology is a waste of effort; no rational explanation of the cosmos is available to the human mind. In Murphy's opinion, the world was never, properly speaking, created in the first place, and man can attain harmony with it only by yielding passively to the true reality of chaos inside his sub-nuclear psyche.

Murphy is successful in dealing with the insane, as his horoscope predicted. However, Murphy now discards his faith in
astrological determinism. He now realizes, not only that the Ticklepenny meeting was sheer chance, but, more importantly, that he decided the issue of the asylum job on his own personal terms. "They were his stars, he was the prior system." (Mu 183) Since there is no observable system amid the universal chaos, of which the stars are a part, he is therefore free to fabricate his own. It is because of his unique ability to penetrate his own insane mental chaos that he succeeds with the psychotics, who exist permanently in this state. For Murphy, consequently, "nothing less than a slap-up psychosis could consummate his life's strike." (Mu 184)

Murphy imagines that the psychotics of MMM have achieved an idyllic state of "self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world which he had chosen for himself as the only felicity and achieved so seldom." (Mu 168) Here, at last, were men living in harmony with the world. From the outset, therefore, Murphy is anxious to test his theory that here he has happened upon "a race of people he had so long despaired of finding." (Mu 169)

Since Murphy believes the mad to be the chosen people, perfectly attuned to the irrationality of the cosmos, he loathes "the complacent scientific conceptualism that made contact with outer reality the index of mental well-being." (Mu 176-77) Murphy's mad rocking is an effort to escape what is commonly taken to be reality. He knows that scientists, the new mystics,
cannot explain reality; they merely make an act of faith in their pointer-readings and erect more or less plausible constructs of their metric visions. They are symbolic. Murphy views scientists as only a little less ignorant of the nature of reality than the general lay population:

The nature of outer reality remained obscure. The men, women and children of science would seem to have as many ways of kneeling to their facts as any other body of illuminati. The definition of outer reality, or of reality short and simple, varied according to the sensibility of the definer. (Mu 177)

In one sense, this could be taken as a statement of the Uncertainty Principle, if it is understood as the indeterminacy stemming primarily from the inadequacy of the scientific observer or his instrumentation. In another sense, it might be taken as a reference to the position and state of motion of the observer in an inertial system, which invariably affects his metric observations. In any case, the nature of reality will always remain obscure if order or system is assumed a priori. Murphy is perfectly convinced that there is neither macro- nor micro-order. Consequently, Murphy deplores psychiatric treatment designed to expel patients from their psychotic sanctuary into the more truly insane world of the quanta.

The function of the treatment was to bridge the gulf, translate the sufferer from his own pernicious little private dungheap to the glorious world of discrete particles, where it would be his inestimable prerogative once again to wonder, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl in a reasonable balanced manner, and comfort himself with the society of others in the same predicament. (Mu 177)
Reason is condemnation to the outer darkness, the world of the "discrete particles" of Bohr, Planck, and Heisenberg which passes understanding. Random irrationality is the essence of all being, whatever the level, micro or macro. Therefore, rationality, with its dream of order, is a curse, not a blessing. If chaos is the cosmic essence, psychosis is preferable to the perpetual frustration of a human rationality that is totally isolated, since it, alone, is not consonant with the rest of nature. Mental alienation is, then, a blessed escape from the "colossal fiasco."

(Mu 178) Murphy denies the psychiatric presumption that treatment and cure are any benefit to patients. He casts his vote for the microcosm of psychosis: "I am not of the big world, I am of the little world." (Mu 178)

Unfortunately, Murphy has fallen into the very same trap as the systematizers and construct-makers he so despises. He has "lovingly simplified and perverted" (Mu 178) the issue by refusing to tolerate or cultivate "the occasions of fiasco, having once beheld the beatific idols of his cave." (Mu 178) He idealizes the shadow of beatitude of the psychotics as a real beatitude. Like Plato's cave-dwellers, Murphy interprets the torpor of alienation as happiness:

The frequent expressions apparently of pain, rage, despair and in fact all the usual, to which some patients gave vent, suggesting a fly somewhere in the ointment of Microcosmos, Murphy either disregarded or muted to mean what he wanted. (Mu 179)
Murphy simply ascribes the anguish of the "microcosmopolitans" to the merciless ministrations of the mind-surgeons. In short, Murphy turns a blind eye to the slavery of psychosis, refusing to believe that it is an iron, impenetrable system of its own. In this way, Murphy "saved his facts against the pressure of those current in the Mercyseat," and continued the construction of "his own little dungeon in Spain." (Mu 180)

There are three reasons why Murphy persists in his belief in psychotic paradise. First, the impassivity of the higher schizoids "in the face of the most pitiless therapeutic bombardment" resembles "Murphy's own bondage" (Mu 180-81) in his zone three refuge. Attunement to a universe of random, discrete particles consists in reaching an ideal state, that of insanity, the blessed isles. The padded cells are the second reason Murphy believes he has found his final haven. The typical cell is "windowless, like a monad," (Mu 181) physically structured in the image of his own zone three. In addition, in an obvious reference to relativity theory, the three dimensions of the cell "were so exquisitely proportioned that the absence of the fourth was scarcely felt." (Mu 181) It will be recalled that the purpose of Murphy's rocking was to accelerate until space-time halted and he could subside into his zone of total freedom. It is the ceaseless flux of space-time which is one cause of the disorder of the universe. In any case, time is measured by point-events, and there are virtually no point-events to mark its passage inside
the cells. The third reason for Murphy's belief in psychosis is his unusual success with the patients, which Murphy took to mean "that they felt in him what they had been and he in them what he would be." (Mu 183-84) In particular, he feels attracted to Mr. Endon, a schizophrenic with an ideal psychosis, "in short, a psychosis so limpid and imperturbable that Murphy felt drawn to it as Narcissus to his fountain." (Mu 186)

On night duty for the first time, Murphy's theory of psychotic bliss explodes—as does Murphy himself. Psychosis is not unconditioned freedom. The night attendant is expected to inspect each cell once every twenty minutes, switching on the cell light and pressing a check indicator. There is no provision in the rigid time schedule for emergencies, in accordance with the "higher law," (Mu 237) that of chance. Inflexible system in a mad-house ignores the fact that "man proposed, but God disposed, even in the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat." (Mu 237)

That night, also, Murphy suffers from the gulf that suddenly separates him from the camaraderie of the mad. "It was as though the microcosmopolitans had locked him out." (Mu 240)

Those sleeping did so in the attitudes of Herculaneum, as though sleep had pounced upon them like an act of God. And those that did not did not by the obvious grace of the same authority." (Mu 239)

Catastrophe is without discernible pattern.

Even his psychotic friend, Mr. Endon, is locked into an a-mental pattern and is not free, as Murphy had imagined. When
Murphy switches on the light in Mr. Endon's cell, he finds him clothed and seated on the bed with the chess-board set up to play. Murphy means nothing more to Mr. Endon than chess, and the psychotic's rigid "quantum of wantum" dictates that he play Murphy during the night just as he did during the day. Habitually, they played completely inconclusive games, both using a stalemate pattern of moves which left the pieces in equivalent positions by the end of each day's play. Murphy attributes Endon's bloodless play to friendship. It is on this night during the chess-game that Murphy suddenly realizes that psychotics are neither in a state of peace, nor of liberation from rigid system. He slumps over the board as the chess-pieces scatter on the floor, numbed by the realization that his theory of a psychotic haven has crumbled, as "when the somethings give way, or perhaps simply add up, to the Nothing, than which in the guffaw of the Abderite naught is more real." (Mu 246)

In the meantime, Mr. Endon has slipped out and is wandering through the hall flipping light-switches and indicators according to "an amental pattern as precise as any of those that governed his chess." (Mu 247) A hypomanic is having a fit in his idyllic cell, bouncing off the walls "like a bluebottle in a jar." (Mu 247) The madman is infuriated by Endon's playing chess with the switches. In a final attempt to bridge the gulf between himself and Mr. Endon, Murphy takes the madman's head in his hands and gazes into the unseeing eyes. Murphy sees only his own reflection in the psychotic's pupils.
On his way to his garret "he raised his face to the starless sky, abandoned, patient, the sky, not the face, which was abandoned only." (Mu 251) The three premises of his theory have collapsed: psychotics are not free, but rigidly determined; psychosis is not bliss, but misery; psychotics exist in closed systems which neither he nor they have any power to control.

Chaos cannot be configured; Murphy's Gestalt field disintegrates:

Scraps of bodies, of landscapes, hands, eyes, lines and colours evoking nothing, rose and climbed out of sight before him, as though unreeled upward off a spool level with his throat. (Mu 252)

Naked in his rocking-chair up in the garret, Murphy begins building up speed for a trip into timelessness. It is his last remaining system. A candle burns nearby on the floor. By chance someone pulls a chain in the water closet below. "The gas went on in the w.c., excellent gas, superfine chaos. Soon his body was quiet." (Mu 253) With the help of the subsequent explosion, Murphy becomes a permanent inhabitant of the totally free state of chaos, unconfigured and unconfigurable. Inexplicably, Murphy has left a last will and testament which dictates that his ashes shall be taken to the Abbey Theatre, carried into the toilet, what the great and good Lord Chesterfield calls the necessary house, on the right as one goes down into the pit, and I desire that the chain be there pulled upon them, if possible during the performance of a piece, the whole to be executed without ceremony or show of grief. (Mu 269)
Murphy, above all men, should have known the efficacy of man's proposals—even his last proposals. The bag containing Murphy's body, mind, and soul is entrusted to Cooper, who, as usual, is unable to resist the attraction of a palatial pub, and in a drunken soccer game that ensues, the paper bag of Murphy's ashes serves as the ball, and by closing time

the body, mind and soul of Murphy were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon; and before another day—spring greyened the earth had been swept away with the sand, the beer, the butts, the glass, the matches, the spits, the vomit. (Mu 275)

Although the ultimate disposal of Murphy violates the letter of his will, the spirit is certainly left intact.
II. Watt

Watt was written between 1942 and 1944 when Samuel Beckett was hiding from the Nazi forces because of his involvement with the French Resistance. Its setting is the Ireland of his boyhood. First published in 1953, it is the last novel Beckett wrote in English.38

Like Murphy, Watt is a novel depicting a quest for meaning in a universe that resists all attempts to reduce it to a rational system. It is a simple story of a middle-aged man who goes to work as a servant in Mr. Knott's house, and while there witnesses inexplicable, trivial happenings. However, the peculiar series of events that occur in Mr. Knott's establishment appear to be determined by some sort of uncertainty principle.

Parodying Leibnitz's famous phrase, Watt terms it the "pre-established arbitrary," in other words, sheer chance or some principle that resists formulation by reason or normal common sense. Furthermore, all events that happen there are indeterminate both at the moment of their occurrence when Watt was more in possession of his faculties, and much more so later in the insane asylum as Watt's ruined mind gropes through his confused recollections. In addition, he confides them to a fellow-inmate, Sam the narrator, who only half grasps the flood of twisted words

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and scrambled sentences. Thus, the novel is a tale told by an idiot, and, half understood, is in turn narrated in the first person by another idiot, about a series of absurd events occurring in Mr. Knott's mad establishment.

The only way man can live a rational life is to try to tame the constant flux of phenomena surrounding him by formulating symbolic constructs that will lend at least provisional meaning to reality. Without meaning there can be no reality. Science is one of the modes of constructing such symbolic systems.

Watt is a caricature of a scientific observer whose ruling passion is to manufacture constructs in an attempt to reduce his observations to some sort of system. Nevertheless, this compulsive activity is determined less by a desire to understand the nature of reality than to find a refuge from reality by means of provisional absolutes, so to speak. For example, Watt's exhaustive permutations to account for the series of famished dogs who depend on Mr. Knott's providence for their food is a problem that obsessed Watt for a time. But every one of his provisional solutions is flawed by two or more objections. In the end, he cannot penetrate the obscure rationale of the Knott--Lynch--dog arrangement, nor can be explain it away. Yet, somehow the clumsy mechanism works. It is only by a process of displacement that the dog enigma is submerged by the next, equally inexplicable enigma.
But much more than with the Lynches, or with Mr. Knott's remains, Watt's concern, while it lasted, was with the dog. But it did not last long, this concern of Watt's, not very long, as such concerns go. And yet it was a major concern, of that period, while it lasted. But once Watt had grasped, in its complexity, the mechanism of this arrangement, how the food came to be left, and the dog to be available, and the two to be united, then it interested him no more, and he enjoyed a comparative peace of mind, in this connexion. Not for a moment Watt supposed that he had penetrated the forces at play, in this particular instance, or even perceived the forms that they upheaved, or obtained the least useful information concerning himself, or Mr. Knott, for he did not. But he had turned, little by little, a disturbance into words, he had made a pillow of old words, for a head. (W 116-17)

Observation of the dog and food nexus gives Watt no clue to the causality or teleology of this rigid daily system. Neither the mathematics of probability nor the permutations of language suffice to give Watt more than a temporary respite from his researches. His basic, unwarranted assumption is that events are rationally explicable, given patient research and a sufficient accumulation of probabilities, one of which must fit the observed facts. However, he finds reason progressively less able to assimilate the radical irrationality of the universe, and he finally loses his reason in the attempt.

From the fact that a "watt" is a unit of electrical energy, Watt's name takes on special significance. It was the Michelson-Morley experiment with light that toppled the absolute, Newtonian universe and opened the way for the Einsteinian. Subsequent experiments by Planck and Einstein revealed the mysterious wave-particle duality of all electromagnetic phenomena,
of which light is one form. And Watt is as mysterious an entity as light, since no one knows anything about him except that he travels. This, then, is an essential key to the strange events that plague Watt's understanding during his stay in the Knott cosmos. Knott's is the unhinged world of relativity, and Watt's efforts to make sense out of it eventually unhinges his mind, though not quite enough to make it capable of understanding Knott's world.

Watt is a classical, Newtonian scientist trapped in the twentieth century universe of relativity and quantum indeterminacy, a researcher who persists in attempting to understand space-time in absolute, classical terms and to assign more or less plausible causes to observed effects. He believes that these causes can be ordered to yield laws. Thus, he is a rational absolutist who fails to heed Arsene's warning about not coming down the ladder, i.e., in Wittgenstein's terms, attempting to express the inexpressible. Consequently, when Watt looks at the mysterious picture in Erskine's room depicting a broken circle and a point floating "in boundless space, in endless time," he understands nothing of what it suggests because "Watt knew nothing about physics." (W 129) Watt indeed knows nothing about the enigmas of modern physics, and as a consequence, he can learn nothing about the significance of the apparently trivial enigmas of Mr. Knott's house. That matter and energy are convertible terms, that linear measure contracts and time slows down on
systems in motion, that nuclear particles behave randomly, that
the nature of light is an enigma--none of this does Watt know.
since his scientific paradigm is Newtonian, he assumes he inhabits
a cosmic mechanism of law. Clearly, he resembles a scientist,
however parodied. Like the scientist, Watt constantly constructs
hypotheses. Unlike the scientist, however, Watt rarely tests his
hypotheses. Like the scientist, Watt is an observer. He is,
however, a very imperfect observer whose powers steadily decline,
as well as his ability to formulate plausible constructs to
account for phenomena. Like the scientist, again, Watt depends
to a degree on mathematics to describe his observations, even
though his mathematical constructs are parodies of this scientific
procedure. Unlike the modern scientist, who distrusts words,
Watt never abandons the attempt to use language, which, however
distorted, fails to capture the chaotic nature of what he
observes.

Unlike Watt, who would be temporarily satisfied with any
workable system based on whatever half-truths he could discover,
Beckett finds no trace of system. All system seems to him
fraudulent. Watt is a novel whose subject is that the universe
so lacks order and finality that human reason cannot grasp it.
One can most nearly attain harmony with the universal "pre-
established arbitrary" in that final model of the cosmos, the
insane asylum where Watt and his biographer, Sam, at last find a
home. However, even here in the idyllic madhouse there is "a fly
somewhere in the ointment of Microcosmos," (Mu 179) as Watt's avatar, Murphy, discovered in MMM. The asylum microcosm, as well as Mr. Knott's establishment, are models of the universe, both so random "that it was impossible for doubts not to arise, in a reasonable mind, regarding the sanity of the person responsible for the layout." (W 159) Even the madman, Sam, sees the world as an affront to his disordered reason, and as a certification of a worse lunacy against its creator—if the world can properly be said to have had one.

Mr. Knott's establishment is the antithesis of the Newtonian universe of stable laws governing a beautifully balanced cosmic machine. Watt, himself, who walks like a badly synchronized mechanism which, once on course, collides with whatever strays into its path, and who travels on train and tram mechanisms as regular as he is errant, finds Mr. Knott's establishment a weird mechanical contrivance, but one operating in accordance with arbitrary, unfathomable principles. Mr. Knott, the divine psychotic, (or perhaps one of his remote ancestors) is surely, on one level, a parody of the Deist Master Mechanic, in the sense that, once his contrivance is set in motion, the system operates effortlessly and serenely, leaving Mr. Knott no further function other than to eat, sleep, and urinate in the bushes. Apparently, he never has to tinker with the apparatus that is his establishment.
The essence of any mechanism is that it is repetitive and predictable in its operation. Although Mr. Knott's establishment is repetitive in its operation, it is unmachine-like in its arbitrariness, unpredictability. It is a mechanism that periodically, but without ascertainable periodicity or cause, absorbs the endless series of servants like Arsene, Watt, Arthur, Micks, and digorges them, more or less the worse for wear, at the termination of their service. Also, it is in parody of assembly-line technology using standardized parts that Arsene classifies the two types of servants Mr. Knott takes into his service: either "big bony seedy shabby haggard knockkneed rottentoothed rednosed men" like Watt, or "small fat seedy shabby juicy or oily bandy legged potbellied potbottomed men" (W 59) like Arsene. Even this series, however, is not certain. In any event, living memory can recall only these two shapes of servants, though Arsene inclines to the opinion that the only essential qualities are "seediness and shabbiness and fewness in number."

(W 59) The shapes are the constants, the individuals the variables of the servant field. These, then, are the living, interchangeable cogs that are rotated when they wear out—if that is the reason. It is probable that what wears out in the series of servants is their illusion of cosmic order. Once the illusion of order disappears in a servant, his place is taken by a fresh servant with fresh illusions.

To Watt's mounting distress, therefore, he discovers that Mr. Knott's establishment is not a determinate system, but a
fluctuating field characterized rather by a series of random variables with only a few irrational constants, such as famished dogs and diseased Lynches. Watt is obviously unaware that modern science inclines strongly to the opinion that scientific laws, scientific field models of the universe—both macrophysical and microphysical—must be kept open and fluid. But Watt cannot tolerate the open-ended, process models of field theory. He cherishes a principle of closure. Consequently, he cannot model the Knott cosmos.

Watt, therefore, is a reductio ad absurdum of the myth of scientific or mathematical systems as pictures of reality. Beckett is parodying attempts to find order in the world as anthropomorphic impositions of frameworks or constructs that, instead of picturing reality, merely falsify or distort it. Watt embodies the folly of the quest for an absolute, Laplacian system in a world of relativity and quantum. Although Watt does not realize it, space-time and mass-energy are relative, and in an important sense, complementary terms. Consequently, the knowledge one can derive from events occurring within these terms will reflect, at best, the same degree of relativity and uncertainty of one’s observations, above all, when both the events and the observers are in a state of flux. A fortiori, any structuring derived from this relative knowledge will be similarly affected by indeterminacy and discontinuity.

The shift from a classical, Newtonian world picture to that of relativity affects the structure of Watt. The bulk of
the novel is related as a first-person report by Sam of Watt's garbled experiences and observations in Mr. Knott's service, and the occasional hiatuses and question-marks record gaps in Sam's version. Nevertheless, the story blandly begins and ends from an omniscient point of view. Implicitly, the omniscient point of view assumes a privileged observer standing outside the framework of the action and recording an accurate version of events. Classical physical theory also assumed a privileged observer. Relativity theory rejects absolute space-time, and no observer, therefore, is privileged. He is locked into his own field of observation. In relativity theory observation is affected by an observer's state of motion and requires transformation equations when translated into other inertial systems. However, in the conventional world of Hackett and the Nixons sitting on a bench at the tram stop in the beginning, or of Mr. Nolan and Mr. Gorman standing at the train station at the end of the story, an absolute world of order is assumed, and this assumption is emphasized by the fictional technique of omniscient narration.

The sequence of the narrative's four chapters in the chronological order of Aristotle's Poetics would be one, two, four, three. As we have seen, the chronology of space-time events in relativity theory varies according to the motion of the observers, such that two sets of observations of the same space-time event would agree only if they were in the same state of motion relative to each other, or if they were transformed into
equivalence. In addition to the chronological confusion, there is epistemological confusion. The order of relative intelligibility or coherence by chapters is the following: two, one, four, three.\footnote{Ruby Cohn, \textit{Samuel Beckett: The Comic Gamut}, pp. 90-91.} Finally, the relative intelligibility of events within each chapter steadily declines from beginning to end.

Similarly, the sequence of events is often without obvious transition or continuity. Events occur like quantum jumps. Whereas the most apparently trivial events involving Watt and Mr. Knott are catalogued in tiresome detail, the sequence of events is often a succession of random, temporal leaps with little or no transition or causal connection.

Dialogue is equally discontinuous. Watching a couple necking on his favorite bench,

Mr. Hackett decided, after some moments, that if they were waiting for a tram they had been doing so for some time. For the lady held the gentleman by the ears, and the gentleman's hand was on the lady's thigh, and the lady's tongue was in the gentleman's mouth. Tired of waiting for the tram said . . . Mr. Hackett, they strike up an acquaintance. The lady now removing her tongue from the gentleman's mouth, he put his into hers. Fair do, said Mr. Hackett. Taking a pace forward, to satisfy himself that the gentleman's other hand was not going to waste, Mr. Hackett was shocked to find it limply dangling over the back of the seat, with between its fingers the spent three quarters of a cigarette.

I see no indecency, said the policeman.

We arrive too late, said Mr. Hackett. What a shame. (W 8)

It is to be noted that the necking is viewed with scientific detachment, and love is made ridiculous by reducing
sexual passion to a series of mechanical actions and analyzed as
disparate segments. Furthermore, Hackett's hailing the policeman
after his 

voyeur-like interest in the love-play, and the presence
or absence of the couple exhibit a lack of causal and transitional
relationship. Likewise, Arsene's long monologue is fragmented,
Watt's entry into Erskine's locked room is unexplained, nor is
there any clear connection between the puzzle of the servants'
rotation and Watt's liaison with the fishwoman, Mrs. Gorman.
They are little more than variables in Mr. Knott's field.
Finally, Watt ends in total discontinuity with the "Addenda," a
random collection of notes which "fatigue and disgust" allegedly
prevented the author from incorporating into the novel proper.
This final collapse into randomness befits a novel whose subject
is an abortive quest for order.

The story is refracted through the two mad minds of Watt
and Sam. In a mockery of relativity theory, the two inmates in
chapter three are depicted as wandering between the asylum fences
with their hands on each other's shoulders, Watt backward and Sam
forward. Lacking any transformation equations to reduce Watt's
observations into intelligible terms, they become two inertial
systems in uniform relative motion, hoping by this means to
transfer Watt's observations precisely into Sam's. Sam's story
is sufficient testimony to their failure.

Watt is ill-equipped to understand his world. Even
knowing relativity theory would not satisfy Watt's quest for
certainty in the world. There would still be randomness at the heart of matter to appal him. The disappearance of the former, classical world has caused "Watt's world to become unspeakable." (W 85)

The reader also needs a set of transformation equations. Besides realizing that he is reading a version of events at several removes from sanity, he must also transform the events in Mr. Knott's establishment into cosmic events. They happen, not in a weird country house in Ireland, but in the universe. The house is a microcosm; the events are cosmic paradigms with cosmic implications. Not Watt alone, but every man must be perplexed at the random, a-teleological nature of Knott's weird world, and either abandon the quest for complete comprehension in human common-sense terms, or risk Watt's fate.

Watt is best read as a mythical quest for cosmic order by a modern Candide. Ruby Cohn calls attention to the mythic quality of Watt and suggests the influence of Franz Kafka's The Castle, which Beckett read in the German:

...we find the heroes of both novels moving through an unpredictable, seemingly indifferent, but ultimately malevolent cosmos. Like the medieval hero, these moderns bring all their resources to their quests. Plodding rather than dashing, cleaving with the minds rather than swords, both K. and Watt fail, finally, to reach their goals—and never understand the cause of their failure, or even the nature of their compulsive quests. 40

Watt's quest, like that of all Beckett's people, follows three rules: 1) The law of the closed circuit: nothing escapes and nothing enters the system; 2) Under scrutiny, things shift their identities in a constant flux; 3) True progress and true immobility are alike impossible. As long as it is understood that the closed circuit world includes the principle of ultimate stasis, entropy, as a limit constantly approached, though never actually reached, these principles are clearly applicable to Watt. In this case, there is entropy of mind, not, as in the later fiction, that of both body and mind. Watt is universalized by his very lack of specification and past history into an Everyman figure. Aside from his grotesqueness, he lacks individuality or personality. John Fletcher terms Watt a deliberate enigma. Although it is stated explicitly that he is a reincarnation of Murphy ("he had once known the stars familiarly by name, when dying in London")—Watt, like all the Beckettian heroes to come after him, is in this way clearly linked to his predecessor in the series—he has nevertheless little of the distinct personality that Murphy has. Mr. Nixon professes "utter ignorance" of Watt's nationality, family, birthplace, confession, occupation, means of existence, distinctive signs. (W 21) The only certain information about Watt is that he is an inveterate traveler in constant motion, he drinks only milk, and he is incapable of an untruth. He is an

42 The Novels of Samuel Beckett, p. 63.
existence of indeterminate essence, physically resembling a parcel
or a roll of tarpaulin to Mr. Hackett, or a sewer-pipe to Mrs.
Nixon. He is a human ink-blot in the twilight.

This, then, is the figure who is first seen tumbling
out of the tram one stop before his destination, the railroad
station, and who perplexes Mr. Hackett and the Nixons, husband
and wife. The first series of speculations turns on the mysteri-
ous kinship Mr. Nixon observes between Watt and hump-backed
Hackett.

The curious thing is, my dear fellow, I tell you quite
frankly, that when I see him, or think of him, I think
of you, and that when I see you, or think of you, I
think of him. I have no idea why this is so. (W 19)

However, the resemblance is both just and fairly obvious. Both
Hackett and Watt have in common a passion for order and certainty,
though Hackett's is the less authentic. Mr. Hackett earlier
attempted to restore public order and decency. He failed. In
addition, both men habitually think in terms of mechanisms. For
Mr. Hackett the love-play on the bench is a case in point. Mr.
Hackett fails to get any but the scantiest information out of
Mr. Nixon, much to his exasperation. Even specious information
seems to Hackett better than none: "And that you are unable to
tell what you do not know I am willing to believe also. It is a
common failing." (W 22) No logical positivist, Mr. Hackett
reports that he fell off a ladder at the age of one. The
Parallel suggesting Wittgenstein's metaphysical ladder is
perhaps intended, because Hackett has been engaged in futile
speculation ever since. Likewise, Watt later does not understand and heed Arsene's warning about coming down off the ladder, and continues to speculate about cosmic order until he speculates himself into insanity. Unlike Hackett, however, Watt does not regard his speculations as pastimes.

The next speculations about Watt concern the five shillings Mr. Nixon loaned him seven years ago to buy a boot. We later learn that he bought a size twelve boot for eight pence from an amputee to complement the size ten shoe he found on a beach, both henceforth to be worn on his size eleven feet. The point is, however, not the asymmetry of this pilgrim of the absolute's footwear, but rather, that for seven years Watt has carried the four shillings and four-pence change. He conceives of money in absolute terms as Mr. Nixon's personal shillings. Mr. Nixon thinks in terms of money-time relativity: five shillings at five per cent for seven years equals six and nine-pence. Mr. Nixon's anger is caused by Watt's incomprehension of this elementary form of financial relativity. Similarly, Hackett thinks in terms of money-time, but at a smaller rate of interest. In any case, none of the speculation about how Watt could obtain one boot reveals the peculiar truth. Their probabilities do not include the highly improbable truth about how Watt actually did buy one boot at a bargain.

A more important series of speculations concern Watt's getting off his tram one stop too soon, and the consequent
danger of his missing his train. Mr. Hackett's guess is that, since Watt is "too fearful to assume himself the onus of a decision, . . . he refers it to the frigid machinery of a time-space relation." (W 21) But it is more probable that Watt is programmed to think in terms of absolute space and time. Consequently, in his ignorance of relativity, Watt leaves out of his calculations the transformation equations that would adjust for the shrinkage of space-time measurement caused by the tram as an inertial system. It is true that this incident parodies relativity theory as well as Watt's absolute concept of space-time, since it is obvious that the tram's motion would have no observable effect on space-time measurements. Nevertheless, Watt's passion to induce events to fit similar absolute terms will continue to plague him during his stay at Mr. Knott's establishment, ignorant as he is of relativity theory.

A rather oblique reference to space-time relativity occurs also at the end of Watt. As such, it is in the important position of completing the frame of the narrative and paralleling the significance of the tram incident. Mr. Cole, a crossing guard, sends to inquire of the station-master, Mr. Gorman, why the signals are set against two trains: the 5:57 from the southeast, and the 6:06 from the northwest. It shortly appears that Mr. Cole's times are in terms of systems in motion because Mr. Gorman, like a stationary observer, expects the trains at 5:55 and 6:04, respectively, or two minutes earlier in both
cases. It is evident that the crossing is two minutes' time, in terms of the train's space-time motion, either southeast or northwest of the station—which direction is not specified. In terms of absolute time, therefore, one of the two trains ought to arrive at the crossing two minutes earlier than its arrival at the station. Yet, Mr. Cole computes the times of both trains as two minutes later. Again, we have another parody of the relative retardation of time on moving systems. Mr. Gorman and the other common-sense men at the station take no notice of the discrepancy of train times. They are believers whose God is the absolutist guarantor of cosmic law, and all can comfortably laugh at the fool who says in his heart, "there is no God," as Mr. Case jocosely remarks. Unlike these unspeculative theists, but like the errant goat "dragging its pale and chain," (W 245) Watt cannot ignore unsolved mystery, and disappears, finally untethered from all absolutes, his reason ruined by the incomprehensible relativity of events in Mr. Knott's house, to find refuge in the asylum. Unlike the mass of mankind, he does not have the gift of either ignoring or accepting the enigmas of the universe.

Despite the fears of Hackett and the Nixons, Watt catches his train. He prefers to ride backward and has some difficulty detecting whether the scenery or the train is in motion, in parody of the fact that one can detect inertial motion only relative to other systems in a different state of motion:
Now the fields flew by, the hedges and the ditches, ghastly in the train's light, or appeared to do so, for in reality it was the train that moved, across a land forever still. (W 28)

A Mr. Dum Spiro (perhaps from "dum spiro spero," or "while I breathe, I hope") Watt's fellow-passenger, introduces himself as the editor of a Catholic periodical, Crux, which deals in pious acrostics and the answers to such pseudo-problems as the precise ecclesiastical anathemas required for the extermination of such vermin as "the eels of Como, the hurebers of Beaune, the rats of Lyon, the slugs of Macon, the worms of Como, the leeches of Lausanne and the caterpillars of Valence." (W 27-8) So much for the Roman Catholic methods of dealing with a disorderly world. Mr. Spiro's air of certainty satirizes all such dogmatisms. Watt, not impressed, takes refuge in his mysterious inner voices, which are no more intelligible to him in their constant permutations of singing, crying, stating, and murmuring than is Spiro's monologue. As a rationalist, Watt could not believe in a factitious cosmic order based on revelation and theology, however explicated by commentators like Suarez or enforced with "all the rigour of the canon laws . . . and pontifical decrees." (W 30)

Having unaccountably gotten off the train at the correct station, Watt sets out for Mr. Knott's house, a "high stamping mass," moving more like an apprentice's first attempt at a robot than like a fully-assembled, articulated human being. Watt's is the painfully acquired walk of an amputee:
Watt's way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south and then turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north... and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination...

(W 30)

Watt's preoccupation with system is a parody of the scientific method and a clue to his pseudo-scientific approach later to the problems of Mr. Knott's house. Roughly, the method of classical science is to consider phenomena in terms of mechanisms consisting of parts. As far as possible, it abstracts, dismantles, and measures the parts and their relations. And this is Watt's method of analysis. Thus, a human being might be considered as an aggregate of pipes, joints, valves, and holes. Similarly, an action like walking may be dissolved into a series of discrete movements. It is probable that Watt, at one time, undertook a motion analysis of the "headlong tardigrade" act of walking, and dissolved it into its component movements. In this way, he hoped to carry out the action systematically rather than unconsciously, like the bulk of mankind. That he succeeds in walking with the discrete motion of an ill-assembled robot indicates that Watt's locomotion analysis seems to have overlooked most of the elements that make it a fluid process. His walk, then, is itself a pseudo-scientific construct, which reduced to practice is woefully clumsy. His incomplete analyses of processes infect his investigations throughout, or rather, his compulsion to analyze
What might better be ignored. Clearly, if we have to depend on Watt’s powers of analysis, Mr. Knott’s mysteries will remain intact.

On the road, Watt is stoned by the militant Catholic, Lady McCann, perhaps because his walk is an affront to her inborn sense of order. However, so accustomed is Watt to the random absurdity which has thus far characterized his experience of the outer world, and which he hopes shortly to reduce to system in Mr. Knott’s house, that "there was not more room in his mind for resentment at a spit in the eye, to take a simple example, than if his braces had burst, or a bomb fallen on his bum." (W 32)

However, if Watt is truly serious about reducing his experience to a system, he cannot ignore some elements in favor of others. Rational causality, in Watt’s absolute terms, seems universally inoperable, whether in the random, outer world, or in the pseudo-ideal microcosm of Mr. Knott.

After Lady McCann’s attack and a brief rest in a ditch, during which Watt hears a threne with which we will deal later, Watt arrives at the back door of Mr. Knott’s house. It is at first locked, and then, inexplicably, open. Watt does not wish to believe "that his science of the locked door, so seldom at fault, had been so on this occasion," and, instead of the probability that he was mistaken in thinking the door locked when it was not so, Watt inclines to the equally probable, but more beautiful opinion—he thinks—that someone unlocked it from
within or without, stealthily. (W 36-7) Nevertheless, concerning this mystery, as well as all the others, Watt was to remain in complete uncertainty, free to manufacture endless series of more or less probable causes for the effects he witnessed, but without finally making a choice between them by some sort of test. It is significant that Watt never questions those who, like Arsene, might have removed his uncertainty. Always the scientist, he distrusts second-hand evidence, for fear of laying himself open to deception. As in the case, later, of Erskine's bell, Watt prefers to experiment, even though the only improvement in knowledge seems to be that the deception and uncertainty become first—instead of second-hand.

Inside in the kitchen Watt experiments with the effect covering the lamp has on making visible the red glow of the fireplace embers. Watt's study of the color spectrum of the embers suggests, however remotely, the famous problem in thermodynamics, that of black body radiation whereby heated bodies glow through all the colors of the spectrum in precise ratio to their temperature. According to classical wave theory, there was no theoretical limit to the amount of energy a body could absorb and therefore no limit to the amount of radiation it could emit. Theoretically, it could absorb enough heat energy to surpass visible radiation at the violet end of the spectrum and reach the lethal ultra-violet level—the so-called "ultra-violet catastrophe." Since this phenomena never occurs in practice, Max
Planck postulated his discrete energy chunks, the famous quanta, and his theory, as we have indicated earlier, ultimately unlocked the Pandora's box that spelled the end of classical physics. This, I think, is the reason for placing this otherwise pointless incident at the outset of Watt's service in the Knott microcosm. No Planck, Watt is puzzled by the ember phenomenon, but not yet seriously so.

While Watt is playing his idle scientific game with the kitchen lamp, observing how the lamp, when covered, causes the grate to appear to redden in the diminished light, and from which phenomena he might have deduced—but does not—the relativity of sense perception and its unreliability, Watt finds that a gentleman has been observing him. Watt then reflects that he really misses much that occurs around him, perhaps much of essential import, and

he found it strange to think, of these little changes, of scene, the little gains, the little losses, the thing brought, the thing removed, the light given, the light taken, and all the vain offerings to the hour, strange to think of all these little things that cluster round the comings, and the stayings, and the goings, that he would know nothing of them, nothing of what they had been, as long as he lived, nothing of when they came, of how they came, and how it was then, compared with before, nothing of how long they stayed, of how they stayed, and what difference that made, nothing of when they went, of how they went, and how it was then, compared with before, before they came, before they went. (W 38)

Watt realizes how much that is germane he misses, not only because of his own mortal brevity, but also because of his inability to focus on events more perfectly. Given such sensory
attention, and it would take superhuman powers far beyond Watt's to encompass the range of human experience so thoroughly, Watt's "Davus complex," (W 251) or dread of enigma, must remain ever incurable, even if the Knott-events were less impenetrable. The point is that Watt's observations, upon which he bases his series of constructs to explain his observations, will always be fragmentary, and his constructs, consequently, basically flawed.

The burden of Arsene's long monologue is to convince Watt of the futility of assuming that intelligible order exists in Mr. Knott's establishment. Although Arsene's "declaration had entered Watt's ears only by fits, and his understanding, like all that enters the ears only by fits, hardly at all," (W 80) "Arsene's declarations gradually came back to Watt" (W 248) in the course of his tenure as a servant. In short, Arsene explains the precise nature of Watt's quest because Watt himself is only dimly aware of its true nature. Arsene then sketches the process of the servants' disillusionment by which they become aware of the irrationality of the world, of the nothingness at the very core of reality, "that presence of what did not exist, that presence without, that presence within, that presence between." (W 45) Matter itself is without constancy or permanence. To men who search for cosmic order, who enroll in Mr. Knott's service "after so many years clinging to the perimeter," (W 41) the surface of existence, "the same things happen to us all, especially to men in our situation, whatever that is, if only we
chose to know it." (W 45) Men of their degree of honesty or insight discover that all models or constructs, however capacious, are inadequate contrivances, and what is worse, false to the prevalent flux of reality.

According to Arsene, the initial step in the process is a period of mindless bliss in Mr. Knott's refuge where "the little sounds come that demand nothing, ordain nothing, explain nothing, propound nothing." (W 39) All the past wanderings, "the past trials and errors glow, seen in their new, their true perspective, mere stepping-stones to this! Hah!" (W 41) All man's history has been a search for principles of order. Nevertheless, all the past cosmic models since the dawn of history were inadequate approximations of the reality represented by Mr. Knott's establishment. At one point in history the search apparently came to a halt when man became convinced that he lived in a vast, orderly mechanism. It was a mechanism about which "the sensations, the premonitions of harmony are irrefragable," (W 40) a magnificent clock-work world that vindicated Leibniz's "celebrated conviction that all is well, or at least for the best." (W 41)

Arsene loses his faith in the Newtonian cosmic order. Watt, however, fails to understand. Arsene's explanation is not explicit enough. Arsene explains how, after a period of initial bliss punctuated by routine tasks, such as peeling the potatoes and emptying the nightstools, there comes a moment when the
entire clock-work construct, which one assumed represented Mr. Knott's establishment, suddenly achieves a kind of critical mass. At that moment Arsene sees his contrivance detonate "with a perception so sensuous that in comparison the impressions of a man buried alive in Lisbon on Lisbon's great day seem a frigid and artificial construction of the understanding." (W 43) Significantly, Arsene dates the "slip" as occurring in October. Lisbon perished November 1. What triggers Arsene's loss of faith in order is, of course, the realization that reality is refractory to rational systems. It is a random flux made in the image and likeness of the random Mr. Knott, the micro-deity. The semblance of order is an illusion that will not bear close inspection. As the micro-world of Mr. Knott, so also is the macro- and microphysical outer universe chaotic. This realization is as shattering to Arsene's illusion of cosmic order as the earthquake of November 1, 1755, was to the eighteenth century optimist viewing the rubble that was Lisbon.

Arsene puts the matter clearly:

For my--how shall I say?--my personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw. Everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened happened outside it. (W 43)

Arsene understands that events which his mental construct or paradigm had habituated him to incorporate inside a rational framework actually occur outside it. The universe is not assimiliable to man's puny reason, and it now appears to Arsene
"an unfamiliar country." (W 44) His attempt to map the formless, to regulate the lawless, and assimilate the irrational represented Arsene's coming down the ladder in the vain hope of finding metaphysical order. The myth of system vanished through a "reversed metamorphosis. The laurel into Daphne." (W 44) Randomness cannot be ordered by mental constructions.

Arsene knows that each man mysteriously chosen to serve Mr. Knott must personally experience a similar disillusion, however different the paths that lead to it, although he also suspects that Watt will be unable to reach the same conclusion in time. In fact, Watt does prove unable to give a similar word of warning at the end when his replacement, Micks, arrives.

Arsene further concludes that all attempts to communicate knowledge are pointless. Human experience, and its every thought, word, and deed, is an irrational "ordure, from beginning to end," taking place generation after generation on this "poor old lousy old earth . . . An excrement." (W 46-7) Not only is communication of knowledge pointless, it is often false, as when Mr. Ash communicates his unsolicited opinion that the time is seventeen minutes past five exactly, just as Big Ben is about to strike six. Time is a relative measure of point-events, and for the rapidly-moving Mr. Ash, it is later than he thinks. He dies a week later "of premature exhaustion," (W 46) leaving his time-piece to a man who keeps the earth's excrement flowing, the house-plumber. Any personal opinion, therefore, is the "type of all
information whatsoever, be it voluntary or solicited" (W 46)--including Arsene's disclosures--and is marked by relative uncertainty and a high probability of error.

One of the factors causing uncertainty in human existence is the relativity of time. Furthermore, time is the prime factor in the flux of all being. And since reality is in flux, so also must be knowledge of it. Therefore, knowledge is no deliverance from the purposeless cycle of time. If essence is a process of becoming, it can never finally be known. For Arsene, the rotation of the seasons is a function of time with the whole bloody business starting all over again. A turd. 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 results would always be the same, and the hundredth life as the first, and the hundred lives as one. A cat's flux. (W 47)

Since, then, existence is repetitive, not in the sense of a pattern, but of a plastic flux, Arsene understands that any knowledge would be that of a past state, and thus totally inapplicable to any present or future state of reality. These successive states are so random as to be ungraspable and unpredictable by mind, or any construct mind can devise. In addition, time is the measure of a change of state, not only of outer reality, but also of the knowing self:

Yes, these moments together have changed us, your moments and my moments, so that we are not only no longer the same now as when they began--ticktick!
ticktick!—to elapse, but we know that we are no longer the same, but know in what we are no longer the same, you wiser but not sadder, and I sadder but not wiser...

(W 50)

Therefore, time is the relativity measure of change of all being, including that of the ego. Knowledge cannot cope with this pattern-less, relativity motion in which the known and the knower are both amorphous, unpredictable factors. The only possible wisdom is hind-sight wisdom, like that of Arsene, but it is no help in coping with any future predicament.

At the spectacle of Mr. Knott's microcosmic chaos, the only appropriate reaction, according to Arsene, is the diabolic, mirthless laugh. It is preceded in the trinity of laughs by the ethical and the intellectual—laughs arising from the realization that Knott's micro-creation is neither good nor true. The mirthless, metaphysical, third laugh ("Haw!") is at the expense of a deity who created a more chaotic chaos. The mirthless laugh, Arsene's final despair at the wreckage of his hope of finding cosmic order after long "successive excoriations of the understanding," (W 48) marks his inability to make sense out of this random microcosm. He despairs of any finality of purpose in this perpetual motion machine. It is purposeless, and Arsene must depart now "with my purpose as with it then I came, the only difference being this, that then it was living and now it is dead." (W 58)

To illustrate the only kind of servant existence endurable in the Knott-cosmos, Arsene conjures up a model human
eating-machine named Mary, a creature whose process-life is summed up in her perpetual rotation between the kitchen and the toilet, a woman whose eating-hands "flash to and fro, with the regularity that I do not hesitate to compare with that of piston-rods." (W 55) However, servants incapable of this type of mindless, mechanical existence could only expect to be allowed "to nest a little while in his [Mr. Knott's] branches." (W 57)

Therefore, the big, bony servants and the fat, potbellied servants ceaselessly rotate about Mr. Knott in tireless assiduity turning, the one or the other or both should be either bony and so on or fat and so forth, though if we could go back in pure time as easily as we can in pure space the possibility, if not the probability, is not excluded in our finding two or less than two or even more than two men or women or men and women as little bony and so on as fat and so forth eternally turning about Mr. Knott in tireless love. . . . Not that space is wanting, for space is not wanting. Not that time is lacking, for time is not lacking. (W 61-2)

Light arriving from stars far distant in space represents a long past state of these bodies, but it reveals nothing about their present condition, any more than a knowledge of the past conditions of Mr. Knott's servant field would explain the present state of the field involving one thin and one fat servant. Description of the field provides not the slightest rationale for this space-time rotation about the pseudo-deity, Mr. Knott. None of this absurd motion has any point. It is simply a labyrinthine process which lacks the clue of Thesus. (W 63) Arsene has been kind enough not to tell the complete truth about Knott's chaos
because, as he claims, he is "indulgent towards the dreams of middle age, which were my dreams." (W 62) Also, the full truth is ultimately inexpressible because what we know partakes in no small measure of the nature of what has so happily been called the unutterable or ineffable, so that any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail, doomed, doomed to fail. (W 62)

Arsene is ultimately unable to utter the "quite useless wisdom so dearly won" (W 62) because it would be to attempt to put into words the nothingness at the heart of all reality. At the end of his servant experience, Watt is in a worse state than Arsene. However oracular Arsene's utterances may seem to be, nevertheless the silence of the miserable Watt at the end of his service would seem to be the more appropriate, if more despairing, response to ultimate nihilism. In another sense, however, Watt's incapacity is far deeper than Arsene's. At the outset, it is already evident that Watt's perceptions are more deeply erroneous than Arsene's, and hence his knowledge and any subsequent construct based on that knowledge. As Arsene leaves by the back door, Watt sees what appears to be two Arsenes leaving, without realizing that one of them is a reflection in the glass pane. (W 63) Thus, at the beginning of his quest, Watt's perceptions are hopelessly confused. In the inner world of Mr. Knott, as in the macrocosm, uncertain observation dooms any and all construct attempts. At the end of chapter one, Watt the observer is as much a prey of sensory error as he is in
Chapter four after he has worn out his mind in the Knott cosmos. Unlike Arsene, Watt finishes his service without enough wit intact to be fully aware of the extent of his disillusionment. That, at least, would have been some accomplishment.

Before examining the events that eventually unhinge Watt's reason, we must first consider the nature of Mr. Knott and his house in terms of a parody of the relativistic deity and his cosmos, since there seems to be more at stake here than simply a parody of Deism, though it undoubtedly is that too.

It would seem that Watt's quest for cosmic order in Mr. Knott's establishment is, in part, a parody of the Platonic theory of the world of Ideal Essences, of which this world is an imperfect copy. In broader terms, however, Watt's quest should be conceived as the human quest for stability and order as an act of resistance to ceaseless change. At the apex of Mr. Knott's microcosm is the shadowy notion of the Absolute Good, or God. Mr. Knott, the god-figure, possesses qualities that parody Plato's personification of Absolute Good. Plato's God is characterized by the following qualities: 1) He is the most indubitable of realities; 2) He is good per se, eternal, and immutable; 3) His nature is unutterable, ineffable, and transcendent; 4) His world is the polar opposite of this world; 5) He is the universal object of desire and draws all things to himself. 43

Far from having any indubitable reality or essence, Mr. Knott is a field, a state of Protean becoming, a relativity, process deity. He is a field composed of a series of partial constructs of his series of servant observers: "Erskine's Mr. Knott, and Arsene's Mr. Knott, and Walter's Mr. Knott, and Vincent's Mr. Knott," (W 126) as well as Watt's Mr. Knott. There is no absolute Mr. Knott. This is, of course, in part a parody of the endless series of contradictory and sometimes ridiculous notions about God's nature entertained by mankind since the beginning of time. In addition, Mr. Knott is not only a perpetually incomplete composite of inadequate constructs never really assembled, but he is also a relative and contingent god, whose existence depends on his servants' observations.

For except, one, not to need, and, two, a witness to his not needing, Knott needed nothing, as far as Watt could see. . . .

And Mr. Knott, needing nothing if not, one, not to need, and, two, a witness to his not needing, of himself knew nothing. And so he needed to be witnessed. Not that he might know, no, but that he might not cease. (W 202-3)

Consequently, Mr. Knott lacks the aseity, the absolutely uncontingent being, commonly associated with the idea of divinity—Plato's or any other. Knott lacks omniscience also, since he often strays in the garden completely puzzled by the nature of the bushes and plants he finds there.

In a parody of the relativity of time as a measure of point-events in space, we find Mr. Knott rotating slightly less than one degree each night in the course of the year on his
circular bed, which alone, amid the wheeling galaxy-furniture of his room "maintained the illusion of fixity." (W 207) The Prime Mover is himself in constant motion relative to the orbit of the earth about the sun. He is, obviously, not the unmoved mover.

Finally, Mr. Knott's appearance and his habits are in continual flux. Except for his meticulous precision in the nocturnal rotation and his Sunday in bed, he is as random and elusive as any Heisenberg electron. His reality consists of his essential randomness. As such, he can never be understood by human reason. It would be an "anthropomorphic insolence." (W 202) Mr. Knott's odd clothing changes defy statistical probability, let alone his physical appearance and his movements. His essence more closely approximates non-entity than absolute being. Watt himself admits that Mr. Knott is an insoluble enigma:

But what do I know of Mr. Knott? Nothing. And what may seem most unlike him, and what to me may seem most like him, may in reality be most like him, most unlike him, for all I can tell. (W 119)

The Platonic God is good per se, eternal, and immutable.

In the first place, Mr. Knott is neither good nor evil, but indifferent. He is fond of blotting out the external world by means of

the simultaneous obturation of the facial cavities, the thumbs in the mouth, the forefingers in the ears, the little fingers in the nostrils, the third fingers in the eyes and the second fingers, free in a crisis to promote intellection, laid along the temples. And this was less a gesture than an attitude, sustained by Mr. Knott for long periods of time, without visible discomfort. (W 212)
It is Arthur who later discovers the existence of a Knott family.

By this time, however, Watt is nearing the end of his term and is too exhausted mentally to take comfort in Mr. Knott's probable mortality, a dying god in the "vermicular series" (W 253) of Knott gods. Watt has already abandoned all hope of cosmic law or system by the time he comes in constant direct contact with Mr. Knott:

For there was no other place, but only there where Mr. Knott was, whose mysteries, whose fixity, whose fixity of mystery, so thrust forth, with such a thrust. . . . Fixity was not the word he would have chosen. (W 199)

To Watt, Mr. Knott has become a relativity field. Flux and randomness, Watt now realizes would be better choices to describe the discontinuous continuum underlying the establishment in the ambience of Mr. Knott, "dimming all, dulling all, stilling all, numbing all, where he passed." (W 200) In contrast to his indifference, his transience, his fluctuation, Mr. Knott's rising and retiring habits appear to be regular: either he rises early and retires late on some days, or he rises late and retires early on others. However, between these habits "there seemed no fixed correlation, or one so abstruse that it did not exist, for Watt." (W 86) Only an irrational principle—or none—could explain such habits. Furthermore, in an obvious parody of the deity's rest on the seventh day of creation, Mr. Knott does not rise at all on Sundays. In any case, since he does not have any work or other function beyond existing--after a fashion--neither
his rest nor his ceaseless motion have much point, except that Mr. Knott "could hardly be expected to remain day and night in the same position." (W 87)

The nature of God is transcendent. It is ineffable, unutterable in any terms available to the human mind. As Arsene earlier remarked about the wisdom he so painfully acquired in Mr. Knott's service, "any attempt to utter or eff it is doomed to fail." (W 62) In a certain sense, and that sense not theolog- ical, language is inadequate to describe either Knott or his establishment in all their elusive irrationality. They elude rather than transcend reason. It is not only their random nature that defies Watt's attempts to comprehend them, but "on the one hand the exiguity of the material propounded to his senses, and on the other, the decay of these." (W 199) The Uncertainty Principle affects both the observer and the observed. Consequently, any construct based on such imprecise observation will stand little chance of accuracy. Ultimately, the permutations of Knott's appearance, as well as his habits, are so endless that Watt could have described many more "if he had not been tired, so very tired, by all he had told already, tired of adding, tired of subtracting to and from the same old things." (W 212) Not even mathematical models of permutation suffice to depict Knott, let alone any language Watt could devise. Watt begins as a scienti- fic theorist, but in the last stage of his service, he has become a descriptive operationalist. Watt never speaks with Knott, who
talks and sings to himself in an incomprehensible gibberish. In this sense, Knott's immanence is absolute. In his attempt, later in the asylum, to put his experience of utter incomprehension and isolation into words, Watt too approaches gibberish. He scrambles letters, words, and sentences in a vain attempt to express his sense of chaos:


Knott's mystery equally transcends the power of mathematics. He descends from the tree where he has been perched during Arthur's interminable satire on mathematics, suggesting a burlesque of the transcension of God, as the tale burlesques the power of mathematical models to clarify the enigmas of the world. (W 198)

Neither Mr. Knott nor his microcosm yield up their basic mysteries to number systems.

The Platonic world of ideal essences is the polar opposite of this world, in the sense of its absolute perfection and permanence. On the contrary, Mr. Knott and his cosmos are as random and indeterminate as reality itself, if not more so. There is as little evidence of system or rational principle governing their permutations of being and motion as there is in the outer world. Thus, the incidents that occur during Watt's
term on the lower floor parody scientific discoveries that led to the formulation of the Special Theory of Relativity, and the incidents that occur on the upper floor parody the extension of the relativity principle to the movements of all bodies in space in the General Theory. In accordance with the General Theory, the laws of nature are uniform for all inertial systems. In a parody of the apparently orderly rotation of the celestial bodies in space-time, a rotation of ceaseless relative motion without any apparent teleology—the cosmic motion imparted by the initial "big bang," but toward no rationally conceivable end—Mr. Knott subjects his furniture "to frequent changes of position, both absolute and relative." (W 204) Thus, the furniture behaves like the masses in outer space in their daily, gratuitous changes of position in the space-time continuum of Mr. Knott's room. Watt records the positions of a tallboy, a dressing-table, a nightstool, and a washhand-stand for a period of nineteen days as they are orbited and rotated relative to each other in various positions upside-down, right-side-up, and on one of their four sides all about the room. Similarly, Mr. Knott orbits and rotates, awake or asleep with no more rational purpose than the gyrations of his furniture. The laws of nature are indeed uniform—they are unintelligible. Mr. Knott's establishment is simply a microcosmic parody of the macrocosmic relativity field continuum of masses in space-time. Indeed, as Berkeley once remarked that the choir of heaven and the furniture of earth have no substance
without the mind, the mind is no help here. Knott's objects have substance but lack rationality.

Lastly, Plato's God is the universal object of desire and attracts all being by reason of His perfection. During his period as Mr. Knott's personal valet, Erskine spends much of his day racing up and down the stairs of the establishment, much to the bewilderment of Watt on the ground floor. Watt thinks that perhaps "Mr. Knott propagates a kind of waves, of depression, or oppression, or perhaps now these, now those, in a way that it is impossible to grasp," (W 120) and Erskine is perhaps attracted and repelled by Knott's gravitational forces or his electromagnetic forces. It later appears that Watt's attribution of force-waves to Mr. Knott is wrong and that his frequent disappearances are the cause of Erskine's frantic searching. However, during his own period of direct service, Watt is unaffected by Mr. Knott's hypothetical fields of force and ignores his frequent absences. Watt "suffered neither from the presence of Mr. Knott, nor from his absence." (W 207) He is indifferent to his micro-deity.

The real reason for the Erskine episode, with its suggestion of the Newtonian theory of gravitation, is to prepare for the mystery of the electric bell and Watt's entry into Erskine's room where he sees the strange picture of the broken circle and the dot. Both gravitational and electromagnetic forces were thought to require ether for their propagation. Watt thinks of these forces in Knott's house in somewhat similar terms.
It is significant that the lack of evidence for the existence of the hypothetical ether caused the downfall of classical physics and prepared the way for a new physical world of relativity flux and quantum randomness.

In examining the attributes of Mr. Knott that parody the attributes of Plato's God, it has been impossible to disengage the relativity micro-god from his relativity microcosm. The little world mirrors the fluctuation of the field continuum and the indeterminacy of its micro-creator. His model world is as innocent of immutable law as the outer universe at its macro- and microphysical limits. It is the reverse of a Platonic, ideal system.

Indeed, it is an open question whether the creator of this microcosm was sane, any more than his satellite servants:

. . . was Erskine out of his mind? And he himself Watt was he not perhaps slightly deranged? And Mr. Knott himself, was he quite right in his head? Were not all three perhaps a little off the hooks? (W 122)

If the creator and the observers are psychotics, then one can account for the absurdity of the cosmos.

If God is absolutely perfect, why does He need creation? Does Knott need his establishment? What purpose does it serve? In this connection, one of Plato's major problems was to account for creation, to reconcile its existence with God's aseity, His utter self-sufficiency. Plato accounts for the multiplicity of created beings on the principle that God wills the existence of all possible beings in all possible degrees of perfection as
incarnations of the entire universe of Ideas, "even things paltry or disgusting." In the cosmos of Mr. Knott, however, only the most imperfect and diseased beings exist, as, for example, the Lynch clan. Knott's model world is peopled exclusively by grotesques. In this model world species are dependent for their subsistence on the existence of an indifferent deity, whose excellence is in direct ratio to the degradation of his creatures. The multiplicity of highly imperfect and contingent beings is the source of the deity's perfection, if only by way of contrast.

Having examined how relativity and indeterminacy infects both the master and his microcosm with a radical unintelligibility, we will now examine the major events of Watt's service on the ground floor, and those of his time on the first floor. Though it is convenient to divide these into relativity events and permutation events, no absolute distinction can be maintained. As previously stated, the special theory of relativity is suggested by the first set of events; the general theory by events on the upper floor. Watt is unable to reduce these events to any kind of order or meaning.

On the way to Mr. Knott's house and shortly after being stoned by Lady McCann, Watt lies down in a ditch to relieve himself and rest. While there, he hears a mysterious threne, or

44Lovejoy, Great Chain of Being, p. 50.
dirge. It forms the leit motif of Watt's abortive quest for order in a world where man is enmeshed by time and an absurd teleology which afflicts mankind with progressive decay for no other apparent purpose than oblivion. The decimal song, chanted perhaps by Berkeley's choir of heaven, describes the solar year in terms of weeks, or rather the legal fiction of the year-and-a-day sentence of a judge: \(52.285714\). It could also represent that quadrennial curse--leap-year. The second verse of the dirge records the elapse of one week. The portion of the remainder of the year is the decimal, \(51.142857\). In addition, the elapse of a week suggests the biblical time of creation. Also, in terms of a life sentence, a part of that sentence has been served. It is, thus, a commentary on "the human condition in time moving through the full term of life in a cold and meaningless universe."\(^{45}\) The dirge is human life in capsule form, blooming, drooping and withering. \(^{W 34-5}\) Furthermore, all mankind is doomed to this cycle of decay until each man's last day, his \(142857\) of a year--"and the same to you." \(^{W 35}\)

The earth on which "greatgranma," "granma," "mama," and "Miss Magrew" go through this four-generation cycle of blooming, drooping, and withering to oblivion sails in a space-time orbit about the sun in terms of an equally irrational space-time decimal


\(^{46}\)\textit{Ibid.}
figure whose first six digits after the decimal repeat themselves indefinitely toward the limit of nothingness, but without ever actually attaining it. Consequently, the exact space-time year is indeterminate, as are the individual days when they are expressed in terms of decimals of a year composed of weeks: 

Thus, time itself is mathematically absurd, let alone the cycle of the doomed whose life consists of mutual greetings, munching buns, and withering away. The dirge expresses duration in a world Watt abhors, and the absurdity of which he hopes to escape in Mr. Knott's establishment.

It is easy to understand that Watt dislikes the sun and the moon, both relative measures of time as the earth and they orbit and rotate in terms of such mathematically irrational space-time. For the same reason Watt loathes the earth and sky through which it orbits and rotates in a space-time irreducible to absolute terms, a space-time that vitiates any other attempt to perceive a determinate, cosmic order. (W 33, 37)

Shortly after Watt begins his period of service, there occurs an event of "great formal brilliance and indeterminable purport," (W 74) an event in some sense typical of all the subsequent events Watt observes. Watt answers the door for two men, one old and the other middle-aged.

We are the Galls, father and son, and we are come, what is more, all the way from town, to choon the piano. (W 70)
The old man, who is perhaps blind and certainly feeble, leaves the tuning to his son, who, after probing the works, boxes his tools.

The mice have returned, he said. The elder said nothing. Watt wondered if he had heard. Nine dampers remain, said the younger, and an equal number of hammers. Not corresponding, I hope, said the elder. In one case, said the younger. The elder had nothing to say to this. The strings are in flitters, said the younger. The elder had nothing to say to this either. The piano is doomed, in my opinion, said the younger. The piano-tuner also, said the elder. The pianist also, said the younger. This was perhaps the principal incident of Watt's early days in Mr. Knott's house. (W 72)

In the first place, it is instructive to note that the piano is a musical machine finally perfected in the 18th century as the culmination of a succession of earlier and simpler keyboard instruments. This era, of course, also marks the triumph of classical physics, which regarded the universe as an orderly cosmic mechanism. Though Samuel Beckett's last statement in the book, "no symbols where none intended," is fair warning to the symbol hunter, there is no doubt that this trivial incident is intended to carry a considerable weight of meaning in this mythical quest for order. That the Gall incident is to be taken symbolically is indicated by the narrator's speculation about whether there were, in reality,

neither Galls nor piano then, but only an unintelligible succession of changes, from which Watt extracted the Galls and the piano, in self-defense? These are most delicate questions. Watt spoke of it as involving, in the original, the Galls and the piano, but he was obliged to do this, even if the original had nothing to
do with the Galls and the piano. . . . Perhaps the Galls were long posterior to the phenomena destined to become them. . . . (W 79)

It should be recalled that quantum mechanics, with its atomization of energy, did more than relativity theory to wreck classical mechanics. In addition, later nuclear research builds symbolic mathematical constructs out of fleeting clicks of counters and meter-readings arising out of the immense microcosm of nuclear events, those dim shadows of a reality that can only be inferred in symbols "long posterior to the phenomena destined to become them." (W 79) The episode, then, is to be taken as a metaphorical construct bearing only a remote semblance to the aboriginal event it is designed to depict. Two probable levels of significance for this event I would take to be physical science and theology.

The piano, then, may be taken as a mechanism analogous to the mechanist cosmic models of classical physics. But that this mechanism is now a mouse-infested ruin is a commentary on the inadequacy of older mechanical models of the universe. No longer is the classical concept of cosmic harmony tenable, not with the piano strings "in flitters." This mechanism, as it now stands, could hardly produce anything but cacaphony, even with nine hammers and dampers still intact, corresponding only in one case, moreover.

On the scientific level, therefore, if we assume that Gall senior is the classical physicist, then his blindness and feebleness suggest the decline of older cosmic notions to cope
with reality. Wisely, he does not attempt to tinker with the ruined mechanism, leaving that to his son. However, the son, the modern physicist, to pursue the analogy further, also fails to tune the piano. Rather than attempt to discover why the machine has reached such a sad state and set it in order, he merely observes and describes it. Nine elements remain intact, suggesting the integers of the number system which are still available, presumably for descriptive purposes in building mathematical models, as in modern physics. However, even here it must be observed that if only nine elements (numbers) remain intact, and these disparate in all but one case, much of the piano-cosmos is in too chaotic a state to be reached by these integers. In short, a large segment of the reality of the total piano-cosmos will inevitably escape metric description by the number system and will remain a mystery. There is, finally, a broad area of uncertainty about whether or not the surviving nine hammers will happen by chance to find strings, however tuned or untuned, to strike. The famous Uncertainty Principle of quantum theory is at the heart of this ruin. It is now governed, not by law, but by whatever chance that spared the nine hammers and dampers--at random. If, therefore, the piano is interpreted as a cosmic symbol, there is obviously little science can do to discover a principle of order, let alone induce one. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of this piano-mechanism as other than a cabinet enclosing a mass of junk, and any attempt to restore it
a patent absurdity. It is no longer a musical mechanism, and hence outside the laws governing musical mechanisms.

The mechanistic determinism of the classical world picture ended abruptly with Planck's discovery of the basic discontinuity of the emission and absorption of energy. Discontinuity and indeterminacy exist, likewise, in the atom. Yet, as in the piano, one constant survives: Planck's constant, $\hbar$, although what it means is not known. As we have seen, Planck's mysterious constant exactly corresponds to the degree of uncertainty about the exact position and velocity of all elementary particles, and hence of all physical reality. It is the universal margin of error. Quantum theory abandons mechanical models in favor of the mathematics of probability and mathematical wave equations.

Turning now to the baffled Watt, any meaning of this incident,

The most meager, the least plausible, would have satisfied Watt, who had not seen a symbol, nor executed an interpretation, since the age of fourteen, or fifteen, and who had lived, miserably it is true, among face values all his adult life, face values at least for him. Some see the flesh before the bones, and some see the bones before the flesh, and some never see the bones at all, and some never see the flesh at all, never never see the flesh at all. But whatever it was Watt saw, with the first look, that was enough for Watt, that had always been enough for Watt, more than enough for Watt. (W 73)

Watt's previous unquestioning existence unfits him for interpreting the significance of this, or any other of the subsequent events in Mr. Knott's microcosm. He was not shocked either by
the sudden apparition of his dead father in the woods on one occasion, or, another time, by the old lady who unstrapped her wooden leg and allowed him to seduce her. These events, though preternatural in the one case, and highly grotesque in the other, nevertheless did not "break up into an arrangement of appearances . . . or\] vanish in the farce of their properties." (W 74) Essences were stable. Watt, now like the scientist, can no longer think in terms of constant essences, but only in terms of successions of appearances. Watt is deeply disturbed by his inability to penetrate the reality underlying what he observes,

And Watt could not accept them for what they perhaps were, the simple games that time plays with space, now with these toys, and now with those, but was obliged, because of his peculiar character, to enquire into what they meant, oh not what they really meant, his character was not so peculiar as all that, but into what they might be induced to mean, with the help of a little patience, a little ingenuity. (W 75)

But, as we have seen, Watt knows nothing of modern physics and the relativity interaction of masses in the space-time field, or of quantum theory and its researches into sub-atomic phenomena where mass and energy merge into waves. He thinks in absolute terms in his pursuit of meaning. Nor does Watt realize "the notorious difficulty of recapturing, at will, modes of feeling peculiar to a certain time, and to a certain place," (W 75) and with a body also in a different state. Passing over the veiled reference to Proust, what Watt does not realize is that his subsequent memory of past events in space-time is affected by personal relativity variants extraordinarily difficult to
transform into their original states by whatever equations. Since he does not know the effect of this kind of psychic relativity, a radical indeterminacy, a built-in margin of error infects all: the event, the observer and the construct deriving from all these variables.

In the incident of the Galls, Watt is less disturbed about not knowing precisely what happened, but "that a thing that was nothing happened, with the utmost formal distinctness, ... with all the clarity and solidity of something." (W 76) What Watt refuses to accept, and what all his predecessors refused to accept, to their detriment, is that the universe is, from any neat, classical point of view, a chaotic wilderness, and not some orderly "culture-park." (W 77) If it was created ex nihilo, then its ultimate essence is just that. However, "to elicit something from nothing requires a certain skill and Watt was not always successful, ... in foisting a meaning there where no meaning appeared." (W 77) Chaos yields only temporarily to any construct forced upon it. It inevitably springs back to its original state, refractory to either absolute law or provisional construct. In his desperation to attain meaning, however provisional, for this event, Watt could not be termed purely classical, because he seems willing to adopt any plausible theory.

The Gall incident is a key event in the novel in that it illustrates the randomness of all that occurs in the Knott microcosm, and by implication, in the universe at large.
Meanings given to an observed event are amorphous because the event itself is formless in all the shifting detail of its march and ordinance, according to the irrevocable caprice of its taking place. It resembled them in other incidents in the vigour with which it developed a purely plastic content, and lost, in the nice processes of its light, its sound, its impacts and its rhythm, all meaning, even the most literal. (p. 72-3)

The plasticity of values of the field in relativity theory, and an analogous plasticity of micro-matter, which make conceptualization difficult, are suggested here.

Other hints suggest that the Gall incident may have broader connotations. It is an archetypal incident, not only because it was "first in time," (p. 80) thus suggesting the beginning of time when the God of Genesis fashioned the primordial chaos into a pseudo-cosmos, but also because this episode "seemed rather to belong to some story heard long before, an instant in the life of another, ill told, ill heard, and more than half forgotten." (p. 74). On the theological level of the biblical account, God was no more successful in ordering chaos than the elder Gall, who can do no more for the piano than foretell its doom—no great feat of prophecy. Nor was the son of Gall any more successful in his efforts to redeem the piano, so to speak, than God's own son on Golgotha. Consequently, on the physical level, with such an unpromising cosmos, it is little to be wondered at that the scientist, with his presumably less efficacious equipment, can neither comprehend nor order it.
In a more general sense, the randomness of the universe and human existence generally, is irreparable. Order or system is root and branch doomed in any area of existence, given its chaotic indeterminacy, its amorphous relativity, its ultimate entropy. Initially, in Beckett's view, God botched the creation—if He exists. An unprejudiced examination of cosmic design would suggest accidental origin. But cosmic chaos is not a conclusion Watt wishes to accept at this time.

Rather, when confronted by bald gratuitousness, Watt has a mania for evolving "from the meticulous phantoms that beset him, a hypothesis proper to disperse them... For to explain had always been to exorcise, for Watt." (W 78) Here, in a parody of scientific practice, we find Watt constructing hypothesis after hypothesis, as each in turn "lost its virtue." (W 78) Occasionally, hypotheses discarded earlier eventually regain their power "to preserve his peace of mind." (W 78) Obviously, Watt has evolved his own principle of complementarity, but with this difference, that his series of divergent constructs yield, not a more complete theory to account for observed phenomena, but rather a series of disparate and irreconcilable theories. Watt is less concerned with approximating truth than with his peace of mind.

Watt is not only tormented by the plasticity of the meaning of events he observes, but he is also losing his grasp of the essences of things in themselves, which now refuse to answer
to time-honored names as they once did. The dilemma of the earlier quantum physicist is here suggested—the particle-wave duality. In classical terms, matter lost its assumed solidity when earlier quantum theorists pursued the essence of matter to the electron threshold where they promptly lost it. What, then, is the essence of the physical world? To call it "electromagnetic condensation" is no help, since the nature of energy remains a profound and perhaps insoluble mystery. The classical notion of matter and energy as isolated entities no longer fits the results of experiments in wave mechanics carried on by de Broglie, Schroedinger, and Dirac.

Immediately after his speculations concerning the Gall incident, with regard to material things Watt finds himself in a state which "resisted formulation in a way no state had ever done, in which Watt had ever found himself, and Watt had found himself in a great many states, in his day." (W 81) Thus, looking at one of Mr. Knott's pots, "it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot." (W 81) The pot essence escapes formulation, and Watt is appalled to find things "of which the known name, the proven name, was not the name, any more, for him." (W 81) Vainly, he hopes the reason is that the pot is indigenous to Mr. Knott's house, and, like all in it, elusive, but he shortly finds that, even though he himself is of the outer world, he cannot even affirm his own essence as man, a "creature that still in spite of everything presented a large number of exclusively human
characteristics." (W 83) Thus, the Gall episode, in dematerializing matter, has begun to render Watt's world unspeakable. Little wonder that Watt must distort language to try to speak of it.

However, the fundamental point of these losses of essence is that, with the collapse of the mechanistic universe and the rise of the new, indeterminate universe, no longer will "things appear, and himself appear, in their ancient guise, and consent to be named, with the time-honoured names." (W 84) The former absolute laws of nature are gone, and with them, the language that evolved to depict reality as it was then understood. The new cosmos needs a new language. Watt's problem is not merely that he cannot "speak of the little world of Mr. Knott's establishment, with the old words, the old credentials," (W 84-5) but he also cannot speak with certainty any longer of the big world, the outer world. Therefore, in the metaphor of a ship foundering, so also is the Newtonian cosmos, in that "things in the ordinary sense, and then the emptinesses between them," as well as Watt himself, have suffered a "loss of species," (W 85) and are being "abandoned, by the last rats." (W 84) It is the disappearance of the classical cosmos of absolute laws determining constant matter, and the subsequent apparition of the new cosmos of plastic flux and indeterminacy that has caused "Watt's world to become unspeakable." (W 85) Watt's series of dilemmas are linked: physical, metaphysical, and epistemological.

The last event showing the effect of the new physics in the collapse of the classical universe is, in reality, a series
of events, subtly connected, but connected nevertheless. Ultimately, Watt narrows his focus to speculate about the significance of a picture in Erskine's room depicting a broken circle and a dot. Initially, however, Watt's problem was to explain Erskine's obsessive motion up and down the stairs. Watt wonders whether Mr. Knott emanates waves of force that alternately attract and repel Erskine. Proponents of the ether theory illustrated the function of their hypothetical substance by comparing it to a water through which masses moved under the influence of gravitational and electromagnetic waves of force, analogous to fish. Significantly, Watt uses a similar analogy to account for Erskine's movements. However, Newton's theory of gravitational forces exerted instantaneously through the ether of absolute space was supplanted by Einsteinian field theory which unites gravitational and inertial force as relative functions of mass and eliminates ether as an unnecessary postulate. Watt later discovers that Mr. Knott's frequent disappearances and not his force-waves send Erskine scurrying about searching frantically. Recalling that Mr. Knott is a god-figure, it is worth noting that one major impetus for modern scientific research has been the disappearance of God, formerly the guarantor of cosmic order.

The next mystery that leads Watt to investigate Erskine's room is the bell that sounds in the night and sends Erskine running down to Mr. Knott's room. It is necessary at this point to recall that Maxwell's formulation of the field
equations for electromagnetism was one of the triumphs of nineteenth century physics. He believed that ether carried the electromagnetic waves. Hendrick Lorentz asked that an experiment he devised to measure the effect of ether on the velocity of light. We have seen that the Michelson-Morley experiment led to the collapse of classical mechanics and to the new physics of quantum and relativity because the postulated ether lacked any physical evidence of its existence. It was unthinkable to conceive of waves without a carrier. Watt is now about to face a similar dilemma. Watt knows that Erskine's door is always locked and the key inaccessible, but he manages, inexplicably, to get into the room. Watt's mysterious passage through a locked door parallels the peculiar phenomenon of the "tunnel effect" in quantum physics whereby elementary particles, because of their wave motion, are able to penetrate barriers and suddenly appear on the other side. Such behavior physicists compare to seeing a man pass through a solid wall—or a locked door. Further parodying scientific research which, in solving one mystery succeeds only in creating other mysteries, Watt does, indeed, find an electric bell, but it is broken. How, then, does it ring? Without ether as a carrier, how can electromagnetism be propagated? Classical theory postulated ether even in copper wire to carry the showers of free electrons from copper atom to copper atom, causing the current to flow. But the bell is broken and so is classical theory.
A most important, though closely related, new mystery soon puzzles Watt after his failure to solve the mysteries of Erskine's movements and the broken bell that somehow rings. On Erskine's wall hangs a picture of a compass-inscribed black circle with its circumference broken at the bottom, painted on a white background. The circle appears to be receding in space. A blue point appears on the background over to one side.

How the effect of perspective was obtained Watt did not know. But it was obtained. By what means the illusion of movement in space, and it almost seemed in time, was given, Watt could not say. . . . Watt wondered if they had sighted each other, or were blindly flying thus, harried by some force of merely mechanical mutual attraction, or the play-things of chance. (W 128-9)

The most immediate implication of this multi-leveled abstract picture of space-time motion is the level of physical science. (Incidentally, from one point of view, the circle can never be completed because the value of \( \pi \) is an irrational number, if we think in terms of a Heraclitean paradox.) Both the broken circle and the dot appear to be in motion in space-time. The circle is the macrocosm of the General Theory, the bubble-universe forever receding outward in space-time from some unknown center of space-time. One reason it is a broken circle is that relativity is a theory and not a law; were it closed, it would represent a classical, absolute universe of Newtonian law. Also, the point would be the center of the circle. Another, and more probable interpretation is that the point represents the microphysical universe of quantum theory, the universe which is, seemingly,
ruled by randomness, chance. And since no unified field theory has yet been devised, another reason for the break in the circle is that the world of the indeterminate quanta lies outside the relatively determinate universe of relativity. We have already noted the fact that the field equations of relativity contain holes, at which points matter is located. Therefore, we have fields of force--inertial and electromagnetic--and matter.

Again, the breach in the circle may be taken as representing the view of modern physics that what were once thought of as laws must now be regarded as open-ended constructs or hypotheses.

Also, there is some suggestion here of Sir Arthur Eddington's idealism, his concept of the world of physics as a closed circle. The entities of physics are really metrical expressions which are the result of a process of mental abstraction from the reality underlying the perceptual world. The physicist deals with properties--phenomena--and not with essences, and only with the properties reducible to mathematical equations. In mechanics, for instance, the physicist's definition of matter is that which embodies three related physical quantities: mass (or energy), momentum, and stress. What are mass, momentum, and stress? They are the qualities of matter. In Eddington's opinion, the only way to break this circle is to give another answer to the question of what matter is, and "define matter as what mind knows. The only property of matter which escapes
the closed circle is thus the property of knowability by mind.\footnote{47}

Watt, however, very properly sheds tears because he has previously found matter (pot) to be unknowable by mind. On this mental level, the point in space-time would represent Watt's mind forever excluded from the comprehension of the imperfect system of Knott's microcosm, represented by the broken circle—and by extension, all of outer reality as well. Reality is impenetrable both now and in any conceivable future—the circle-cosmos is receding ever farther from the point-mind in space-time. The point, in any case, could never encompass the circle.

This picture-paradigm of the universe is, nonetheless, not final, it would appear, but simply one of an endless series, like all previous cosmic paradigms. Scientific constructs, whether relativity or quantum theories, are in constant flux, like Watt's own hypotheses, or like the constant relative motion of Mr. Knott and his furniture:

Was the picture a fixed and stable member of the edifice, like Mr. Knott's bed, for example, or was it simply a manner of paradigm, here to-day and gone to-morrow, a term in a series, like the series of Mr. Knott's dogs, or the series of Mr. Knott's men or like the centuries that fall, from the pod of eternity? (W 130-1)

The reference to Galileo (W 131) and his \textit{eppur se muove} indicates that the heliocentric theory, which replaced the geocentric paradigm, is one of the macrocosmic models in the series of paradigms of the universe, presently supplanted by the

Einsteinian. It should also be noted in passing that one paradox of the Michelson-Morley experiment was that it seemed to prove that the earth was motionless in the ether, whereas astronomy proved that it was in motion.

Furthermore, although Knott's bed appears fixed, it too moves. Nothing is static. Nonetheless, Watt appears to realize that not only is it possible that cosmic paradigms are mere transitory terms in a series, but also that his own mind may be in a similar state of relative flux, rapid or slow, and "Watt was greatly worried by this disparity. And indeed it contained cause for worry." (W 131) But Watt, typically, reaches no final conclusion about all these relative motions. They cannot satisfy his thirst for absolutes.

The only stability in Mr. Knott's microcosm is its state of constant change of the field, and, in parody of the doxology, it is the state of change of Mr. Knott's establishment "that as it was now, so it had been in the beginning, and so it would remain to the end." (W 131) Constant relative motion of the field is the only element that does not change "because nothing remained, and nothing came or went, because all was a coming and a going." (W 132) The only reality, therefore, is becoming, not being. In a relativity world, consequently, the manufacture of mental constructs corresponding to such prevalent fluctuations of fields of dogs, Lynches, servants is a patent absurdity, a labor of Sisyphus. Apparent system is gratuitous,
Watt should have realized after he violates Mr. Knott's microcosmic "laws." For instance, when Watt omits his duty of superintending the dog's feeding,

no punishment fell on Watt, no thunderbolt, and Mr. Knott's establishment swam on, through the unruffled nights and days, with all its customary serenity. And this was a great source of wonder, to Watt, that he had infringed, with impunity, such a venerable tradition, or institution. (W 115-6)

Nor does any quasi-biblical retribution restore the order of the "pre-established arbitrary" later on when Watt no longer takes in the door-key to hang it on the nail, but leaves it outside under a stone for Mr. Graves, the gardener. (W 145)

Even love-play in this strange house has a grotesque space-time relativity of its own. Every Thursday the fish-woman, Mrs. Gorman, visits the Knott house, and she and Watt go through the motions of love. The mysteries of the attracting forces which bring them together parody planetary inertial forces. Thus, it is perhaps the smell of fish which attracts Watt into Mrs. Gorman's orbit, and the bottle of stout which attracts Mrs. Gorman into Watt's orbit. In any case, there is a mutual attraction operating between these two masses. Their love play, similarly, becomes a series of relative motions described in precise space-time terms. They rotate in turn on each other's laps, kissing once each time. This series of relative motions, allowing one minute for the interversion, gives an average session of fifteen seconds, and, on the moderate basis of one kiss, lasting one minute, every minute and a half, a total for the day of one kiss only, one double kiss, begun in the first session and
consummated in the last, for during the interversions they could not kiss, they were so busy interverting. (W 141)

Further than this the couple cannot go in their love orbit, Watt lacking the force, and Mrs. Gorman the time.

Finally, when Watt has finished his term in Mr. Knott's service, his ability to distinguish illusion from reality is completely shattered. Watt is watching what appears to be a huge, grotesque figure walking on the road in the night, but it seems that the motion is accompanied by absolutely no headway. (W 226) He speculates that the figure may be a man or a woman, probably a priest or a nun, or someone disguised as a priest or nun. What he does not realize is that he has been watching his own reflection in the glass panes of the train station. The static illusion of motion indicates that his quest is at an end. The mind cannot impose order on erroneously observed phenomena, cannot break the meter-reading circle of appearances to penetrate the underlying reality of observation. But then,

when were Watt's concerns with what things were, in reality? But he was forever falling into this old error, this error of the old days when, lacerated with curiosity, in the midst of substance shadowy he stumbled. (W 227)

No conceivable equations exist capable of transforming phenomena into reality. Reality is a succession of relative appearances, the meaning of which is utterly indeterminate. The observer must take into account his own state of motion to reach a correct space-time perspective. Watt cannot.
In Watt, besides a series of weird events, the reader is plagued by tedious sets of permutations of such fields of trivia as the positions of furniture, the rotation of Knott's footgear or servants, or the origin of the recipe for Knott's food. Seemingly, the point of all this is to emphasize, by contrast, the vastly greater series of permutations and combinations involved in solving more complex problems of human existence. If Watt cannot solve micro-enigmas, then a fortiori, cosmic enigmas.

Germaine Brée makes the point that Watt tends to think like Leibnitz: that is, he expects that from a precise observation of events, or effects, he will be able to deduce their underlying operational laws, or causes. The basic assumption that vitiates Watt's investigations, however, is that Knott's microcosm is a rational system. Like Leibnitz, Watt also assumes that Mr. Knott's will be the best of all possible worlds, because it is unthinkable to him that, in any series of potential worlds, a deity would not have opted for the most perfect. On the contrary, Watt finds the Knott system a tissue of absurdities. If law exists, he cannot deduce it. Indeed, in any series of permutations, one of which might conceivably fit phenomena observed in Knott's house, the least probable and most absurd seems generally to have prevailed.

It has been remarked that, in dissolving observations into a series of atomic facts (or guesses), Watt "acts like Wittgenstein's prize student--using his senses, logic, and language with maddening meticulousness."\(^{49}\) The theory of knowledge of Ludwig Wittgenstein may be roughly summarized thus:

it is the human mind alone which divides up the formless continuum of the universe into distinguishable objects. The first characteristic of man is his ability to identify, and in order to identify, he must have language. . . . Where there is no language, continues Wittgenstein, there is no thought; and where there is no thought, there is nothing but the massive, unidentified Totality of existence: there is ALL and Nothing.\(^{50}\)

Whatever man cannot formulate clearly in language about phenomena, renders that phenomena unknowable. Furthermore, ultimate reality is not knowable; only language about it is. Consequently, from sensory evidence, scientist Watt tries to reach truth by turning perceptions into words so that he may attempt to impose meanings.

Watt's mind conceived as a word-computer can only hope to function on condition that Watt give it all the data, not merely a selection. This is the factor that accounts for the most extraordinary feature of Watt--the lists, the sequences, the merciless enumerations, the grotesque and exhaustive series of permutations and combinations of word-data which distinguish it from any other novel in the language.\(^{51}\)

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\(^{50}\) Coe, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 39.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., p. 41.
Watt reasons that among the series of constructs he formulates must reside the explanation of what he observes. However, he can never discover which one of the series is true. At the end, he has discovered literally no meanings; or perhaps he has discovered that nothing has ultimate meaning.

Thus, Watt is a savage parody on metaphysics, among other things. Reality is incomprehensible. In this sense, Beckett est ainsi sorte de Faust contemporain qui, par le truchement de ses personnages, rejette en bloc, avec un féroce humour, toutes nos tentatives passées et présentes d'imposer à la réalité une structure comprehensible, de "penser" notre situation humaine. 52

Not one of Watt's series of permutations, nor any combination of them, is an acceptable rationale of the great chain of being linking Mr. Knott, the famished dogs, the Lynch clan, and the series of servants.

The beginning of the chain is, of course, Mr. Knott. His food consists of well over forty animal, vegetable, mineral, medicinal, and alcoholic ingredients, meticulously measured and cooked once a week to "the consistence of a mess," (W 87) in sufficient quantity to provide fourteen meals, though Knott eats only twelve, since on Sunday he stays in bed. Typically, this culinary chaos, ingested, becomes the amorphous being that is Knott.

Just as typically, Watt, reacting here not as a logical positivist, since he speculates about the ultimate origin of this peculiar feeding system, devises a series of twelve probabilities (out of at least 40,320) to account for the arrangement, from the least to the most absurd, the last being that "Mr. Knott was not responsible for the arrangement, but did not know that any such arrangement existed, and was content." (W 90) Shortly, however, this unsolved mystery sinks into the usual limbo of the insoluble, and is replaced by that of the series of famished dogs pressed into service, one at a time, to eat Mr. Knott's leavings.

Mr. Knott's arrangement, whatever its origin, is clearly not providential for the chosen dog, since it must be kept in a constantly famished condition so that the injunction that it eat every scrap of Mr. Knott's left-overs be obeyed. Furthermore, "as a general rule Mr. Knott ate every atom, both of his lunch and of his dinner, in which case the dog got nothing." (W 92) Consequently, the dogs were not long-lived, as a rule. In their case, this particular principle of uncertainty becomes a principle of fatality. Knott is a capricious providence—nearly a non-providence. Ironically, the dogs are fully capable of recognizing the undependability of his providence, and must, therefore, be constantly leashed to prevent their foraging for themselves and thus upsetting this admirable economy.
Watt ignores the cruelty of the arrangement, however, to consider how the dog and food juncture was arrived at. Of the four possible solutions he considers, each is variously flawed. But even Watt can conceive at least four methods of dealing with Knott's garbage that the neighborhood dogs (and common sense) would find preferable to the actual system prevailing. There is in Knott's system a bitter parody of the dispensations of a providence which require an endless series of local men and famished dogs held serially in readiness to perpetuate an absurd arrangement: besides the current man-elect and dog-elect, and their immediate substitutes,

a third, a fourth, a fifth, and even a sixth famished dog should be acquired and suitably maintained at Mr. Knott's expense in some convenient place in a famished condition, or that better still there should be at Mr. Knott's expense on some favorable site established a kennel or colony of famished dogs from which at any time a well-bred well-trained famished dog could be withdrawn and set to work, in the manner described; and that on the off chance of the second poor young local man's passing over, into the beyond, at the same time as the first poor local man, or even before, and stranger things are of hourly occurrence, a third, a fourth, a fifth and even a sixth poor young local dogless man or even woman should be sought out and by fair words and occasional gifts of money and old clothes as far as possible secured to Mr. Knott's service . . . (W 99)

Existence on these terms is irrational, but the parody of providence extends to the apparent caprice that dominates all human existence.

There is a chosen people set aside to provide the necessary famished dogs. It is the grotesquely diseased and
crippled clan of the Lynches, who are distinguished by their nicknames and their specific afflictions: rectally ailing, rheumatically crippled, hunch-backed inebriate, legless, blind, palsied, sore-infested, paranoid, paralyzed, syphilitic, cretinous, dwarfed, epileptic, and so forth. The one constant among the various dogs of that field is hunger, just as disease is the constant dominating the field of the Lynches. In a parody of teleology, the ambition of the Lynch clan is to achieve a literal millennium, the five living (if that is the proper term) generations having attained a total of nine hundred and eighty years at the time of Watt's arrival.

However, the death of the forty-year-old Liz after the birth of her twentieth child retards the millennium and affects each member of the Lynch "field" with some loss of clan relationship: the loss of a wife, a mother, a mother-in-law, and so forth. This is, it would seem, a parody of human relativity, in that a change in one interlocking value of the clan-field shifts all the others simultaneously. In addition, in human existence the only clearly operative law is that of chance, which controls mortality and imperils all human aspiration for whatever millennium—in this case, temporal. Furthermore, humanity is here reduced to a field of relations and time units. Rather than persons, the Lynches are: 1) names, 2) ages, 3) interlocking blood-relations, 4) specific diseases or afflictions, 5) pro-creators perpetuating the clan and its diseases.
Another relativity shift of the field and a millennial loss occurs later when Joe, Bill, and Jim die within one week, depriving the clan of one hundred and ninety-three years and every member of three additional relationships. Also, their deaths cause another redistribution: the probabilities that one of the three committed incest with the syphilitic Ann and sired her twins. The probabilities are now redistributed among the surviving males. Thus, a series of events controlled by chance affects each member of the clan relatively and simultaneously. The entire chain of being is a relativity field, ultimately linked to Mr. Knott's system.

Watt then becomes obsessed with discovering the principle behind the rotation of servants. In an effort to determine the terms of service on the ground floor and on the first floor, Watt "laboured at the ancient labour," (W 136) that of finding a principle of order. The time of service is, however, indeterminate, and Watt never finds out how long he spent as a servant, let alone the reason he was rotated out of service. It appeals to his passion for order that the appropriate length of time on each floor should be one year: that is, a perfect three hundred and sixty degrees of the earth's orbit, since less than that period of space-time would leave "a page of the discourse of the earth unturned," (W 132) and longer than one year in the service of Mr. Knott, a fragment of rigmarole re-read. For the new year says nothing new, to the man fixed in space. Therefore on the ground floor one year, and on the first another... (W 132-3)
Order, however, cannot be postulated for systematic chaos, and "even Watt could not hide from himself for long the absurdity of these constructions." (W 133) Here, again, a species of relativity field theory operates: the movements of three men in the servant-field are all mysteriously affected by whatever principle determines the precise moment to terminate the service of the man on the first floor. Perhaps, rather, it is the arrival of the new servant that ejects the first-floor man into the outer darkness. Or perhaps it is neither. Indeterminacy and randomness in this relative motion, as in other cases, cannot be reduced to a discernible purpose, and the movement of a new man into the establishment simply represents a change in the values of the field and causes the movement of the ground-floor man up and the first-floor man out. Some mysterious "pre-established arbitrary" is the determining factor of this relative motion, and no "arbitrary" is determinable.

Thinking then, in search of rest, of the possible relations between such series as these, the series of dogs, the series of men, the series of pictures, to mention only these series, Watt remembered a distant summer night . . . and the three frogs croaking Krak!, Krek!, and Krik! (W 136)

The series of croaks Watt hears the three frogs emit, together with determinate intervals of rest, totals exactly three hundred and sixty. It is a perfect, Pythagorean series. Furthermore, the probability of three frogs croaking and resting in three hundred and sixty intervals of time is obviously improbable, though not impossible. The point would seem to be that, simply
because a given series of events is reducible to mathematical order, it does not then follow that a law is deducible. Mathematics fits only this series of croaks, and it is therefore only factitiously systematic. But nothing whatever can be proved about a frog-croaking law which would immediately go into effect whenever three frogs are gathered together in a ditch. In probability theory pattern is a chance repetition. Where chance operates, one cannot extrapolate a law from a single occurrence of pattern. Neither is Watt licensed to extract a law of servant rotation from what he can deduce from his single term service—or anything else he observed in Mr. Knott's microcosm. The "pre-established arbitrary" has the power of assuming the guise of law, at least occasionally, as in the case of the frog-croaks.

The only major incident during Watt's first-floor service, aside from the parody of the General Theory in the transformations of Knott and his furniture, is the long story Arthur tells about a native mathematical prodigy, the seventy-six-year-old Mr. Thomas Nackybal, a County Clare peasant who allegedly can both cube and extract cube-roots mentally. The story is a parody directed at academic research and at mathematics as an innate human endowment. Far from being innate, mathematics is a human construct with all the limitations that this implies, and should mathematics happen to fit phenomena, as Riemann's geometry did for the curved space of relativity or Planck's mathematical model for thermodynamic energy quanta, it does so
by chance, as it once did the frog-croaks. This is certainly Beckett's view, if not Watt's.

Ernest Louit, the researcher who claims to have discovered Nackybal in the bogs cubing and rooting, is the author of a dissertation entitled, *The Mathematical Intuitions of the Visicelts*. He obtained a grant of fifty pounds for research on his subject, but spent it, in all probability, on a long spree. He claims to have lost his sheaf of notes in a railroad station, and has nothing to show for his months of absence from the university but the mathematical peasant, Mr. Nackybal, whose prowess at cubing and rooting is to be taken as evidence for Louit's thesis that mathematics is innate in western Irishmen. During an examination by an idiotic academic committee of five, Nackybal proves his native genius by making only twenty-five errors out of forty-six attempts at cubing, and only four errors out of fifty-three rootings. The committee conducts the examination using a list of numbers compiled by Louit, which contains roots of no more than two digits and cubes of no more than six digits.

Mathematical precision is here satirized. The five members of the examining committee exchange their meaningful glances randomly. To avoid this "unspeakable disorder" (W 179) and waste of time, Arthur recommends a number system for the members so that they each will be enabled to glance at the others in orderly sequence.
Arthur is aware that he is satirizing mathematical systems when he directly addresses Mr. Graves in the middle of the tedious story to ask him of what use is measurement and precision in the planting of his seeds. All the planter really needs is "seed, earth, excrement, water and a stick." (W 182) The subsequent growth of the seed is a random matter; it is not predictable and not directly subject to number theory. Growth does not occur through a natural metric law. Of what use is mathematics, therefore? The implication is that mathematics is not innate in nature, any more than in the phony prodigy, Nackybal. By the end of the examination when the members are beginning to challenge Nackybal's alleged genius, Louit intrudes with a series of retorts indicating the limitations of mathematics. The allusions are to three miracles that Christ Himself did not perform: "Did he rise on the second day? ... Dance on the waters? ... Into whisky? said Louit." (W 192) The committee breaks up in disorder, "so that the first was last, and the last first ... in that order, as chance would have it, or some other agency." (W 196-7) Just as chance decreed the apparently unfair payment of the laborers in the vineyard in the parable on the operation of God's Providence, so also chance rules the committee's departure, not law.

Arthur weary of his long story and omits the last part: that Nackybal is a city dweller, not a peasant, and cannot cube or root in his head. But this story about a
fictitious mathematical system conveys the idea of the falsity of all systems: consequently, Arthur cannot reveal the fraud while he is on Mr. Knott's premises where another pseudo-system prevails "whose mysteries, whose fixity, whose fixity of mystery, so thrust forth, with such a thrust." (W 199) To do so would have been to commit a species of micro-blasphemy against Knott-god.

The final experience of Watt deals with the constant relative motion of Mr. Knott and his furniture, which, as we have seen, parodies the General Theory of Relativity. What possible useful knowledge is attained by knowing the equations of the field of cosmic masses in motion in space-time? Such equations answer no ultimate questions of teleology, any more than knowing the relative positions of furniture or the changes in appearance (and mass) of Mr. Knott enabled Watt to deduce meaning. It should be remembered that chapter three is told to Sam while Watt and he attain inertial equivalence between the fences. The irregular, parallel fence system is in parody of the inertial fields of force of cosmic masses in irregularly curved space-time. The holes in the fences, as the hole in the circle of Erskine's picture, again represent the presence of matter, as in the field-equation gaps. And, as we have seen, the matter-gaps are ruled by indeterminacy. In short, everything is in relativity flux and indeterminate, and Watt, at last, abandons all attempts to penetrate the significance of all the changes of Knott and his
furniture, contenting himself with merely describing the changes without any of his earlier theorizing. Like the modern physicist, the operationalist, he no longer seeks to know why or how phenomena occur, but merely observes and describes fragments of occurrences.

The end of the story, chronologically, occurs at the end of chapter three in an asylum. Sam and Watt occupy separate mansions in the midst of a series of unkempt garden-wildernesses which are surrounded by irregularly parallel curving space-fences. So random is this space that the fields appear to have been laid out by one insane.

The favorite pastime of Sam and Watt during the period they occupied the same asylum ward, or mansion, was to feed frogs and fledglings to the troops of rats from a near-by stream. "It was on these occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we came nearest to God." (W 156) God, they implicitly agree, could have organized a cosmos, but cruelly did not. Consequently, their cruelty to the small birds and animals parallels God's to mankind. After being separated, they later meet, Watt walking and talking in reverse in an absurd attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible. In Sam's eyes Watt is a Christ figure, perhaps in the sense that Christ also failed to establish order in His redemption attempt:

His face was bloody, his hands also, and thorns were in his scalp. (His resemblance, at that moment, to the Christ believed by Bosch, then hanging in Trafalgar Square, was so striking, that I remarked it.) (W 159)
 Appropriately, the quest for order in a chaotic universe ends in an insane asylum. The universe is, in effect, also an insane asylum of *nullus ordo*, of which the Knott microcosm and the madhouse are merely smaller models.

Watt fails in his quest because he is an unreconstructed rationalist in a surd-universe, a neo-Pythagorean shocked into final insanity by the irrationality of Mr. Knott's inscrutable microcosm. As a classical absolutist with a faith in mechanist order, he fails to discover an absolute principle governing the relativity flux of the Knott world. The gratuitousness of its system—or non-system—is complete. It has no semblance of inherent necessity. No thunder-bolts strike when he violates the system. Thunder-bolts would almost have been a vindication of Watt's search.

The universe is ruled by relativity and indeterminacy—both principles implying an absence of absolutes in being and event, observer and observation, and any construct based on them. No construct is unflawed by limitations of observation. No construct is final. The macro-world is a plastic continuum on the one hand, and a micro-world of the discrete and the discontinuous, on the other.

If gods exist, they cannot be bothered bestowing gifts of understanding on human grotesques like Watt. Lying stunned on the floor of the train station after being accidentally hit by a door, Watt hears a fragment of a poem by Hölderlin
describing the body of a victim rebounding from cliff to cliff
while the unconcerned gods go about their blissful business high
above in the empyrean: 53

.......................... von Klippe Zu Klippe geworfen
Endlos ins................................. hinab (W 239)

CHAPTER III

MYTH OF PSYCHIC ORDER: MOLLOY,
MALONE DIES, UNNAMABLE

The theory of relativity shows that the universe cannot be divided into two separate segments: a perceiving subject and a perceived object. Their state of motion must always be taken into account. In quantum theory, also, the interaction of the observer and the observed changes the state of the object, so that in reality what one studies is not the independent object but the relationship set up between the observer and the observed. The discontinuities and relative fluctuation Watt observes in Mr. Knott's establishment defeat any attempt to detect and formulate cosmic order. In the Trilogy, therefore, the observer turns in upon himself in an equally vain attempt to find order--in this case, psychic order. He is probing to discover the nucleus-self underlying the series of selves generated in him by the passage of time and events.

The Trilogy, in one sense, is a time-reversed film sequence of disparate segments from a motion picture of the narrator's life history. Although the human consciousness holds to the common-sense concept of time irreversibility, modern physical theory regards the concept of time reversal as at least
possible. Thus, quantum theory regards anti-particles as moving backward in time. If two protons collide to produce a proton, a neutron, and a positive pion, time-reversal would, in effect, occur if the proton, neutron, and pion thus produced could be made to collide simultaneously to re-create the original two protons. Elementary particles are even more unselfconscious than the simplest organism. All electrons are identical, without any principle of individuation, unscarred by any past, unaware of any future. The idea of a direction in time is meaningless for them.¹

Similarly, in relativity theory the time arrow has no more a privileged direction than in quantum theory. Suppose a film were shot of the planetary motion of our solar system from a point one hundred million miles in space and then shown to highly intelligent beings in some distant galaxy. Whether the film were shown straight or in reverse would have no effect on inductions about physical laws derived from observation. It is true that, in reverse, the planets would be shown orbiting in a clockwise rather than in the actual counter-clockwise direction. Nonetheless, the galactic physicists could deduce laws of gravitation or inertia identical to those of relativity: the laws of nature are invariant regardless of a reversal of space-time motion.

In an important sense, Beckett's narrator in the Trilogy, particularly the one called Unnamable, behaves as if he emitted a barrage of photons the instant before his death. He would then be an anti-man composed of anti-particles. He could reverse his world-line and the time-arrow and slip back through his past, colliding with it at various points, thus totally annihilating the being he was, decomposing it into a barrage of word-energy, just as, analogously, a positron-electron collision results in a mutual annihilation into pure energy. Considering the inexplicable physical degeneration of the Trilogy selves, it is perhaps more than an analogy to consider them as being composed of anti-matter. In any case, in each of the novels the anti-narrator reverses his life, choosing discrete segments much as Krapp chooses his tapes. He curves backward in time in his process of de-creation, back to his foetus and Worm-sperm beginning in a mother's womb. By keeping his consciousness ceaselessly churning out word-events about his past states, he forces, paradoxically, his time-arrow forward simultaneously in order to induce an end to the pain of existing. He is committing a form of word-suicide.

The state of Unnamable, the last narrator-observer who struggles back through his world-line, is like that of a creature capable of comprehending the whole span of time as we comprehend the span of space, the activity of annihilation and creation . . . is not activity at all. It is a stationary display, a
picture painted in space and time. It is the fact that man, the observer, can comprehend only one instant of time at each moment that converts the stationary display into motion and activity.\(^2\)

The time-arrow is a construct of human consciousness. All the word-selves generated by the narrator are false, anti-selves, as though the present consciousness were matter and the word-selves anti-matter—or the reverse, since it would make no difference. One annihilates the other.

This introduction to the Trilogy will examine the concept of the relativity field-ego and its effect on these three novels of exploration of the consciousness. As previously mentioned, all the character-segments of the narrators are cross-sectional egos of the world-line in space-time of a single character. The characters in the Trilogy were spawned in Watt and have retreated underground from the chaotic world only to find the world of the psyche equally chaotic. The Trilogy was written during two years of seclusion between 1947 and 1949 in Beckett's Paris flat. The order of writing during his great productive period after the war until 1949 was, according to Beckett, the following: Molloy, the abandoned work Eleutheria, Malone Dies, Waiting for Godot, Unnamable, and Texts for Nothing.\(^3\)


\(^3\)Fletcher, The Novels of Samuel Beckett, p. 120.
Although the central characters in the trilogy bear different names, the tales told in *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *Unnamable* are all segments of events that happen to the same slowly decaying man. Both Molloy and Moran write presumably factual reports of events which may be considered memoirs of the universal disorder that leaves them physically and emotionally crippled. Next, Malone rejects the writing of memoirs in favor of fictions that are actually memoir-scrap. So uncertain and incoherent are his memories of his past states of consciousness that they are largely unreliable. Unnamable, finally, murmurs fictions of a series of past selves, variously named and variously degenerating, until he is alone and isolated still murmuring his word-field at the end which is not an ending. Thus, the three novels are first-person interior monologues, written or spoken, questioning the reality and meaning of human existence. "The implication, of course, is that we ourselves, however thickly we may have built the walls of civilized distractions over our own Beckett-like innermost selves, can do little more."4 David Hayman finds that unity in the *Trilogy* is achieved by an ironic paralleling of Dante's three states: *Molloy* occurs in the hell of quotidian existence; *Malone Dies* is a purgatorial state of

being forced to relive painful phases of previous existence; *unnamable* is paradise.5

After the publication of *Molloy* (1951), the so-called *nouveau roman* became a dominant force in French fiction, attracting such writers as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute. The new novel rejects both engagement and elucidation—*a novel must now not mean but be*. It is a literature stripped of all exterior justification, or any desire to demonstrate or instruct. The new novel is written, it would seem, not to say anything, but paradoxically, to say nothing.6 Beckett himself thinks that "the time is perhaps not altogether too green for the vile suggestion that art has nothing to do with clarity, does not dabble in the clear, and does not make clear."7

Ross Chambers sees the unity of the *Trilogy* to consist in a descent of the self away from the outer universe into the microcosm of the mind, where, amid the free flux of forms of Murphy's psychic zone three, the ego exists freed from the bondage of space-time, "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom." (Mu 112) In this sense,

5"Molloy à la recherche de l'absurde," in Friedman, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 133.


Molloy will then be the novel of parallel forms, where the characters travel towards the center of a physical world that is at the same time the world of the self, thus undergoing the hell of spatial existence, Malone Dies will be that of the half-lit world where Malone-Belacqua lies dreaming through his existence a second time in expectation of his release from it, and so suffering the purgatory of life in the temporal dimension, and The Unnamable will be that of the state of darkness and the flux of forms, where we are a mote in the absolute freedom and ourselves "improved out of all knowledge." 

However, existence in this zone is not the idyll Murphy supposed it to be, any more than was his dream of psychotic bliss. The absurdity of this descent into the self is that the categorical imperative that compels the agonized autology derives from no ethical code or religious system. Its ultimate goal is really the extinction of all consciousness. To this end, the narrator's quest is for the final, uncreating word.

Murphy and Watt found the macrocosm metaphysically inaccessible to ordering by the human mind. The Trilogy narrator finds the self similarly inaccessible. Beckett would agree with Guelincx that the world order is quite beyond our control, that we are saddled with a body that is liable to let us down at any moment, and that we know nothing about the essences of things or about the origin of the universe or of our minds—our ignorance entails our impotence over all things except what goes on inside our heads.


The disintegration of cosmic order is mirrored in the mind of the anti-hero who is no longer certain whether his interior monologue is truth or pure invention. Form and coherence dissolve with the narrator's ego.

Proust's claim that writers spend their lives writing and rewriting the same work is descriptive of Beckett's method of probing ever more deeply in the Trilogy in search of the self which began with Murphy. Murphy is the first of the long series of literary ego-replicas that wander through the novels, whose function is progressively to reveal the self through an endlessly regressive series of diminishments of being toward a vanishing-point ego limit. There is a family resemblance between Murphy, Watt, Molloy, Moran, Malone, Macmann, Mahood, and Worm which indicates that they are "all creations of a single, central self." ¹⁰ They are all cross-sections of a single human world-line at different points of its space-time geodesic. In his essay on Proust, Beckett found the ego to be in a permanent state of flux, such that its desires are perpetually frustrated by the time-lag between desire and attainment, during which both the subject and object change. In Beckett, self-knowledge is radically impossible because the self is trapped on the time-treadmill. Furthermore, the narrator's consciousness is gradually cut off from the world of objects and becomes totally

formless and inchoate itself. Memory of a past is no guarantee of the continuity and authenticity of the narrator's ego, and time was a constant threat which could mean the loss of self in the multiplicity of memories, stories, and verbal traps which, in their extreme, might be represented today by the self-digestion of Samuel Beckett's time-trapped heroes.11

It is time that condemns the series of alter-egos to be no more than transient and crude facsimiles of the true, evolving self. The Proustian conquest of time through "involuntary memory" is denied to Beckett's narrators, who lack any faith in an escape from reality through the medium of art.12 Although they cannot escape existence, the narrator's interminable monologue is an anodyne, however ineffective, to mute the pain of existence. The Trilogy is a monument to the collapse of thought and language which follow upon the collapse of external reality and that of the ego itself.

Beckett's characters, from Murphy on, occupy increasingly restricted space, from the ash-cans of Hamm's parents, Mahood's jar, to Unnamable sealed up in his skull, if that is his space. Yet, the restriction merely increases the uncertainty about the location and definition of the elusive self. Except for


utterance, Unnamable ends in total immobility. The pursuit of the self is the movement of the Trilogy toward a "gradual shrinking of the universe . . . , a shrinking that has as its goal the attainment of an impossibility, a place without spatial or temporal dimension." However, since the self is a process of generation in space-time, it can attain finality only in the stasis of death and not in art. The attempt to capture one's ego-field is a little like a snake trying to commit suicide by swallowing itself tail-first. It is difficult to speak of a point of view of a narrator diminishing in space and time except to say that it progressively narrows its focus. Like the quantum-world of Murphy's zone three, the mental microcosm resists ultimate probes into its core reality. The ego is, like the elusive electron, an impenetrable mystery.

The man in the Trilogy is devolving back to the prehistoric slime from which he evolved aeons ago. He is becoming a humanoid protozoan groping for some meaning to his existence, often enough driven to the conclusion that the solution to this problem is to be sought in extinction, and pained by the remote possibility that there may be a meaning which eludes him because he is not groping for it properly. His descent down the chain of being, however, is discontinuous, characterized by

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inexplicable, sudden losses of limb and senses. In short, he regresses toward ideal non-being in quantum jumps. Though Beckett's characters endure mental torture, they are stoic in their endurance of physical suffering. Rarely do they resent physical abuse or their inexplicable cripplings. They are resigned to suffering. In the impossibility of self-knowledge, they have only one desire, that of extinction. The great guilt of life is simply birth. The punishment of life is consciousness. In short, the ego is a core of conscious nothingness that somehow lives or, rather, exists.

The structure of the Trilogy is a discontinuous continuum and thus mirrors the consciousness of the narrator. The reason for the various names given to the central self is to demonstrate the extent of the temporal discontinuity between these cross-sectional slices of being. However, there is just enough similarity between them to say that they are successive states of a central self, the "I" of Unnamable, if that is the proper pronoun for a field ego. The novels are process-fictions of a self attempting to utter its own discursive being—its void. The only result of this self-research is a progressively greater degree of uncertainty about the truth of what the narrator utters. In a real sense, the novels "self-destruct," as the narrator affirms and then denies the truth of what he is saying, or stops to comment on the inadequacy of his performance.
All the narrators seek to convey the immediacy of experience before the rational intelligence tampers with it. Humor and pathos alike depend upon a seeming senselessness of each event, and upon their utter non-concatenation; for in the large sense of situation, the human condition is increasingly pathetic in each Beckett fiction.¹⁵

It is clear from allusions to Gestalt psychology and to William James in *Murphy* that Beckett is aware of the influence of field theory on studies of perception and consciousness. But it is equally clear that field theory sheds no more light on the ego than it does on the cosmos, from Beckett’s point of view. Kurt Koffka (Mu 48) says that “if the locus of behavior is the physical world, then the field concept which is so powerful a tool in physics must be applied to behavior.”¹⁶ Therefore, in field terms there is a psychophysical parallelism whereby the field cosmos perceived by human consciousness forms a field ego which is constantly changing. Consequently, no attempt to formulate character in any final terms can possibly succeed in arresting the variables of the field-self. The ego is not a constant, absolute unit. It is a space-time variable. Ultimately, the narrator of the *Trilogy* reaches the conclusion that he is inexpressible, a human field-process. He sees himself as an indeterminate field unreeling in space-time, a field that his words pursue but never capture. Every version of

¹⁵Cohn, *The Comic Gamut*, p. 117.

the narrator's ego is therefore a fiction. However powerful a tool field theory may be in physics, it certainly complicates any research into one's personal consciousness, especially if one begins with some hope of discovering a stable identity, as Unnamable does. Because the field universe is a buzzing, plasmic turmoil, so also is the consciousness that absorbs and disgorges it in the Trilogy.

The narrator of the novels after Molloy tells fragmented tales, partly because they relieve the tension of his inability to define himself in any stable terms. He constructs facsimiles of the self he once was out of the vast field of past selves he more or less dimly remembers, arbitrarily labels them Saposcat or Macmann or Mahood, and sets them off on their pointless wanderings. The stories are small comfort, however, because these past selves are all utterly alien to the present, unfolding self.

The ego, therefore, is not a kind of consciousness-capsule locked up inside a skin-tight body, an absolute self that patient introspection by a Malone or an Unnamable will be able to find, but it is rather an interaction between a human organism and its varying environment. In this connection, Alan Watts argues that psychology cannot stand aloof from the whole revolution in scientific description which has been going on in the twentieth century, a revolution in which conceptions of entities and "stuffs," whether mental or material have become obsolete. Whether it is describing chemical changes or biological
forms, nuclear structures or human behavior, the
language of modern science is simply concerned with
changing patterns of relationship.17

However, the trilogy narrator progressively becomes cut off from
virtually any relationship with an environment, as in Unnamable.
If the field ego is an interaction with an environment, then as
the environmental field gradually fades, so also does the self.
Indeed, by the end of Unnamable there is nothing left of an
environment but the faint murmurs of a nearly sense-less narrator
talking to himself. He is a nearly non-existent humanoid
consciousness. By the time Unnamable utters his final cry of
despair, it is clear to him that he cannot even know himself,
let alone anything else in the world of space-time relativity.

The idea of an ego separate from its experience of the
world is simply a fiction in the light of relativity theory
because "the ego is the role, the 'act,' that one's inmost self
is permanent, that it is in control of the organism, and that
while it 'has' experiences it is not involved in them."18 There
can be no privileged observer in relativity theory, and neither
can there be a privileged ego. The notion of a "skin-encapsulated
ego"19 is a relic of the classical concept of the world. For

17Psyo@h@r@py East and West (New York: Mentor Books, 1961), p. 12.

18Watts, Psychotherapy, p. 69.

19Ibid., p. 17.
Beckett, the true ego is the relativity ego, the ego in flux. From this point of view, any attempt to isolate a nugget ego must fail. Furthermore, as Unnamable discovers, pronouns designating an ego as an "I" or a "he" assume stable identity and expose the failure of language to record a self that is a process. There is no relativity process pronoun, no fourth person singular.

In the process of rummaging through his psychic pit, Unnamable splits himself into a narrator-subject and a narrator-object, an impossible divorce that muddles his research completely. He apparently assumes that he is, at one and the same time, an observer, an object, and a nervous system recording the observations. However, if the ego is a psychic field, then the very activity of observing the self is the self at that moment, and the states of the nervous system need not, as we suppose, be watched by something else, by a little man inside the head who registers them all. Wouldn't he have to have another nervous system, and another little man inside his head, and so on ad infinitum? When we get an infinite regression of this kind we should always suspect that we have made an unnecessary step in our reasoning.20

Nevertheless, it is this "little man" whom the narrator so frenziedly wants located. The ego and the consciousness become separate terms in a duality. If Unnamable could accept the theory that he is a tissue of successive perceptions, only then could his conflict be resolved. To identify himself with an

20 Watts, Psychotherapy, p. 70.
absolute ego

is to confuse the organism with its history, to make its guiding principle a narrowly selected and incomplete record of what it has been and done. This abstraction from memory thereupon seems to be a concrete and effective agent. But it is just this which is lost in death. Oneself as a story comes to an end, which shows that the ego is in every sense a story.21

Hence, the abortive nature of the narrator's efforts to annex a self with stories of his past selves—or rather, incomplete and therefore untrue versions of past selves. Nevertheless, the theory that he is a multiplicity of selves is repugnant. He remains a classical absolutist trapped in a relativity universe. Therefore, his personality, or ego, is a perpetually collapsing hypothesis, a formless fog of words.

However precise the Trilogy narrator attempts to be in his use of words, he finds that his words, at best, can only approximate his experience. And since his experience is incoherent, inchoate, the language he uses to describe it, ideally speaking, would have to be utterly meaningless, mindless gibberish. Then only would it express the exact truth of Unnamable's final experiences.

Each successive phase of the ego in the Trilogy may be taken as a limiting case of the present state of the narrator. In each case consciousness is able to construct only an approximate self. The ego places itself in front of itself, so

21 Ibid., p. 100.
to speak, but it then distorts by its observation the very self it seeks to know. He perhaps can learn something of the being he is by examining his creative handiwork. He does create stories, but they depict only residual selves created from unreliable memories of his past.

Besides some scraps of fiction, Molloy and Malone still have small bits of junk and rags of clothing, relics of their presumptive past. These things give him the illusion of having existed. On the other hand, although Unnamable is inventing stories about various past states of himself masquerading as Mahood or Worm that he knows are false, he still persists in assuming that there must be a tertium quid ego between the narrator-ego and the fictional egos. Nevertheless, the passage of time and words produces nothing more than an indefinite series of selves and observers, all imprecise and dissolving under observation, without ever detecting a quintessential ego. Some sort of determinate, persisting person must be postulated as underlying the series of persona-constructs. Otherwise, he faces the dilemma of infinite regression. However, the narrator steadfastly refuses to postulate an "ur-ego" and persists in his regressive attempts to capture it.

If Unnamable is composed of words, he is at the most advanced stage of ego decomposition, considering the randomness of his monologue at its final stages. Properly speaking, he cannot be a person, an "I," but rather a provisional
personification dissolving in the acid of introspection. He is an undifferentiated and discontinuous fiction, or rather, a series of discontinuous fictions.

It has been observed that languages which have parts of speech tend to translate experience as though events can be taken apart like pieces of a machine.

All such languages represent the world as if it were an assemblage of distinct bits and particles. The defect of such grids is that they screen out or ignore (or repress) interrelations.22

So also, the series of selves in the Trilogy are regarded by the narrator as discrete individuals only vaguely related to each other. If thought is limited by the language in which it is expressed, and language is inadequate to express it, thought cannot be said to exist. Therefore, "what can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak one must be silent."23 The narrator refuses to accept any such solution to his dilemma.

Molloy, the first novel of the Trilogy, is a story of two phases of a decomposing single person curving back in space-time. Molloy records the dual quests of Molloy and Moran. Molloy in part one is journeying back to his mother, a moribund crone with whom he can communicate only through a coded series

22 Watts, Psychotherapy, p. 33.

of knocks on the head. The purpose of his quest is not immediately clear, but it would seem that Molloy wants to confront his mother with the question of the meaning of his existence. He wants, essentially, a post-natal abortion. Ultimately, it seems that the journey is the first retrogressive step in the destruction of the narrator's world line by means of fictions that burn it like a fuse leading back to the womb. At first, Molloy travels by bicycle with his one good leg pumping the pedal and with his stiff leg perched on the front axle. He carries crutches fastened to the frame. His journey is difficult because he has forgotten both the name and the location of his town. Picked up by the police for loitering in a town, he is able to recall his name only with intense effort. Released, he next violates public order by running down a dog accidentally. Its owner rescues him from the irate bystanders and another possible arrest. The woman, Sophie Loy, whom Molloy subsequently calls "Lousse," takes him into her home. After a long, indeterminate period of time, he leaves this haven to resume his search, this time on crutches because his bicycle unaccountably no longer runs. At the end, both his legs become crippled, and he is reduced to crawling through a vast forest using the crutches as grapnels. Someone unknown seems to have helped him reach his mother's room and into the bed she may have once occupied. Here he lies immobile, writing this account a few pages at a time. Once a week, perhaps
on Sunday, a thirsty man, strongly resembling Gabor, comes to
collect the pages and pay him for them.

In the second section of Molloy, a man named Moran is
commissioned by a messenger, Gaber, (Gabriel) to find Molloy.
Moran is an agent, perhaps a kind of private detective whose
mysterious employer is a person named Youdi (Dieu). Moran's son,
Jacques junior, is to accompany him. In the course of an
uncharacteristically random journey begun on foot, Moran's leg
begins to stiffen, and the journey continues on bicycle.
However, Moran never gets further than the general region of
Ballyba, the Molloy country. His son, whom he cruelly abuses as
a matter of principle, finally deserts him. Gaber appears and
transmits Youdi's order for Moran's return home, a trip that takes
all winter because he can only hobble slowly, using his ruined
umbrella as a cane. Moran's story is in the form of a written
report to the hated Youdi of his failure to locate Molloy. At
the end, he announces his intention to leave his home to under-
take what he hopes will be his last journey--the Molloy quest
for his dying mother of the first part of the novel. The story
is entitled Molloy and not Moran because the first is the latest
segment of the space-time self, and both stories represent a
reversed space-time geodesic of two segments of the world-line of
a single self from a present to a past state.

As Murphy and Watt vainly search for a cosmic order which
might make their absurd existence endurable, so also Molloy
exposes the disintegrations of systems and habits, all of which are gratuitous constructs masking underlying chaos, both external and internal. Molloy finds the very concept of system incomprehensible from the outset, though he does outwardly conform to whatever petty regulations society imposes on him, such as, for instance, obeying the traffic law which requires that he dismount from his bicycle at the gates of the town, even though it is difficult for him to push the bicycle and move on his crutches at the same time. Whereas the Molloy phase of the story reveals a blank incomprehension of the factitious systems of society as enforced by the police or the relativity system of Lousse's house and grounds as maintained by the Lorentz transformations, the Moran phase of the story records a life lived by meticulous, though arbitrary system. Since Molloy is, in reality, Moran badly crippled, the second phase chronologically preceded the first. Moran begins as a bien-pensant believer in order as heaven's first law. His report documents his gradual disillusionment and consequent abandonment of his faith in order as inauthentic. Perhaps Youdi's intention is to disabuse Moran of his notions of order by giving him the metaphysically impossible mission of finding and perhaps destroying his future chaotic ego, Molloy, as a threat to any notion of order. On the other hand, it may be that the existence of Molloy is a threat to the perpetuation of the illusion of cosmic order, an illusion that Youdi, a god-figure, has a vested interest in maintaining. In
any case, the various constructs that Moran has spent a lifetime building to shore up his petty existence gradually collapse under the successive losses he suffers in his impossible quest for his future self. Religious and personal order begin to crumble the moment Gaber announces Youdi's command. In another sense, the quest for the grotesque Molloy that lurks within him depends on Moran's shedding—or being forced to shed—the successive protective coatings of order or system that conceal the naked ego: religious, social, physical, natural. In this sense, the experience of Moran amounts to a bitter conversion from baseless faith to truth.

Wisdom, it would seem, consists in withdrawal from the outer world of random motion to a vegetative existence where writing about past selves parallels Belacqua's contemplative repetition as a form of expiation for a life of impenitence. Immobile in bed, Molloy has attained a "pre-mortem" state of eternal rest writing his account of his stewardship in the cosmic chaos. His obscenities are a gauge of his bitterness at the excremential earth over which men are doomed to hover like so many butterflies over a manure heap. The passage of man's space-time is marked by point-events which are progressive losses of physical and moral being. Beckett's emphasis on ordure and constant motion is to show the absurdity of a process existence dominated by animal functions. The search for the process-self is as gratuitous as Youdi's order to locate it, and no less so
is the obsessive writing "an absurd but inescapable activity that
is part of the punishment for an unknown crime that is life."\textsuperscript{24}
The journey in pursuit of a self receding in time is a process
without any possible term except the suspension of the process
by death.

Although at the outset Moran differs sharply from Molloy,
his progressive losses of being rapidly close the gap between
them, and Moran approaches his Molloy-ego as a limit, just as
the bed-ridden Molloy is the next ego-phase that will later
become Malone, also bed-ridden and scribbling with a pencil. The
only difference between these phases, as between those earlier
phases of the field known as Murphy and Watt, is a measurement in
space-time. They are disparate segments of one disintegrating
self, much like random samplings of the reels of a long life-
history recorded on movie film. In both sections of \textit{Molloy},
moreover, space, time, and events become increasingly indeter-
minate as the crippled Molloy and Moran aimlessly wander in
forests and fields without shelter. If the search for self is
mirrored in the artistic process of writing about segments of
past selves, then "Moran's failure to penetrate beyond the edge
of the 'Molloy country' suggests the failure of art as a means
of self-discovery,"\textsuperscript{25} as Unnamable ultimately does fail.

\textsuperscript{24}Chambers, "Samuel Beckett and the Padded Cells,"
p. 456.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., p. 454.
Whereas Moran writes his report out of a sense of duty, Molloy writes automatically and not because he fears the weekly visitor or needs money. He expects to discover nothing. As in the case of Watt, the events and their meanings are all distorted by the angle of vision of the narrator-observer. The story cannot ever be told precisely as it happened. Either words change the precise nature of the events, or the persons and events change in the process of observation before words can capture them. Therefore, all literature is invention, distortion of truth.26

However, even this realization is a psychological triumph, but if it represents salvation, the salvation is a negative one: not an expansion but a contraction, into oneself and into a more barren, if truer, existence. Beckett is too much of a pessimist to believe in any new and better dawns.27

Molloy is convinced of the absurdity of assuming any order exists because neither man's senses nor mind can convey certainty. Rather, his experience has convinced him that all systems are imposed and not truly observed to exist in nature. Molloy begins his quest by relating an incident of two men passing each other on the road: one bound for the town and the other, an old man, bound for the fields and hills. He is crouched above the road gazing at "A" and "C," as he terms the two apparitions. The hilly road undulates in waves so that the

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27 Fletcher, Novels of Samuel Beckett, p. 149.
observer often loses sight of the two men. The observer's speculations are vitiated by a "psi-function," the wave nature of all matter. As in quantum theory, the Uncertainty Principle is at the heart of all observation, and Molloy can, therefore, only speculate on the behavior and destiny of the two beings he terms "A" and "C," letters suggesting perhaps waves of alternating current. The man bound for the town is apparently untroubled, out for a brief constitutional. The old man, on the other hand, seems anxious and uncertain about his surroundings and destination. What possible use is knowledge when all is in flux in space and time, including the man himself, so that at his return it will be I think with other eyes, and not only that but the within, all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their sabbath, all that too quite differently disposed. (Mo 10)

In short, all knowledge is vitiated by the inadequate evidence provided by the senses of a body constantly changing, "that unstable fugitive thing, still living flesh." (Mo 11) Every man passes through the phase of mindless confidence in order of the man called A, the townsman whose attitude resembles that of the early Moran. Only later will age and infirmity force another conclusion when one reaches his Molloy phase of the ego series, that life is highly random and uncertain. At this point, he will realize that perhaps only in fiction is there certainty.
I believe all I'm told, I've disbelieved only too much in my long life, now I swallow everything greedily. What I need now is stories, it took me a long time to know that, and I'm not sure of it. (Mo 13)

In reality, Molloy cannot reach certainty even about himself and is in the same ignorance with regard to past or future selves as the observer, Molloy, who is speculating about the two men passing below, or the two men themselves as they pass each other on the road. But Molloy finds the speculation about the men as idle as all attempts to arrive at any certain knowledge. He wants to achieve a degree of freedom from pointless speculation about a pair of fictions moving in the twilight in order to be

I don't know, restored to myself, no, I never left myself, free, yes, I don't know what that means but it's the word I mean to use, free to do what, to do nothing, to know, but what, the laws of the mind perhaps, of my mind, that for example water rises in proportion as it drowns you and that you would do better, at least no worse, to obliterate texts than to blacken margins, to fill in the holes of words till all is blank and flat and the whole ghastly business looks like what it is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery. (Mo 13)

In an absurd process world, what passes for knowledge deserves destruction since it is no sooner formulated than it becomes false to the shifting reality. Molloy then sees the arrival of a dawn that serves only to emphasize that the space-time confusion of the cosmos that parallels his own inner confusions:

And so at last I came out of that distant night, divided between the murmurs of my little world, its dutiful confusions, and those so different (so different?) of all that between two suns abides and passes away. (Mo 15)
In part one Molloy records the segment of the space-time motion that led to his present immobile state waiting for death in a bed, perhaps his mother's. He is totally crippled. In part two Moran records the space-time curve in carrying out Youdi's commission to find Molloy, only to find that he has himself become the Molloy we see in part one, half-crippled and bitterly disillusioned.

Molloy seeks to discover the reason for his existence by moving back to his earthly origin, his mother, who must have had some reason for bringing him into the world. He will travel back to her room on his bicycle, that neat, mechanical set of Newtonian gears and wheels. However, at the moment of recording this journey on paper, nothing is left any longer of this mechanism of organized motion but the bulb-horn, the blowing of which he swears that,

if I were obliged to record, in a roll of honor, those activities which in the course of my interminable existence have given me only a mild pain in the balls, the blowing of a rubber horn--toot!--would figure among the first. (Mo 16)

But now he is only "a form fading among fading forms," (Mo 17) beginning his journey back to "her who brought me into the world, through the hole in her arse if my memory is correct. First taste of the shit." (Mo 16) He has an intense disgust of the birth process which began the entire chaos that has been his life of random motion. He hates human existence as an unbearable curse. Only gestation was more or less endurable:
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 fate that ear-marked me for less compassionate sewers. . . . And I forgive her for having jostled me a little in the first months and spoiled the only endurable, just endurable, period of my enormous history. (Mo 18)

He cannot forgive his mother for not having aborted him.

Shortly, after attempting to comply with the regulation about dismounting at the gate of the town, Molloy is arrested for loitering as he tries to rest after the tiring process of swinging on his crutches and pushing his bicycle at the same time. Informed that there are "not two laws, one for the healthy, another for the sick, but one only to which all must bow, rich and poor," (Mo 20) and asked for his papers, he offers the policeman the bits of newspaper he carries about to use when he has a stool, which he then uses, as a rule, to wipe himself. He is then taken to the police station where he barely remembers his own name. It appears that he has given a "deplorable example" bent over his handle bars in a state of despair, a scandal to the citizenry.

Having unwittingly violated the local non-relaxation-on-bicycle-law, Molloy reflects on the gratuitous nature of all laws imposed on the behavior of men marooned in a random universe, the more so "as a lifetime of observations had left me doubting the possibility of systematic decorum," (Mo 25) even within the limited area of personal habits:

And if I have always behaved like a pig, the fault lies not with me but with my superiors, who
corrected me only on points of detail instead of showing me the essence of the system, after the manner of the great English schools, and the guiding principles of good manners, and how to proceed, without going wrong, from the former to the latter, and how to trace back to its ultimate source a given comportment. For that would have allowed me, before parading in public certain habits such as the finger in the nose, the scratching of the balls, digital emunction and the peripatetic piss, to refer them to the first rules of a reasoned theory. (Mo 25)

His previous researches during his period as Watt in Mr. Knott's house proved that immutable macrocosmic system is not possible in a deranged universe of relativity and quanta, let alone in social conventions governing physical actions which in themselves are indifferent. In an oblique reference to the Cartesian cogito, the classical first principle postulated to insure the absolute certainty of all knowledge, Molloy looks forward to the "day I know that when I thought I knew I was merely existing," at which time he will review the long decomposition that was his life, his "passion without stations."

(Mo 25) More generally speaking, if there is a first principle governing existence, it is the principle of entropic decay that infects all being. Shortly after, Molloy sees a flock of sheep and worries about their destination: pasture or slaughterhouse.

(Mo 28) Mankind, too, moves in its little herds, tranquil in its belief in the good shepherd and a teleology that orders the life of the obedient toward the celestial green pastures. To Molloy, the mass of men are mindless beings who "wake up, hale
and hearty, their tongues hanging out for order, beauty and justice, baying for their due." (Mo 67) Therefore, on his journey Molloy carefully avoids encounters with men by sleeping during the day and moving by night, the image of his inner chaos. Also, like the other Beckett characters, he abhors light, the invariant speed of which condemns almost all else in the universe, man included, to variance, change.

Released from detention, Molloy accidentally runs down and kills Sophie Loy's (or Lousse's) pet dog, Teddy. Trotting obediently at heel, she apparently thought Teddy to be perfectly safe, utterly unaware that by so assuming, "she was setting the whole system of nature at naught." (Mo 32) Bystanders profess outrage at Molloy's crime. In the course of his later ruminations in bed, Molloy finally realizes that their hostility was aroused less by the fate of the dog than by their conviction that any such chance occurrence damages their assumptions of cosmic law. Chance, not law, has become the universal paradigm for Molloy, and the Newtonian universe of natural law and orderly motion collapses into random particle-waves. The same may be said of the Einsteinian as well. Not only the universe, but man, is like a Newtonian "watch wound and buried by the watchmaker, before he died, whose ruined works will one day speak of God, to the worms." (Mo 36) Neither the world nor man was ever properly created. To talk about law is a sick joke.
Molloy thinks of his body as a ramshackle assemblage unwinding and rotting through life toward burial and contemplates its disintegration with a certain amused detachment. Its random, causeless decay is as much an indictment against its so-called creator as is the rest of the ruined universe. During his trip to his mother's town, Molloy describes the stiffening of his good leg and the shrinking of his bad with detached scientific precision. After an allusion to Watt, who also journeyed in search of meaning during a period of his life "richer in illusions" than was true later, Molloy describes his progress, which

slow and painful at all times, was more so than ever, because of my short stiff leg, the same which I thought had long been as stiff as a leg could be, but damn the bit of it, for it was growing stiffer than ever, a thing I would not have thought possible, and at the same time shorter every day, but above all because of the other leg, supple hitherto, and now growing rapidly stiff in its turn but not yet shortening, unhappily. (Mo 76)

Clearly, there is no causal system operating in this asymmetric stiffening and shortening. In addition to his legs' inexplicable defections, his sphinctre is rapidly showing such signs of decline that I would have hesitated to exclaim, with my finger up my arsehole for example, Jesus-Christ, it's much worse than yesterday, I can hardly believe it is the same hole. I apologize for having to revert to this lewd orifice, 'tis my muse will have it so. Perhaps it is less to be thought of as the eyesore he called by its name than as the symbol of those passed over in silence, a distinction due perhaps to its centrality and its air of being a link between me and the other excrement. (Mo 79-80)
Thus, man and his world are linked in their similarity of being, operation, and law. It is at this period that Molloy dates "the dastardly desertion of my toes, so to speak in the thick of the fray," (Mo 80) during his journey to his mother. That the tone is comic does little to allay the spectacle of a body as a chaotic sewage system with its parts ill-made, ill-assembled, and ill-functioning. It is more an organic junk-pile than a viable mechanism capable of some measure of self-adjustment. It is designed, it would appear, to blend in with the rest of the cosmic mess. Finally, as Molloy reaches the stage of reptation toward his mother, even his heart does not truly beat. As for the sounds it manages to squeeze out, "I'd have to refer you to hydraulics for the squelch that old pump makes." (Mo 89)

To speak of natural laws governing men and the universe under such circumstances as these is ludicrous to Molloy. Mechanist description is hardly accurate to depict man and his world. Yet, even the relativity microcosm of Lousse's house cannot satisfy Molloy's quest for meaning.

The accident that draws Molloy into the house of Sophie Loy (Wisdom, Law) occurs, ironically enough, just as he has formulated a plan to discover whether he is in his mother's town. Planning, quite obviously, is pointless in a random universe. However, in the relativity microcosm of the Lousse house, Molloy awakens to find a chamber-pot and a roll of toilet paper at his
bedside and reflects that here "nothing was being left to chance."

(No 38) Since relativity theory can achieve invariance of observation through the transformation equations applied to the movement of masses in space-time, it is, as we have seen, deterministic. Nature is a domain of law. However, at no time in this house is Molloy able to find out if he is in the area of space occupied by his mother. It would seem that part of the problem is the complex space-time motion of the moon, which reveals to Molloy that between his resolution to seek out his mother and his awakening fourteen days have unaccountably elapsed, the moon which was a mere sliver when he went to bed now being full.

Two bars divided it in three segments, of which the middle remained constant, while little by little the right gained what the left lost. For the moon was moving from left to right, or the room was moving from right to left, or both together perhaps, or both were moving from left to right, but the room not so fast as the moon, or from right to left, but the moon not so fast as the room. But can one speak of right and left in such circumstances? That movements of an extreme complexity were taking place seemed certain. . . (No 39)

All bodies are in constant relative motion, and Molloy realizes that there is no privileged observer whose act of observation is not affected by his own motion in space-time. Equally relative is the direction of observed motion. Long ago, Molloy studied astronomy and geology, primarily to kill time. Science cannot solve the mystery of being. Consequently, he remarks that he studied "anthropology and the other disciplines, such as
psychiatry, that are connected with it, disconnected, then connected again, according to the latest discoveries," but that these sciences, themselves in a state of relativity flux and uncertainty, still left "the meaning of being beyond me."

(No 39) Relativity and quantum theory complicate the concepts of space, time, and matter, just as anthropoplogy leaves man in ruins. Molloy is forced to conclude that man and the macrocosm are a place with neither plan nor bounds and of which I understand nothing, not even of what it is made, still less into what. And the thing in ruins. I don't know what it is, what it was, nor whether it is not less a question of ruins than the indestructible chaos of timeless things, if that is the right expression. (No 39-40)

Neither the origin of man and the universe, nor their movements in space-time appear intelligible. With matter itself an undecipherable mystery, seemingly chaotic, Molloy thinks that perhaps chaos is, and has always been, the essence of being, and life in this case is better lived randomly. This would enable him to achieve harmony with his world. Space, time, mass, motion--none of these values are constants in the relativity world, which is "collapsing endlessly, a frozen world, under a faint untroubled sky." (No 40) Both outer chaos and the inner chaos of Molloy's ruminating mind are in constant relative flux, wastes where true light never was, nor any upright thing, nor any true foundation, but only these leaning things, forever lapsing and crumbling away. . . (No 40)

This is the voice of the expanding relativity universe speaking to him. Observer and observed are both affected by relative
motion and change, and Molloy sees this process as the cause of the perpetual distortions that frustrate accurate observations of oneself and the world.

In an attempt to account for the two states of the moon and his loss of fourteen days, Molloy postulates the possibility of two moons "as far from the new as from the full and so alike in outline that the naked eye could hardly tell between them, and that whatever was at variance with these hypotheses was so much smoke and delusion." (Mo 42) Relativity theory attempts to compensate for sensory discrepancies in observation to achieve invariance and to compensate for what appear to be "nature's pranks." (Mo 42) What is a man to do, however, when his own identity as an observer continually changes? Molloy thinks that there are a whole series of moons corresponding to the series of selves observing them, all truly moons, yet all different moons. Thinking of

this moon I had just seen, I had forgotten who I was (excusably) and spoken of myself as I would have of another, if I had been compelled to speak of another. Yes it sometimes happens and will sometimes happen again that I forget who I am and strut before my eyes, like a stranger. Then I see the sky different from what it is and the earth too takes on false colours. It looks like rest, it is not, I vanish happy in that alien light, which must have once been mine . . .

(Mo 42)

At the bottom of all the variations of observations is essentially a relativity observer, and this fluctuating observer is as much responsible for the confusion as the relativity variations similarly affecting the field of observation. The earth and the
observing self may appear to be at rest relative to the moon, but
this is not at all so.

As Molloy looks toward the window, even the boughs appear
to shift, "as though endowed with an orbital velocity of their
own," (Mo 44) distorted by their relative motion. Molloy
professes to find it difficult to go to his mother with things in
such a state. Consequently,

I saw the room but darkly, at each fresh inspection
it seemed changed, and that is known as seeing
darkly, in the present state of our knowledge. . . .
But that there were natural causes to all these
things I am willing to concede, for the resources
of nature are infinite apparently. It was I who was
not natural enough to enter into that order of things,
and appreciate its niceties. (Mo 44)

Molloy takes no comfort in the theory of relativity and its
workings, and his return to his mother, his point of origin, is
perhaps an attempt to discover a primal self before it underwent
its perpetual metamorphoses in the course of its space-time
existence in the universal flux. It is the relativity self that
the narrator hopes to fix in space-time. He must find some
principle beyond relativity theory, though "if I speak of
principles, when there are none, I can't help it, there must be
some somewhere." (Mo 46) Significantly, it is at this point
that Molloy discovers that his bicycle will no longer run. Its
brakes seem to be locked, although it has no brakes. This is a
mechanist symbol of the Newtonian world machine which is
inoperable in the Lousse relativity microcosm. Though he is well
fed and cared for, being in flux is unendurable to Molloy, and
for this reason he feels Lousse's house to be "an accursed place,"
even though Lousse, the observer, merely asks of Molloy "the
right to contemplate from time to time this extraordinary body
both at rest and in motion." (Mo 47) She fears that in outer
space, the street, he would never find his way in again. That
Molloy cannot get from Lousse the name of the town shows that he
is in the undulating field of relativity space.

Molloy finds it hard to keep his identity intact in the
garden of Lousse where "the labour of the planet rolling eager
into winter" plucks his ego out of his jar "which knew neither
seasons nor gardens." (Mo 49) However, sealed in the jar,
Molloy's ego is careful to ask itself questions to ascertain if
it still exists in its impossible dream of stasis. When he is
not careful, he participates in the relativity flux of the garden
rolling with the planet in its course:

And there was another noise, that of my life become
the life of this garden as it rode the earth of deeps
and wildernesses. Yes, there were times when I
forgot not only who I was, but that I was, forgot to
be. Then I was no longer that sealed jar to which I
owed my being so well preserved, but a wall gave
way. . . (Mo 49)

The major ambition of the narrator of the Trilogy is precisely
this: a stable identity.

Molloy lacks transformation equations to rectify his
sensory observations in the Lousse household, so that he finds
his senses unreliable. His space perception is so untrustworthy
that "I often misjudged the distance separating me from the
ether world, and often I stretched out my hand for what was far beyond my reach, and often I knocked against obstacles scarcely visible on the horizon." (Mo 50) His observations are in error, and the error is due to faulty sense data. The image of the Belgian philosopher, Geulincx, occurs to Molloy, that of a slave on the inertial system of a galley, free only to crawl in the opposite direction of the ship's motion, but with no control over the essential motion, despite the subtraction of velocities. In any case, relativity has nothing to do with teleology, and if it tells the tales of relative inertial motions and their effects, the motion of the galley "bears me from no fatherland away, bears me onward to no shipwreck." (Mo 51) The journey of life is pointless motion.

Even though Molloy either has no knowledge of the transformation equations, or realizes their futility in discovering any meaning in the motions of inertial systems, the same is not true of the Lousse house and garden. Here, the transformation equations give an illusion of fixity and stability, despite their constant motion in space-time:

In my head there are several windows, that I do know, but perhaps it is always the same one, open variously on the parading universe. The house was fixed, that is perhaps what I mean by these different rooms. House and garden were fixed, thanks to some unknown mechanism of compensation, and I, when I stayed still, as I did most of the time, was fixed too, and when I moved, from place to place, it was very slowly, as in a cage out of time, as the saying is, in the jargon of the schools, and out of space too to be sure. For to be out of one and not out of the other was for cleverer than me, who was not clever, but foolish. (Mo 51)
Molloy also notices that the garden did not seem to change, and some "mechanism of compensation," transformation equations, conspire to mask space-time variance, or change. Nonetheless, Molloy is dissatisfied with the essential falsity of transformations which essentially merely mask the reality of perpetual variance. In order to insure that she will be able to satisfy her passion for observing Molloy's inertial system, he suspects that Lousse perhaps drugs his food and drink. One effect of this is to confuse his notions of space and time. The drug also seems to induce sudden inertial forces in Molloy, because

from time to time I caught myself making a little bound in the air, two or three feet off the ground at least, at least, I who never bounded. It looked like levitation. And it happened too, less surprisingly, when I was walking, or even propped up against something, that I suddenly collapsed, like a puppet . . . (Mo 54)

This is an obvious parody of the effect of changes of velocity on inertial systems in space-time which cause changes in the forces affecting other inertial systems—in this case, Molloy.

Molloy's fundamental concern is the meaning of being, and he finds that the theory of relativity cannot satisfy his hunger for some sort of teleology. In an apparently irrelevant recollection of a long-past love affair with an old woman named Ruth or Edith, undertaken to try to discover the meaning of love, Molloy describes their sexual encounters in terms of the relative motion of sex organs. The only conclusion he reaches is that coitus is more enjoyable than masturbation.
Twixt finger and thumb tis heaven in comparison. But love is no doubt above such base contingencies. And not when you are comfortable, but when your frantic member casts about for a rubbing-place, and the unction of a little mucous membrane, and meeting with none does not beat in retreat, but retains its tumefaction. It is then no doubt that true love comes to pass . . . (Mo 58)

Love is a meaningless relative motion of a pair of sex organs, a mutual struggle to achieve orgasm, both Molloy and Edith laboring so mightily that "under our desperate strokes the couch moved forward on its castors, the whole place fell about our ears, it was pandemonium." (Mo 57) Love is no more explained by this frantic movement than the meaning of the universe is explained by relativity theory and the effects of motion on masses in space-time fields. It is all "pandemonium."

One night Molloy mounts his crutches and leaves Lousse's house of relativity transformations. Disenchanted with phony systems, he also leaves his bicycle behind. He abandons both Newtonian mechanisms and Einsteinian fields and takes his random course on crutches in the direction of the wind. (Mo 60) Nothing can disguise the reality of lawless change and the feeling Molloy has that "somewhere something had changed, so that I too had to change, or the world too had to change, in order for nothing to be changed." (Mo 88) Reversing Einstein's theory, he finds variance to be the only natural law. No other constant, natural law exists.

If relativity invariance is simply a scientific myth, the randomness of the microcosmic quantum theory better explains
the otherwise inexplicable shifts of identity Molloy experiences both in himself and the world at large. It is the reason he cannot remember his own name, his mother's, or even the name of the town of his birth. Names imply stable essences and belie the truth of perpetual becoming and change:

And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate, as we have just seen I think. And so on for all the other things which made merry with my senses. Yes, even then, when already all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. I say that now, but after all what do I know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. (Mo 30)

He has no difficulty naming things later near the seashore. (Mo 75) The pseudo-systems of society obscure reality as random nature does not. Even matter deceives the limited range of the senses. At its deepest levels matter vibrates in uncontrolable, unpredictable wave-packets that diffract like light. Micro-cosmic indeterminacy infects the cosmos, which, being a chaos, is indeed "foully named," in Molloy's opinion. Nothing can truly have "a beginning, a middle and an end as in the well-built phrase" of Aristotle if all being is simply a "long sonata of the dead." (Mo 31)

The true paradigm of all existence is the accident involving Lousse's dog. At the heart of nature is enthroned the principle of chance and uncontrolable contingency. Lousse assumes that a dog at heel is immune to accident and "thought she had left nothing to chance, so far as the safety of her dog
was concerned, whereas in reality she was setting the whole
system of nature at naught." (Mo 32) Although Lousse defends
him from the bystanders on the ground of his witlessness, in this
state he is certainly more attuned to the true harmony of the
universe of quantum than she in her transformation house.

Molloy randomly follows first the wind and later the
sun in setting out from Lousse's house into the heart of the "pre-
established harmony" (Mo 62) of the chaotic outer world where the
"true division begins, of twenty-two by seven for example, and the
pages fill with the true ciphers at last," the asymptotic, the
unlimited $\pi$. (Mo 64) All, including Molloy's life, is an
endless process of approaching an unattainable limit.

From the Pythagoreans and Plato onward, mathematics has
always been considered the model of rational activity and
precision. The cosmos was conceived as a harmony of number.
Modern physics describes its findings in the mathematics of the
field and probability. However, when Molloy attempts to reduce
his sixteen sucking-stones to order in his four pockets in such
a way that he can suck them in succession, one after the other,
he fails. Ultimately, he gives up the attempt to reduce his
sucking to a perfect system. His inability to solve this problem
is a commentary both on the limitations of mathematical systems
and on Molloy's more radical incapacity to solve the problem of
the meaning of existence itself. After five pages of various
permutations, none of which are satisfactory, he throws away all
the stones except one which he either lost or swallowed. (Mo 74)

Molloy is more successful with a spot-check fart-count on one occasion, although it hardly constitutes a fundamental gas law for his personal plumbing system.

One day I counted them. Three hundred and fifteen farts in nineteen hours, or an average of over sixteen farts an hour. After all it's not excessive. Four farts every fifteen minutes. It's nothing. Not even one fart every four minutes. It's unbelievable. Damn it, I hardly fart at all, I should never have mentioned it. Extraordinary how mathematics help you to know yourself. (Mo 30)

In the course of his journey, the changing condition of his body will render even this degree of self-knowledge false.

Despite errors in navigation, or perhaps because of them, Molloy gets out of the city to the sea-shore and into a forest. On the way, he attacks and perhaps kills an old charcoal-burner whom he encounters in his semi-circular wandering in the forest. There is no reason for the savage attack other than the old man's offer of shelter to Molloy and a well-meant attempt to detain him, perhaps out of pity for Molloy's ruined condition. Molloy "had a mania for symmetry" (Mo 85) and kicks the old man senseless using the principle of the pendulum, rocking back and forth on his crutches to give his kicks the proper force.

Molloy deliberately adopts a circular course in the forest in order to circumvent the well-known principle of the lost wandering in circles. He is shortly reduced to crawling when his legs give out. However, it is random, not planned,
motion that finally brings him to the edge of the forest after some months of crawling. Near the end, Molloy crawls with his eyes closed following a roughly polygonal course. His accidental rescue by someone unknown enables Molloy "to get a complete picture of the resources of their planet," (Mo 91) the planet, that is, of those believers in cosmic order who assume that help is available to human beings. The narrator in the bed thus ends his account: "Molloy could stay, where he happened to be." (Mo 91) In other words, the self named Molloy remains in the ditch at the edge of the forest; the self in the bed is no longer the same person.

The second half of Molloy records the quest of an earlier Molloy-version named Moran. Moran's report of his pursuit of Molloy describes a closed curve of space-time. At the end of his quest, the exhausted Moran enters his house and writes: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining." (Mo 176) The Moran segment begins thus: "It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows." (Mo 92) His pursuit of Molloy is a process of degeneration by which he curves through space and time decaying from a being named Moran into a being named Molloy, hearing voices dictating to him and reduced to hobbling about on crutches until he tires of being a man among men.

At the beginning Moran is a believer in absolute systems. The story of his pursuit of Molloy is a chronicle of the
break-down of his factitious systems and his degeneration into the aimless wanderer that is Molloy. It seems that Moran's habitual routines are a refuge from the knowledge of the disorderly self that he conceals under the veneer of ordered existence.

The visit of the thirsty Gaber carrying the command of Youdi to find Molloy begins to buckle Moran's formerly systematic life. First, it causes him to miss Mass and violate a religious obligation. Moran also drinks a glass of beer with Gaber and later receives holy communion from Father Ambrose, despite his violation of the eucharistic fast. On the other hand, he carefully cross-examines his son, Jacques, whom he suspects, unjustly, of having missed Mass. Professionally, the meticulous secret agent Moran begins to fall to pieces and reflects that "the poison was already acting," (Mo 96) since he uncharacteristically fails to plan the pursuit of Molloy systematically. An earlier, cruelly plotting Moran could envision himself as seated high above the world, god-like, "my eyes fixed on the earth as on a chessboard, coldly hatching my plans, for the next day, for the day after, creating time to come." (Mo 125) The present Moran, however, was making ready to go without knowing where he was going, having consulted neither map nor timetable, considered neither itinerary nor halts, heedless of the weather outlook, with only the vaguest notion of the outfit he would need, the time the expedition was likely to take, the money he would require and even the very nature of the work to be done and consequently the means to be employed. (Mo 124)
The type of detective work Moran has been accustomed to hitherto is no preparation for the pursuit of the self, even though his first impression was that "the affair seems childishly simple." (Mo 94) It would seem that imposing order on others is easier than a planned pursuit of oneself.

Moran's devotion to absolute order, however illusory he knows it to be, drives him to a petty persecution of his son on the pretext of inculcating good habits. When his son tells of his dentist appointment on the next day to seek relief from an aching tooth, Moran cuts his protest short alleging the impossibility of the pain because the dentist, Mr. Py, assured him he had worked on the tooth and it could not possibly ache. Later in the day, when his son is sick to his stomach, Moran takes delight in afflicting the boy with a salt-water enema, not so much out of concern for his son, but "I was not going to expose myself to thunderbolts which might be fatal, simply because my son had the gripes." (Mo 118) Fear of the power of the mysterious Youdi takes precedence over his son's welfare. To help his son sleep, Moran gives him a sleeping pill, even though they are to leave at midnight on their quest. Unable later to shake his son out of the drugged stupor, he takes delight in pulling him out of bed onto the floor beating him meanwhile with the handle of his umbrella. (Mo 126)

Moran also practices moral cruelties to enslave his son to a systematic life. He keeps a mental ledger of slights in
view of future redress. Clearly, he believes in a moral order which he feels called upon to maintain. When his son wishes to take a few valuable stamps with him against Moran's wishes, he behaves like the coldly logical Youdi:

You leave both your albums at home, I said, the small one as well as the large one. Not a word of reproach, a simple prophetic present, on the model of those employed by Youdi. Your son goes with you. (Mo 109)

Moran is as arbitrary in his commands as the pseudo-deity, Youdi. When his son is unable to walk properly in the night, Moran deprives him of his scout-knife in punishment. He knows what Jacques holds most precious after a brief rummaging in "my mind, where all I need is to be found." (Mo 130) That his son would gladly have cut his throat does not worry Moran, since his son is "still on the young side for the great deeds of vengeance."
(Mo 131) Moran dreams of an orderly, fettered world where he could chain his son to insure against even the possibility of his wandering. He is dreaming a Grand Inquisitor dream of absolute order

in a world less ill contrived and wondering how, having nothing more than a simple chain, without collar or band or gyves or fetters of any kind, I could chain my son to me in such a way as to prevent him from ever shaking me off again. (Mo 129)

This amounts to an admission that all his systems are actually nothing but spurious camouflages to help him live in a world so crudely contrived. Systems are masks disguising the randomness of all reality.
When during the journey Moran suffers from the sudden stiffening of one leg, he sends his son to buy a bicycle. They continue traveling with Moran perched on the carrier while the boy struggles to pedal them both. Unable, finally, to endure any more of his father's cruel insults and blows, Moran's son disappears one night taking with him the bicycle. Rather than control his son, Moran's system of petty persecution alienates him. Also, Moran loses the bicycle, a symbol of mechanist order. Now he hobbles on alone while he steadily degenerates into the chaotic creature that is his Molloy-self.

In bed, even before setting out on his quest, Moran reflects on his coming mission and suspects that his ideas of order are escape mechanisms. Order is the personal bulwark he erects to seal himself from the universal chaos, and it becomes most apparent to him when he is resting in the darkness, hidden from the refractory outer world.

All is dark, but with that simple darkness that follows like a balm upon the great dismemberings. From their places masses move, stark as laws. Masses of what? One does not ask. There somewhere man is too, vast conglomerate of all of nature's kingdoms, as lonely and as bound. (No 110)

Man is bound to the great asymmetry of nature, and Moran dimly realizes that he, too, is infected by those two diseases of nature, relativity and indeterminacy. Although controllable in Moran's nocturnal reveries, the world of daylight reality is unruly.
I get up, go out, and everything is changed. The blood drains from my head, the noise of things bursting, merging, avoiding one another, assails me on all sides, my eyes search in vain for two things alike, each pin-point of skin screams a different message, I drown in the spray of phenomena. It is at the mercy of these sensations, which happily I know to be illusory, that I have to live and work. It is thinks to them that I find myself a meaning. (Mo 111)

In fact, Moran will find the disorder of cosmic phenomena by no means illusory, but quite real indeed. Like the Murphy of mental zone one, Moran imposes a factitious order, "a finality without end," on the disorderly outer world. He does the same with his life and habits. This imposed order, however, is false, as he will later discover, to his cost.

In fact, although Molloy represents an affront to any dream of order, Moran begins to feel that he "found him ready made in my head." (Mo 112) Moran somehow vaguely knows Molloy as if he were his submerged self, which in fact he is. However, the vision of his Molloy-self fills him with terror. Thinking of Molloy, Moran feels welling up in his soul "nothing but uproar, bulk, rage, suffocation, effort unceasing, frenzied and vain. Just the opposite of myself, in fact." (Mo 113) Only a tyrannical discipline keeps Molloy from surfacing. Moran admits that his present personality "was a contrivance," (Mo 114) a persona assumed to keep the Molloy in him submerged. In fact, "in the inerrable contraption I called my life," (Mo 114) Molloy was the monster of Moran's dark places awaiting his hour to emerge.

Nonetheless, Moran knows that between him and Molloy, "so far as
the essential features were concerned . . . the likeness was there." (Mo 114) Not only is Moran's disciplined self a "contrivance," a construct rather than a stable entity, Molloy is also a construct, or rather, a composite of five different constructs: the monster in Moran's soul, Moran's caricature of Molloy, Gaber's Molloy, Youdi's Molloy, and the real Molloy. "And let us not meddle either with the question as to how far these five Molloys were constant and how far subject to variation." (Mo 115) All these versions of Molloy are constantly changing. They are as amorphous Youdi's mind.

His faith in order having vanished in the course of his impossible quest, Moran breaks off his narrative to think about the offense his report gives to Youdi and other custodians of order. It shows the futility of missions undertaken to impose order on essential chaos, including one's chaotic self. Now Moran obeys an inner voice that urges him to be the faithful servant I have always been, of a cause that is no mine, and patiently fulfill in all its bitterness my calamitous part, as it was my will, when I had a will, that others should. And this with hatred in my heart, and scorn, of my master and his designs. Yes, it is rather an ambiguous voice and not always easy to follow in its reasonings and decrees. (Mo 132)

When he finishes his report, Moran hopes it will help him "to endure the long anguish of vagrancy and freedom" (Mo 132) in his random journey to his mother in the guise of his Molloy-self. Furthermore, Moran finds it painful to attempt to recapture the self with which he began his quest in order that "that must again
be unknown to me which is no longer so and that again fondly believed which then I fondly believed at my setting out." (Mo 133) Moran must make a stern effort to suppress his present disillusionment and bitter knowledge. It is Sisyphus and his infernal toil all over again.

Belief in the existence of order is not strong in Moran even at the beginning during the visit of archangel Gaber. In his lucid moments his faith in the guarantors of order became so weak that sometimes Moran came

to doubt the existence of Gaber himself. And if I had not hastily sunk back into my darkness I might have gone to the extreme of conjuring away the chief too and regarding myself as solely responsible for my wretched existence. (Mo 107)

But he prefers a dim faith at this time to the devouring light of reality. Faith in beings like Gaber and Youdi he feels to be a necessary postulate to insure cosmic order, or any other.

On the road to Ballyba it is evident that Moran is rapidly changing. Not only does he proceed at a snail's pace, but his memory, once superior, has become so dim that he cannot recall the instructions of Gaber. He has no idea what to do with Molloy when he finds him. In addition, his mind wanders randomly over his mysterious past missions, and he recalls the stories he could tell of that "gallery of moribunds, Murphy, Watt, Yerk, Mercier and all the others." (Mo 137) Nothing in his past dealings with these pilgrims of cosmic order gives Moran a clue as to his duty in the case of Molloy. Since they
all past ego-versions, different segments of the self in space and time, they are as different from Molloy as the present ego, Moran himself. Although Moran's memory is fading at this point, his mind is not yet the tabula rasa it will become in Molloy.

Like Molloy, Moran's leg suddenly stiffens without apparent cause. During the days it takes Jacques to procure the bicycle, Moran begins a noticeable decline toward his Molloy state. He thinks of Molloy, and

on myself too I pored, on me so changed from what I was. And I seemed to see myself ageing as swiftly as a dayfly. But the idea of ageing was not exactly the one which offered itself to me. And what I saw was more like a crumbling, a frenzied collapsing of all that had always protected me from all I was always condemned to be. Or it was like a kind of clawing towards a light and countenance I could not name, that I had once known and long denied. (Mo 148)

Liberated from his protective systems, Moran is approaching that hulking, misshapen being he earlier discerned deep within himself. He no longer keeps any accounts of his spending, nor does he attempt to ration his few provisions. Two weeks earlier, he would have systematically solved the "question of calories and vitamins, and established in my head a series of menus asymptotically approaching nutritional zero." (Mo 149) Now, instead of orderly planning or effort, he merely contemplates his imminent starvation. Like Molloy, he would welcome the loss of all his faculties and "dread death like a regeneration." (Mo 140)
Moran kills a man on very slight provocation. Molloy perhaps kicked his man to death for offering to touch him.

Moran's attack appears to have a similar, absurd cause. The man attempts to touch him, and Moran beats his head into a pulp. However, he can recall no detail of the killing, although he appears to have used an insensate degree of force. His one-pound set of keys, suggesting security and control, are scattered on the ground in the course of the attack, but Moran makes only perfunctory efforts to collect them by rolling around on the ground. He does not even count the ones he finds. When his son returns with the bicycle, Moran's last remaining system, that of petty persecution, finally collapses when the son, revolted by his father's cruelty, deserts him. His "infallible technique" (Mo 160) for baiting no longer has a victim.

Gaber appears and orders Moran home. He takes no notice of Moran's unkempt appearance nor the "great inward metamorphoses" (Mo 163) he has suffered. When Moran asks if Youdi is angry with him, Gaber says he hears him chuckling to himself and rubbing his hands in the inner room. Then Gaber repeats Youdi's remark, in a paraphrase of Keats: "life is a thing of beauty, Gaber, and a joy forever," (Mo 164) Enraged, Moran begins to tear up the grass around him, but halts shocked. Earlier, Moran loved plants so much that he could not bear to prune them. He "saw in them at times a superfetatory proof of the existence of God." (Mo 99) Moran, it is clear, has lost virtually all faith
in arguments from design. Having lost faith in cosmic system, Moran approaches atheism out of hatred for God's cruelty, like Sam and Watt imitating God by feeding fledglings to their beloved rats. But the plants revenge themselves on Moran and give him severe intestinal trouble.

Certain mosses I consumed must have disagreed with me. If I once made up my mind not to keep the hangman waiting, the bloody flux itself would not stop me, I would get there on all fours shitting out my entrails and chanting maledictions. (Mo 166)

During his seven-month journey back home, Moran makes slow progress on his crippled leg and is never sure of his location or the right paths to take to Turdy. He is a "prey to the malignancy of man and nature and my own failing flesh" (Mo 165-6) during this long winter. He thinks of flies who hatch at the beginning of winter, suggesting Gloucester's famous indictment of the gods in King Lear. (Mo 166) To pass the time while he rests, he asks himself a series of random theological questions dealing with the Incarnation, Eden, the Antichrist, and "13. What was God doing with himself before the creation?" (Mo 167) For such mysteries there are no answers. Neither are there answers to his personal questions about his own destiny. There is no eternal, cosmic system within which his own destiny fits, but only unknowable chaos.

Besides theological and human systems, Moran speculates on his precious bees. They seem to signal each other by dancing in the air at various levels with variable-pitched hums. Yet,
However closely this phenomena was investigated by Moran,

I was more than ever stupefied by the complexity of
this innumerable dance, involving doubtless other
determinants of which I had not the slightest idea.
And I said, with rapture, Here is something I can
study all my life, and never understand. (Mo 169)

He now recognizes all the variables that his interpretations can
never account for in his bee-system. He can never know if the
signals by nectar-laden bees point to nectar sources for the
bees emerging from the hive to go and collect. "Exiled in his
manhood," (Mo 169) Moran sees that his interpretation is only an
anthropomorphic construct foisted upon the bee-movements.

A fortiori, more complex cosmic or theological questions will be
similarly vitiated by anthropomorphism. Furthermore, when he
arrives home he finds all the bees dead in their hives. They
had not been fed during the winter. All order is precarious.
The hive is a human construct and collapses without the care of
the human artificer. Likewise, Moran's hens did not survive.
All man's works, being artificial constructs, are doomed. Only
the wild birds survive in his garden. His hopes and systems
have perished, and

I swept them away, with a great disgusted sweep of all
my being, I swept myself clean of them and surveyed
with satisfaction the void they had polluted. (Mo 162)

The void is both within and without Moran.

Physically ruined by his travels, nonetheless Moran now
has a piercing insight into his true identity:
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. (Mo 170)

During the long, random trip back home Moran avoids building any more shelters, perhaps because they suggest the systems he once built around him to screen out reality. Having arrived at his garden, he cannot unlock the gate. He bursts it open. Similarly, he breaks open the house-door, though he could have tried some of the keys. He sells his house, determined to wander from henceforth, as Molloy in search of his mother. "I have been a man long enough, I shall not put up with it any more, I shall not try any more." (Mo 175)

A voice of conscience or truth orders Moran to write the report, an indictment of the human propensity for factitious order as an evasion of the truth of chaos. The raining—not raining contradiction at the end shows Moran has come full circle: from systems which purported to order all phenomena in relation to his anthropomorphic desire for human order to simple statements that describe phenomena, however contradictory. Like Watt, Moran ends as an operationalist. No laws are deducible from observed phenomena.
II. Malone Dies

*Molloy* is a novel with a two-phase ego from contiguous areas of the field of the self, with Moran dissolving into Molloy. In the case of *Malone Dies*, there are three phases: Saposcat, Macmann, and Malone. The discontinuity between these three phases of the ego is, however, much sharper than in *Molloy*. The narrative is a description of certain events or phenomena that occur during these three limited segments of the field. Saposcat represents a youthful, and Macmann an aged state of the ego, while Malone is the final, dying state. Malone narrates the stories of the two past states and intersperses them with reports on his present, dying state. It would seem that the major purpose of the stories is to create a series of point-events which will force the passage of time, thereby bringing about the dissolution of the self.

Malone, the narrator, lies in bed writing, as did his avatar Molloy, of whom he is a diminished version. Furthermore, whereas Molloy and Moran wrote memoirs or reports, the Malone ego-version writes stories, fictions. Thus, he admits more precisely than did his predecessors the impossibility of ever recapturing exactly the past states of the relativity ego. Malone's real reason for writing is to create a series of pencilled point-events. Without these events, virtually cut off as he is from outer phenomena, except in a confused way, there would be only suspension in an amorphous and interminable present.
Virtually no events exist in his timeless and gray room. If he is ever to engulf his present ego in order to attain an ideal nonexistence, he must devise some means of forcing the passage of time. For this purpose, the motion of his pencil over his paper represents a series of space-time events and forces time to move and propel the self to its vanishing point in space-time. The pencil is his clock.

There are serious reasons why Malone has never been able to formulate a satisfactory version of a self. First, society insists on imposing a false self and a pattern of behavior corresponding to a man's function within its framework. It arbitrarily invents both the game and the rules. Secondly, a stable, continuous self eludes the narrator because his memory is incapable of reconstructing past states of the ego with sufficient accuracy. Finally, even the present ego is an unsatisfactory construct because neither the senses nor the mind can encompass a self possessing any final dimensions or characteristics. All that they can detect is a constant state of flux, a flux which defies a definite construction definable as a self. The self must, therefore, remain a hypothesis forever open, a field of constantly changing values.

The self which surrenders its identity to a definition imposed by society finds, not the true self, but one circumscribed by a social function and a more or less rigid behavior pattern. One is forced to play games in accordance to rules which may be
false to oneself. Therefore, Saposcat does not study for his university entrance examinations to prepare for the vague career his parents contemplate for him, not merely out of indolence, but because he can see no meaning in existence itself. Much later, as Macmann, he is an utter failure at such occupations as garden weeding and street cleaning, for similar reasons. Thus, Malone finds he has always been unable to play society's tightly-regulated games: "I gave up trying to play and took to myself forever shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms, hiding." (Ma 180)

Society demands a conformity that requires some surrender of one's authentic being, whatever it may be and however undiscoverable it may be. Malone refuses this surrender and persists in the impossible quest for a self, saying:

what matter whether I was born or not, have lived or not, am dead or merely dying, I shall go on doing as I have always done, not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am. Yes, a little creature, I shall try and make a little creature, to hold in my arms, a little creature in my image, no matter what I say. (Ma 226)

In any case, the construction of ego-images is less vain an activity to Malone than the deformation required in assuming any of the various Procrustean identities which life in society demands. Life as an aged foetus or homuncule would be preferable, formless but closer to the reality of the self. Yet, when Malone, as a child, refused to play the game of life in society, "the grown-ups pursued me, the just, caught me, beat me,
hounded me back into the round, the game, the jollity. For I was born grave as others syphilitic." (Ma 195) Malone's refusal to accept any of the social masks society forces on him does not solve the problem of self, however. "My concern is not with me, but with another, far beneath me," (Ma 195) in other words, Malone probes for the nucleus-ego which he conceives lies beneath the spray of phenomena that composes the fluctuating field ego he experiences. This essence, he believes, exists independent of spatio-temporal change.

A sense of personal identity throughout all the changes brought about by the passage of time is a function of memory. However, Malone's memory is worse than Molloy's. He has no recollection of how he came to the room where he is lying, or what he was doing before he lost consciousness, outside of walking, his life-long occupation. He does, however, "vaguely remember a forest," (Ma 183) Molloy's forest, undoubtedly. Looking at the stars one night, "I suddenly saw myself in London. Is it possible I got as far as London? And what have stars to do with that city." This is, of course, a vague recollection of his past Murphy-ego. Malone thinks that before he dies, "I shall write my memoirs. That's funny, I have made a joke." (Ma 184) Indeed he has. The Saposcat and Macmann stories, even if complete fabrications, are no more fictive than the highly selective and incomplete recollections that generally compose what purport to be true "memoirs."
If the public ego dictated by society is unacceptable and the past states of the ego inaccessible to memory, the present state is also elusive, given the condition of Malone's senses and his mind. The relativity self is not a skin-encapsulated ego, but an interaction of the human organism with its environment through a process of continuous perception and cognition. To Malone, however, sounds merge into "one vast continuous buzzing," (Ma 207) noise he is incapable of decomposing into its components and identifying. All is an "unbridled gibberish." There is virtually no environment with which the Malone organism can interact. Thus empty, the ego or consciousness approaches a vanishing-point. Like Jackson's parrot, Malone is on the verge of his own "nihil in intellectu." (Ma 218) Space and time are indeterminate, lacking some sort of sensory point-events as measurement: "In a flicker of my lids whole days have flown." (Ma 186) Regardless of Malone's efforts, he fails to detect the self that he is certain lurks inside him:

All my senses are trained full on me, me. Dark and silent and stale, I am no prey for them. I am far from the sounds of blood and breath, immured. I shall not speak of my sufferings. Cowering deep down among them I feel nothing. It is there I die, unbeknown to my stupid flesh. That which is seen, that which cries and writhes, my witless remains. Somewhere in this turmoil thought struggles on, it too wide of the mark. It too seeks me, as it always has, where I am not to be found. (Ma 186)

Yet, Malone refuses the only possible way out of the dilemma of being unable to detect a self in any way identifiable with his
mind or his body, that is, he refuses simply to postulate the underlying self. For one who must wait for a "space of time, filled with drama, between the message received and the piteous response" (Ma 191) whenever he wishes to move his feet, Malone is ill-equipped to detect a stable self, even supposing it to exist. Malone, as Unnamable later, maintains an impossible distinction between the phenomenological field ego in its fluctuating state and the stable, substantive "I" it cannot detect:

All I ask is to know, before I abandon him whose life has so well begun, that my death and mine alone prevents him from living on, from winning, losing, joying, suffering, rotting and dying, and that even had I lived he would have waited, before he died, for his body to be dead. (Ma 198)

Death alone can solve the problem of the ceaseless process-life. Alive, Malone is "buried in the world." (Ma 199)

Society tried to force Malone into a mold. It failed in its effort to enforce the adoption of social persona, and now he fears that discovery of his true identity is perhaps impossible. Therefore, Malone vows to spend his last days of life inventing stories of his past surrogate selves named Saposcat and Macmann, the youth and old age of one and the same person. He will formulate his own rules for this ego game, no more or less arbitrary than those of society. However, he will play to lose.

After the fiasco, the solace, the repose, I began again, to try and live, cause to live, be another, in myself, in another. How false all this is. No
time now to explain. I began again. But little by little with a different aim, no longer in order to succeed, but in order to fail. (Ma 195)

The ego Malone succeeds in formulating is a parasitic ego, "and on the threshold of being no more I succeed in being another," (Ma 194) namely, Saposcat-Macmann. But this is no worse than what society would have done to him, and therefore he is unforgiving: "I wish them all an atrocious life and then the fires and ice of hell and in the execrable generations to come an honoured name." (Ma 180)

Up to now the narrator's existence has been a formless flux. Therefore, he devised his own system to impose a time-sequence and an event sequence on his last period of life. He will first describe his present state, then tell three stories, and finally, make an inventory of his chattels. This specious ordering of his final phase may be absurd, but at least it will be a free, and not an imposed absurdity. The stories themselves are not absurd, in that they document his revulsion and passive revolt in the face of absurd existence.

Beginning with the fragment of the story of Saposcat, Malone wonders "if I am not talking yet again about myself. Shall I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject?" (Ma 189) It seems obvious, despite his disclaimers, that the idle scholar, Saposcat, is an early version of Malone. He baffles his parents by his silence and idle wanderings. They fear he will not pass his entrance examinations. Yet, Sapo is
bright and loves mathematics, especially applied mathematics. "All calculation seemed to him idle in which the nature of the unit was not specified." (Ma 187) Similarly, Saposcat sees absolutely no point in preparing for a career of work when the essence of his own being is undecipherable. Lacking this knowledge of self "is more than enough to stop up the nose of a lucid and sensitive boy." (Ma 192) Consequently, he broods about what will become of him, and he could make no meaning of the babel raging in his head, the doubts, desires, imaginings and dreads. And a little less well endowed with strength and courage he too would have abandoned and despaired of ever knowing what manner of being he was, and how he was going to live, and lived vanquished, blindly, in a mad world, in the midst of strangers. (Ma 193)

Like the earnest Malone, the face of Sapo was always grave as he listened to an inner voice by whose command he moved on his erratic wanderings, halting only when it stopped. (Ma 206) This suggests both the hopeless quest for the self, and the erratic, fluctuating motion of the field self. No wonder Sapo has no interest in preparing himself for medicine or the bar.

The paradigm of futile life faces him not only at home with his feckless and unperceptive parents, but also in his visits to a poor peasant family, the Lamberts. Here, amid the annual pig-butchering of Mr. Lambert, the sickness of the worn-out mother, and the mutterings of impending incest between the son and daughter, there is no identity crisis or questioning of the meaning of existence. There is only the mindless,
monotonous toil interspersed with the joys—for Mr. Lambert—of
the annual winter pig-butcherings. One day Sapo makes his last
visit. Their memory of him, as his memories of himself, will fade as the memories of the deceased fade.

Malone then slips into his second *alter ego*, that of an aged Saposcat he now calls Macmann.

I have taken a long time to find him again, but I have found him. How did I know it was he, I don't know. And what can have changed him so? Life perhaps, the struggle to love, to eat, to escape the redressers of wrongs. I slip into him, I suppose in the hope of learning something. But it is a stratum, strata, without debris or vestiges. (Ma 226)

Considering the worn state of Macmann's typical Beckett uniform, the wrecked derby and the frayed tubular greatcoat, a clothesfield which, like the wearer, is shifting all its values relatively toward ultimate entropy, Malone thinks it a pleasure to find oneself again in the presence of one of those immutable relations between harmoniously perishing terms and the effect of which is this, that when weary to death one is almost resigned to—I was going to say to the immortality of the soul, but I don't see the connexion. (Ma 229)

Although the hat and coat appear to have decayed together in a kind of parallel harmony, so also has the self that was once Saposcat. Very little of a self remains to embalm in immortality. In fact, Malone finds so little being remaining that immortality would perhaps be bearable. Macmann is sitting motionless on a bench watching the conventional people streaming out of the factories and offices furiously bent on pleasure after their day's stint of toil. Macmann looks as if time has
And perhaps he has come to that stage of his instant when to live is to wander the last of the living in the depths of an instant without bounds, where the light never changes and the wrecks look all alike. (Ma 233)

In contrast to the frenzied motion of the populace, Macmann's motionlessness suggests that of a hackney-horse drooping between his shafts in the street "between its recent career as a pet horse, or a race-horse, or a pack-horse, or a plough-horse, and the shambles," (Ma 230) the goal of all life's motion. It rains upon Macmann far from shelter. He lies down on the ground, cruciform. Finally, as Molloy in his last stages was tempted to do, Macmann begins rolling away like an eccentric cylinder and dreams of an ideal existence where he might live "after the fashion of a great cylinder endowed with the faculties of cognition and volition." (Ma 246)

Macmann is utterly inept at work. When weeding, he cannot master the irresistible urge that came over him at the sight of vegetables, and even of flowers, and literally blinded him to his true interests, the urge to make a clean sweep and have nothing before his eyes but a patch of brown earth rid of its parasites, it was often more than he could resist. (Ma 243-4)

He does not recall his experience as the Moran who attacked the plants, those arguments for design, after the ruinous quest ordered by Youdi. Street-cleaning, or any other work demanded by society, are functions Macmann literally cannot master. If Macmann continues to move about the earth, he does so "for
obscure reasons known who knows to God alone, though to tell the
truth God does not seem to need reasons for doing what he does
... to the same degree as his creatures, does he?" (Ma 245)

For some reason, perhaps for indulging his inclination
to play the role of a cylinder, Macmann suddenly finds himself
in an asylum, the House of Saint John of God, where he is
required to sign a form of commitment. His keeper is an old,
yellow-skinned woman named Moll who brings his food and empties
his chamber pot. Like Molloy, Macmann vehemently demands the
return of his clothes, and does receive his ruined and brimless
hat. He is informed that he may have back a little silver
knife-rest, also, the mysterious metal object once stolen from
Lousse's house by Molloy. (Mo 63) Moll, though exceedingly ill-
favored, attracts Macmann, and they soon couple in a ghastly
parody of love. Both are completely impotent, and Macmann is
forced 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." (Ma 260) In the love letter Moll writes that, though
they do not reach rapture, age, too, has its needs, and "all is
relative." (Ma 261) That they are surpassingly ugly is no
deterrent to their love, since their most handsome contemporaries
are now scarcely less hideous than they, given the passage of
time. Macmann's curiosity is aroused by Moll's crucifix
ear-rings. She informs him that they represent the two thieves,
and in her mouth she also carries Christ on her solitary fang,
"a long yellow canine bared to the roots and carved, with the
[327x518]drill probably, to represent the celebrated sacrifice." (Ma 264)
Curiously, the sight of this parody of Golgotha becomes a fetish
to Macmann and arouses an eroticism that persists even during the
last stages of an illness that causes Moll to vomit uncontrollably
and to smell bad.

Dead Moll is replaced by the insane keeper, Lemuel, who
exorcises his psychic demons by periodic raps on his shins or
his head with a hammer he carries about for this therapeutic
purpose. It is Lemuel who kills the two servants of Lady Pedal
during an Easter week excursion to an island and sets out
together with five madmen to drift out to sea in a small boat.
This incident ends the Macmann episode. It is the week-end
"spent by Jesus in hell," (Ma 280) so that Malone Dies ends
before the Resurrection. Northrop Frye sees the incident as a
parody of the beginning of the Purgatorio with Lemuel replacing
the angelic pilot, launching the five mad souls out to the
uncharted sea without any destination, drifting with oars
shipped. 32 The drifting toward extinction is also a metaphor
for the movement of all human life and Malone's own oblivion
which is simultaneously occurring as his space-time fades into

never anything
there
any more (Ma 288)

32 "The Nightmare Life in Death," Hudson Review, XIII
Furthermore, the three segments of the ego-field merge precisely as the field is extinguished in death. "Luckier than Moran in his search for Molloy, Malone and Sapo-Macmann do meet, and their lives do exactly coincide at one point in the novel, the vanishing point of death, when they drift together and as one into nothingness."33

Before his final trip, Macmann is permitted out of bed to wander about the unkempt, fenced park of the asylum. He hides in a bush when tired until Lemuel comes to escort him back to his room. Out in the wild park great waves of disgust come over him at the spectacle of the perpetual flux of things and people imprisoned in the space-time field, caught up in a perpetual flux that alienates them from any hope of order or comprehension. He feels that

space hemmed him in on every side and held him in its toils, with the multitude of other faintly stirring, faintly struggling things, such as the children, the lodges and the gates, and like a sweat of things the moments streamed away in a great chaotic conflux of oozings and torrents, and the trapped huddled things changed and died each one according to its solitude. Beyond the gate, on the road, shapes passed that Macmann could not understand, because of the bars, because of all the trembling and raging behind him and beside him, because of the cries, the sky, the earth enjoining him to fall and his long blind life. (Ma 278)

This is not simply the vision of a madman, but that also of quantum and relativity physics. It is an immense sensory

confusion of plasmic being in a space-time motion that perpetually molds and remolds all the masses trapped in the fluctuating field. Macmann despairs of escaping from the fenced asylum space, that fictive parody of order, into the outer space, "the black joy of the solitary way, in helplessness and will-lessness." (Ma 278) In a sense, he does escape this space, only to be hemmed into narrower space of the drifting-boat inertial system to be, presumably, engulfed by the sea.

Turning finally to the present state of Malone, we find that the same forces affecting the universe of sheer process and becoming also affect what purports to be the present state of the self, making it unseizable by no matter what sleight-of-hand. The forces of change are both external and internal, and Malone's solution to his impasse is to invent a series of point-events, his five activities, to enable his consciousness to mark his passage to oblivion. In the first place, his process-body is a dual-sphinctred tube, contrived, it would appear, "to eat and excrete. Dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the poles." (Ma 185) His slowly declining body is like a contraption for processing food from the dish into excrement for the pot, an absurd cycle that only halts when, later for some unexplained reason, no more dishes come and no one empties his pot. Analogously, his process-ego might be said to be excreted slowly out of his mind through the tip of his lead pencil and, like it, dwindling to a stub. This perpetually vanishing field ego makes it difficult even to
remember the details of his stories of Sapo and Macmann, and "each time disaster threatens, to look at myself as I am," (Ma 189) that is to say, as a process. Yet, he must strive on, or he will fail to write out of "the world that parts at last its labia and lets me go." (Ma 189)

In order to detect the passage of time, some sort of regular point-events are necessary. One reason for the indeterminacy of time is the absence both of accurately observed events and a general sense of confusion about how observed events are occurring in relation to Malone's position in bed. He hears noises of steps outside his room coming and going, but "all things considered I would be hard set to say for certain where exactly they are, in relation to where exactly I am." (Ma 219) Ignorance of his relative position makes accurate sound observation and interpretation impossible. Nor does he trust his sight, which reveals what appears to be sky and another window opposite his. He may be in a vault among other vaults, "and this space which I take to be the street in reality no more than a wide trench or ditch with the other vaults opening upon it." (Ma 219) In addition to space indeterminacy, time passage is confused by the strange behavior of the sun, which on one occasion no sooner rose than set again--or so Malone observed. (Ma 220) The reverse Malone has never observed: twilight turning immediately to dawn without intervening darkness. There are several observations to be made about Malone's experience of
time. In the first place, Malone is very nearly a zero inertial system, and in relativity theory, time speeds up the slower the inertial system. This would account for the apparently peculiar behavior of the sun. Furthermore, if time is a measure of point-events in space, for Malone point-events have nearly ceased to exist and time, therefore, becomes an absolutely subjective judgment. Finally, for the most part, Malone no longer is able to observe the motions of the sun and moon, those relative measurements of space-time, but only infer them from the kind of "grey incandescence" in his room which does not "seem to depend on the time of day." (Ma 221) When Malone, therefore, speaks of noises penetrating his room and their irregular occurrence, he speaks of their ceasing, sometimes for days, "their days." (Ma 221) In another sense, time stasis is associated with the constriction of space, which is so acute that it sometimes seems to Malone that he is "in a head and that these eight, no, six, these six planes that enclose me are of solid bone." (Ma 221) Thus immured, as Unnamable later is, cut off from all external evidence of motion, time would be a meaningless term.

The direction of the time-arrow is toward entropy. Malone reminisces about how he observed the moon, the dead world with "nights of three hundred hours." (Ma 201) He would count showers, bells, bird-calls, or simply count, "for no reason, for the sake of counting, and then I divided, by sixty. That passed the time, I was time, I devoured the world." (Ma 202) Malone
no longer counts anything in order to pass the time and devour the world; he now invents his own point-events through pencil-motion. This will suffice for the devourment, if not of the world, at least of his own consciousness. A similar thought occurred to Sapo, listening to the tick of the invisible alarm-clock, "the voice of that silence which, like the dark, would one day triumph too. And then all would be still and dark and all things at rest forever at last." (Ma 203) This is clearly the heat-death of the inexorable second law of thermodynamics.

As the numbness of death steals over Malone, and the self shrinks into the head, his feet and other extremities seem to behave like independent inertial systems fleeing outward at great speed "beyond the range of the most powerful telescope." (Ma 234) In accordance with relativity theory, Malone should feel an enormous increase in his physical mass thus accelerated in space-time. His other parts also appear to recede outward in space:

For my arse for example, which can hardly be accused of being the end of anything, if my arse suddenly started to shit at the present moment, which God forbid, I firmly believe the lumps would fall out in Australia. And if I were to stand up again, from which God preserve me, I fancy I would fill a considerable part of the universe . . . (Ma 235)

While it is true that time slows on moving inertial systems in an direct ratio to their mass, and Malone fears it would take him perhaps a month to call in his feet after he located them, nevertheless the ego imprisoned in the six-plane skull is
relatively motionless, and hence is hard put to make time appear to pass by means of the pencil.

Malone's invention of the Saposcat being is a device both to force time to pass and to serve as a refuge. Saposcat seems unlike Malone in that the boy is struggling to "shed a little light upon himself," (Ma 193) a task Malone regards now as impossible. However, there is little doubt that they are versions of the same world-line in different areas of time. As for his own decaying body, Malone swears that

I shall never go back into this carcass except to find out its time. I want to be there a little before the plunge, close for the last time the old hatch on top of me, say goodbye to the holds where I have lived, go down with my refuge. (Ma 193)

If Saposcat is no longer "I," neither is the account of the "present state" of the narrator ever a true account of the core ego, "because it is no longer I, I must have said so long ago, but another whose life is just beginning." (Ma 208) With no memory of recent and remote past variants of the ego, only the notebook preserves any semblance of a persistent identity of Saposcat, Macmann, and Malone in space-time. Every variant of Malone's present state set down in the notebook is infected by the unavoidable time-lag, and is no sooner set down than another "I" is beginning (and ending). The purpose of the writing is to perpetuate a series of point-events to order his last days, to spite an existence which has demonstrated no natural, ontological order thus far. Speaking of the order demonstrated by his notebook jottings:
That must be the natural order of things, all that pertains to me must be written there, including my inability to grasp what order is meant. For I have never seen any sign of any, inside me or outside me. (Ma 210)

In a universe in constant flux, and a self in constant flux, only the beings in the notebook achieve a factitious constancy and order. However, having never experienced order in any form, Malone cannot affirm that his quintuple arrangement to fill in the void of his dying life by pencilling blank sheets is really ordering, whatever that term may mean.

Whether or not Malone's various pencilled existences represent order, if he loses the pencil, point-events and the self cease to be until he recovers it. This happened on one occasion while he was writing of the Saposcat ego. He lost his pencil for two days, and it was as if Saposcat's and his being oozed away without any record or recollection of what may have occurred. An amnesiac gap of two days occurred, but these days brought me the solution and conclusion of the whole sorry business, I mean the business of Malone (since that is what I am called now) and of the other, for the rest is no business of mine. And it was, though more unutterable, like the crumbling away of two little heaps of finest sand, or dust, or ashes, of unequal size, but diminishing together as it were in ratio. . . (Ma 222)

Consequently, existence by pencil is the only possible existence for Malone. The pencil is ego-creative and ego-destructive. In addition, it is the only record of the passage of space-time as measured by the number of inches of line. When Malone lost the pencil, his being and that of his surrogate Sapo, during this
period time was "streaming and emptying away . . . until finally nothing remained, either of Malone or the other." (Ma 224)

Lacking written point-events as measurement, Malone observes that the process of ego-evacuation was highly irregular, "now rapid, now slow." (Ma 224)

Conceived as discrete particles of sand sifting away or liquid mud, the ego is in a state of indefinable flux, just as the body is a half-formed foetus or homuncule, never properly having been born. The history of this amorphous thing is, at best, only a legend. (Ma 225) From this point of view, aesthetic existence, if only a pencil existence, is vastly preferable.

Malone realizes that, far from possessing any deducible essence, his self is composed of a long stream of phenomena sprayed into his organism by his senses and recorded there fleetingly and confusedly. And this kaleidoscopic experience he cannot regard as a life, to say nothing of ordered life.

For a mere local phenomenon is something I would not have noticed, having been nothing but a series or rather a succession of local phenomena all my life, without any result. (Ma 234)

This is a clear description of the relativity field ego, that process self in interaction with its constantly changing environment, the observed and observer affecting each other mutually.

Neither do the objects Malone attempts to inventory maintain their identity. They simply change more slowly: the broken pipe, bicycle bell, half a crutch, and the bloody club.
He calls things his, "the whereabouts of which I know well enough
to be able to lay hold of them, if necessary." (Ma 249) Of
clothing, he still has one boot and the melon-shaped Macmann hat,
lacking its brim. For some mysterious reason, things appear and
disappear in this room. They are also affected by some
relativity principle of the fluctuating values of the field. Only
thus can Malone account for the "changing aspect of my possessions."
(Ma 250) They, too, are affected by an inexplicable form of
motion. Unable to satisfy his strict definition of possessions
as those things which maintain constancy of position in order to
be reachable, Malone abandons his inventory.

Malone recalls the variously-named past egos of his
space-time existence now that he is about to die:

Then it will be over with the Murphys, Merciers,
Molloys, Morans and Malones, unless it goes on
beyond the grave. But sufficient unto the day,
let us first defunge, then we'll see. How many
have I killed, hitting them on the head or
setting fire to them? Off-hand I can only think
of four, all unknowns, I never knew anyone. (Ma 236)

Malone thinks that perhaps all these progressively attenuated
versions of the ego in space-time will not be reunited finally
in the death of what appears to be the final attenuation named
Malone inside "this foul little den all dirty white and vaulted,
as though hollowed out of ivory, an old rotten tooth." (Ma 236)

But then, even if he should accede to their demands to be taken
with him into death, Malone finds an insuperable difficulty, in
that he does not even know what is meant by "me," the ego-core that
will have to do the actual dying.
In the meantime, he is faced with the problem of time and the point-events that enable it to disappear and Malone to finish disappearing. He observes the sky, the outer world, and realizes that there is no simultaneity, that events in space require various periods of time to reach him, depending on their distance from the observer:

"... I have to look long and fixedly and give things time to travel the long road that lies between me and them. And that indeed is a happy chance and augurs well, unless it be devised on purpose to make mock of me, for I might have found nothing better to speed me from this place than the nocturnal sky where nothing happens, though it is full of tumult and violence, nothing unless you have the whole night before you to follow the slow fall and rise of other worlds, when there are any, or watch out for the meteors, and I have not the whole night before me. (Ma 237)"

Space-time motion of planetary and astral bodies does constitute a measure of time passage, but the "tumult and violence" of the speed of these bodies is scarcely detectable to the observer's senses. Instead, the window across the street is lighted and behind it Malone observes, though at first confusedly and uncomprehendingly, another kind of relative motion, the motion of a couple standing in the light of the window engaged in sexual intercourse. Malone is parodying the sensory effects of observations made on different inertial systems, and love, as we have seen before, is reduced to a series of relative motions, male and female.

For they cleave so fast together that they seem a single body, and consequently a single shadow. But when they totter it is clear that they are twain, and in vain they clasp with the energy of despair, it is
clear that we have here two distinct and separate bodies, each enclosed within its own frontiers, and having no need of each other to come and go and sustain the flame of life, for each is well able to do so, independently of the other. Perhaps they are cold, that they rub against each other so, for friction maintains heat and brings it back when it is gone. (Ma 238)

Only gradually do the sensory messages reveal to Malone that there is motion in progress, that the shadow is made up of two body-masses, and that the purpose of the motion is not to induce heat, but rather sexual orgasm. The stars of the sky and the intimate union of two people are thus reduced to a series of reciprocal relative motions. For Malone, however, it is one of the few outer world events that allows him to get through a period of time. For the most part, he must propel time with his pencil.

Malone begins the last version of his Macmann story with the explicit declaration that the notebook contains his life and that it has enabled him to consume time and his own being since the outer world is nothing but an incomprehensible babble.

This exercise-book is my life, this child's exercise-book, it has taken me a long time to resign myself to that. And yet I shall not throw it away. For I want to put down in it, for the last time, those I have called to my help, but ill, so that they did not understand, so that they may cease with me. (Ma 274)

However discrete and garbled these events and beings, they are all versions of Malone and his life. He writes, therefore he exists.
The narrator of Unnamable is in a state of being much reduced from that of his avatars, Malone, Molloy, and Moran. The space in which he finds himself is an indeterminate dim pit, perhaps the interior of a skull. Perhaps he is a pulsating brain pierced by an ear-hole, a mouth-hole, and an eye-hole for weeping. More likely, Unnamable is a fully conscious, articulate foetus at a primitive stage of gestation. He no longer writes as the previous egos did, but recites an endless series of words which appear to be dictated to him. The subject of the recitations of this lowest common denominator of the past ego-fields is his own indeterminate self which he is attempting to define in words. However, the frenzied attempts at self-discovery are ceaselessly frustrated by the fact that the words he recites are dictated by prior segments of the field ego and are therefore false to the present reality of the self. If the self is not a permanent capsule ego, but rather a continuum of sensory phenomena, the problem of encompassing a stable ego in definite terms is, as we have seen, insoluble. It is, in fact, a pseudo-problem. In the end, Unnamable is only a disembodied voice pressing on, chasing its disembodied shadow. It hopes to achieve its own annihilation by exhausting its energy emitting words. The voice hopes to end the absurd process.
When Camus and Sartre denounce the absurdity of existence, they have the dual aim of exposing inauthentic traditions of order and creating new structures to replace them. Beckett, however, does not revolt against the absurd. He simply records it. Previously, he recorded the randomness of the cosmos, and in Unnamable, as in Molloy and Malone Dies, he records the random flux of the self. He does this, not from some superior vantage point, but from that of a narrator who is himself the "mess" he attempts unsuccessfully to record. As long as consciousness continues to flow, the ego-increments approximating it in words must likewise continue in a process that can only end when consciousness itself ceases—when an ego no longer exists to record.

Beckett's view of the inescapable absurdity of literature thus finds expression in the figure of the nameless "I," knowing nothing about itself, knowing that the "stories" it tells are a lie, but reduced nevertheless to looking for itself in stories, because it has no alternative, and telling lies rather than peter out altogether, because lies offer the only hope—such as it is—of eventually earning the right to silence.

Unnamable records the present state of the Unnamable narrator, his accounts of the past egos in his world-line, the more recent ego-phases he calls by the names of Mahood and Worm, and finally, the total isolation of the creature named Unnamable.

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34 Pingaud, "Molloy, douze ans après," p. 1287.
Unnamable dimly senses that he is seated with his hands on his knees in some indeterminate space, a womb, perhaps. His head is "a great smooth ball I carry on my shoulders, featureless, but for the eyes, of which only the sockets remain," (Un 305) sockets which he bungs to stop the flow of tears. However, his sense of touch is by now so unreliable that the impression of his physical shape is rather that of an egg "with two holes to prevent it from bursting, for the consistency is more like that of mucilage." (Un 305) If extension in space is characteristic of material being, Unnamable is approaching physical non-being. He is a "big talking ball, talking about things that do not exist, or that exist perhaps, impossible to know, beside the point." (Un 305) What is impossible to know is not only his physical shape, but his mysterious, flowing self.

Unnamable is unable to determine if he is in motion, or if his voice (if it is his) is reciting the right lesson. Motion is indeterminate, except relative to the motions of other masses, and even then, a state of motion or of rest would be difficult to measure, since one might mistakenly assume he is at rest with respect to another body when both motions might, in reality, be the same in velocity and direction. "Let us then assume nothing, neither that I move, nor that I don't, it's safer, since the thing is unimportant, and pass on to those that are." (Un 307) Even if Unnamable is in a state of bodily stasis, it is certain that his self is not. All he knows for certain is that a voice
issues from him, a voice so constantly changing that he cannot believe it is his:

It issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my walls, it is not mine, I can't stop it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know, its round that I must revolve, of that I must speak, with this voice that is not mine, but can only be mine, since there is no one but me, or if there are others, to whom it might belong, they have never come near me, I won't delay just now to make this clear. (Un 307)

The narrator does not seem to realize that both his ego and his voice are reciprocals of the shifting field consciousness. The "face in the embers," glimpsed ephemerally, "is doomed to crumble." (Un 307)

Unnamable conceives of himself as a nucleus around which orbit his former egos. Only the most recent satellite-ego, Malone, is visible to his field of vision which is fixed and focused on a narrow area of his inner consciousness. The more remote selves are believed also to be orbiting farther out in the space-time field of his consciousness, no longer detectable by his inner vision because "I only see what appears immediately in front of me, I only see what appears close beside me, what I best see I see ill." (Un 297) The range of Unnamable's inner vision is highly limited, and this fact suggests the relativity observer locked into his field of observation and limited both by the conditions of the field and the observing instrument. He exerts a kind of psychic gravitational force to keep his ego-satellites in orbit and is, in turn, affected by their fields of
To these satellites, his "delegates," Unnamable attributes all his knowledge of the world and of "men and the ways they have of putting up with it." (Un 297) However, he is puzzled by his conviction that he has never communicated with his past delegate egos. His egos are characterized by the discontinuities of quantum states rather than by the field continuum of relativity. Between Malone and Mahood, for instance, there appear to be no intermediary states. There is a quantum jump from one ego-state to the next and not a smooth transition. In any case, research into one's consciousness for the ultimate self is impossibly complicated by these discrete states. Rational order or systematic succession will not account for what seems to be random changes of the ego. Therefore, reasons Unnamable, "the thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of system." (Un 292) There is no observable law of ego evolution whereby one can predict an orderly succession of future states from observation of past states even if one could know all the variables of the field. An Uncertainty Principle operates in the consciousness as surely as in the field of the elementary particle. What prevents Unnamable from saying "who I am, where I am" is "the spirit of method to which I have perhaps been a little too addicted." (Un 303) He rejects any analogy between his self-laceration in probing for his essential self and the sufferings of Prometheus in the Caucasus, the god who bestowed the useful arts on man which spawned civilization and the long
series of abortive systems that misled man into assuming that order and not randomness is the ultimate cosmic law. If Unnamable does succeed in detecting a core ego, it will be by sheer chance that he utters the words that will constitute it. He refuses to be a dupe of the myth of order like the mass of mankind who come and go, and feel at home, on tracks they have made themselves, in order to visit one another with the maximum of convenience and dispatch, in the light of a choice of luminaries pissing on the darkness turn about, so that it is never dark, never deserted, that must be terrible. (Un 314)

Men who assume an orderly universe of absolute space and time neatly sliced up by orbiting suns and moons, and who impose equally orderly motion on their earth movements, are living lives false to the reality of inner and outer chaos. Unnamable's random research among his fictive egos for his true ego is likewise inauthentic, but admittedly.

All this business of a labour to accomplish, before I can end, of words to say, a truth to recover, in order to say it, before I can end, of an imposed task, once known, long neglected, finally forgotten, to perform, before I can be done with speaking, done with listening, I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies. (Un 314)

Unnamable persists in his perpetual word-motion less in the hope of succeeding in his search than in exhausting his absurd being through the effort it costs him and the time he thus forces to elapse. All his egos are false constructs.
If this impossible task could be conceived as a penance for the crime called life, or for having failed to recite his lesson, Unnamable wonders if he must therefore postulate a master. Perhaps the master is the reigning ego who is currently usurping Unnamable's identity, as is Mahood, for instance. (Un 311) It may be that Mahood requires the admission that he is the real ego, and Unnamable's denial constitutes his crime. Perhaps the master is a god-figure, like "Moran's boss," Youdi. (Un 312) Assuming, then, that a master exists "in my image," he may wish Unnamable well, perhaps, but be unable to help him discover an identity, or perhaps the master's will is being done perfectly, unknown to Unnamable, "ever since I came into the world, possibly at his instigation, I wouldn't put it past him." (Un 312) Assuming that a master exists who wishes his will to be carried out and that he is not merely another fiction among the gaggle of fictive egos thronging about Unnamable's consciousness, a little more explicitness on his part, since the initiative belongs to him, might be a help, as well from his point of view as from the one he attributes to me. Let the man explain himself and have done with it. It's none of my business to ask him questions, even if I knew how to reach him. (Un 315)

But Unnamable is forced to admit that a postulated god whose unknown will must be done is no less false than his other hypotheses to explain his word-quest for a determinate ego. In the last analysis, the words he pours out "in obedience to the unintelligible terms of an incomprehensible damnation" produce not a self, but "a troop of lunatics," (Un 308) false egos.
What has been wrong with the method of research employed by the narrator thus far? It seems that, in chronicling the "fables" of these past selves, Unnamable has been distracted from his essential quest. Yet, under all noises of his "lunatics," the music of the self continued:

For if I could hear such a music at such a time, I mean while floundering through a ponderous chronicle of moribund in their courses, moving, clashing, writhing or fallen in short-lived swoons, with how much more reason should I not hear it now, when supposedly I am burdened with myself alone. (Un 308)

Of course, all these provisional egos were temporarily true. Under all the cacophony of these noisy and chaotic wanderings there is a muted, symphonic self, but not one that is clear enough to provide final annotation for the staves. The ego underlying the field can only be postulated. In addition, the voices that carry on the research are all weakening versions of the same voice. When Basil metamorphoses into Mahood (Doom) to invade Unnamable and issue stories about his alleged past, and even after Mahood's eventual disappearance,

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. And still today, as he would say, though he plagues me no more his voice is there, in mine, but less, less. (Un 309)

In order to silence it the sooner, Unnamable speaks without pause. Though the egos are a discontinuous series, some traces of continuity survive the changes. The present voice is an entropic version of the Mahood voice. So also is the ego. The
field of the ego is a diminishing spiral of being. However, the
time-lag between existence and utterance dooms any final definit-
ton of the space-time ego. Therefore, no uttered ego is the
true one, and the voice is condemned to perpetual, unavoidable
lying.

Another source of despair for the narrator is his
inability to determine space and time. Dimly he realizes that
changes of these values are associated with that of his ego,
making it an inexpressible variable. Unlike Malone, he has no
pole or means of plying it to determine whether the gray space
which hems him in is "the old void, or a plenum." (Un 300) If
his mysterious space is a "plenum," then the apparent changes
(motion) are illusory. If it is a void, his ego is in a
Heraclitean state of constant change and motion. More important,
there are virtually no point-events inside this space "where
there is nothing to be seen, 99% of the time." (Un 301) The
only "event" is the orbiting Malone, but Unnamable cannot use
this as a measure of time because, lacking any other regular
event relative to it, he cannot determine Malone's periodicity.
Therefore, he is forced to use the words that utter his fictive
egos as point-events, and these are not regular. He doesn't
even know what tense is proper in his narration, given the
indeterminacy of space-time and the process-self:

These things I say, and shall say, if I can, are no
longer, or are not yet, or never were, or never will
be, of if they were, if they are, if they will be,
were not here, are not here, will not be here, but
elsewhere. (Un 301)
However uncertain his own being in space-time, Unnamable has only one resource left to induce some sort of movement, and that is the motion of his sound waves. He hopes that the word-motion will annihilate the self, but since the self is constantly changing, he is engaged in the endless process of describing selves in an infinite regression, and to go on means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again, a stranger first, then little by little the same as always, in another place, where I shall say I have always been, of which I shall know nothing, being incapable of seeing, moving, thinking, speaking . . . (Un 302)

Lacking memory, the self may perhaps be a tiny nugget ego enclosed in a skull engaged in perpetually reciting the same story over and over again, each time convinced that it is a new story. Only the remote chance that he may ultimately "light on the happy combination" of words and be acquitted of his penance keeps Unnamable going. (Un 311)

Unnamable's search for stable being often appears to him a patent absurdity since he is unable to identify himself with any of his ego versions,

alive with their life, not far short of a man, just barely a man, sufficiently a man to have hopes one day of being one, my avatars behind me. And yet sometimes it seems to me I am there, among the incriminated scenes, tottering under the attributes peculiar to the lords of creation, dumb with howling to be put out of my misery . . . (Un 315-6)

None of his "paltry priests of the irrepressible ephemeral," (Un 316) his field egos, seem aware, as he is, of the pointlessness of a process existence which unreels toward death.
Nonetheless, Unnamable realizes vaguely that they are his own process, however caricatured. His "miscreated puppets" have tried to convince him that they were he and inflated him with their words "like a balloon,"

loaded me down with their trappings and stoned me through the carnival. I'll sham dead now, whom they couldn't bring to life, and my monster's carapace will rot off me. (Un 325)

Unnamable refuses to accept life on these terms, despite the danger of denouncing it openly as a "condemnation" and a "banishment." (Un 325) Whereas his vice-existers fumble in his dust, trying to create a man out of the pile, Unnamable is "tired of being matter, matter, pawed and pummelled endlessly in vain."
(Un 348) Better the truth of a formless core-ego than the endlessly false forms of the field ego constructs. If the ego is constantly changing, how "can that be called a life which vanishes when the subject is changed?" (Un 353) In the end, Unnamable describes himself as a skull pierced by two holes, an ear and a mouth, "two holes and me in the middle, slightly choked." (Un 355)

How should one speak of a self under these conditions? Unnamable decides that "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." (Un 355) Pronouns, however, imply objective existence. How speak of process existence, of pure becoming? The ego is a series of dwindling "I's" so different that they are referred to as "we's" or "he's" or
"they's" in succession, and none of this frantic shifting of pronouns is adequate to describe the flux. His ego family is a series of hypothetical constructs.

You wouldn't think it was the same gang as a moment ago, or would you? What can you expect, they don't know who they are either, nor where they are, nor what they're doing, nor why everything is going so badly, so abominably badly, that must be it. So they build up hypotheses that collapse on top of one another, it's human, a lobster couldn't do it . . . I myself have been scandalously bungled . . .

(Un 372)

The ego in process, along with the whole of the fluctuating relativity creation, has been "scandalously bungled" and whirls through time unstable to the point of unintelligibility. One after another the selves named Mahood and Worm vanish as did all the previous provisional states of the self, though Unnamable questions whether they could "ever vanish utterly without having been at some previous stage." (Un 373) The narrator finally comes to the conclusion that the function of his previous selves, the latest of whom are Mahood and Worm, was to coax the real, core self out of its skull-space or womb-space to join in their inauthentic, fictive fixity and to acquiesce in the fraud, but he prefers the pain of the perpetually unreeeling consciousness to this kind of surrender.

The major reason that man is an indeterminate being and therefore incapable of definitive self-knowledge is that he, like all other things, is affected by the relativity of space-time motion. Sensory data is unreliable, changing in its
passage through the narrator's admittedly decayed organs. There are no transformation equations to compensate for these changes and achieve invariance. The world and the ego are thus unreliable and ephemeral constructs that refuse to stay put. Auditory and other sensations seem to "change on their passage through me," (Un 346) and it is this constant change operating on the words dictated by his various egos "to make me believe I have an ego all my own" (Un 345) that prevents him from achieving a state of rest. Unnamable thinks that his last avatar, Worm, is "a step toward me! To get me to be he, the anti-Mahood," (Un 346) but he shortly finds that Worm also is trying to force his identity on him. However, Worm himself labors under the same perceptual hindrances as all other observers and commentators.

Worm, to say he does not know what he is, where he is, what is happening, is to underestimate him. What he does not know is that there is anything to know. His senses tell him nothing, nothing about himself, nothing about the rest, and this distinction is beyond him. Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless, but not for himself, for others, others conceive him and say, worm is, since we conceive him, as if there could be no other being but being conceived ... (Un 346)

As the present ego-field, Worm is subject to all the distortions of the field flux, whether we consider Worm's version of himself or that of other observers. None of this unreliable information pumped into the unreliable ear of Unnamable, himself subject to the same sensory distortions as his avatars, can be accurately reconstructed. Unnamable is superior to his "puppets" in that he clearly realizes the instability of their experience of
existence, and also that permanence can only be achieved when the current self recedes from the personality flux of the present into a changeless character embalmed in the past along side Malone, Molloy, et al.

Space and time are in a constant state of change, and so also is the self. The first words of Unnamable associate these variables: "Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving." (Un 291) No word values in the novel succeed in pinning down these interacting space-time variables. Also, if the self is conceived as a constant interaction between an environment and an organism, there is virtually no ego left at the end when the space-time environment virtually dissolves, leaving only a voice murmuring to itself about itself. It should also be noted that the narrator is aware of the impossible subject-object dilemma he is faced with: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me." (Un 291) He is both the observer, the I-subject, and the field of observation, the me-object. Consequently, he is forced to admit that, in such circumstances, it is difficult to speak of "facts" about his ego: "I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak." (Un 291) The one "fact" is constant change.

We have already seen that Unnamable's space is indeterminate. It may be vast in extent, or it may be only twelve feet in diameter. (Un 295) Equally, it may be the interior of a skull. But unless Unnamable knows his own dimensions relative to
his space, no determination is possible. His ego may well be an atomic-sized nucleus, in which case a skull interior would assume the dimensions, relatively, of a macrocosm. In addition, Unnamable is unable to define his state of motion or rest with respect to the orbiting Malone. He thinks it a pleasing hypothesis to think of himself as fixed in space with Malone revolving like a planet, but admits the distinct possibility "that I too am in perpetual motion, accompanied by Malone, as the earth by its moon." (Un 295) Motion can only be detected in terms of other relative motions, and, in relativity theory, no observer in an inertial system can detect his own motion without reference to some other system.

Furthermore, Unnamable lacks the transformation equations to adjust his sensory perceptions. He cannot account for the disorder of the lights he observes in his space except by postulating a state of motion for himself as well as Malone. In astronomy, inertial mass and motion do affect the perception of light by affecting its wave-length, as in the red shift. Consequently, although the narrator assumes that he is a fixed ego, he is not, in fact, and all his perceptions are flawed by the neglect of the effect of motion (change) on the self he is attempting to observe and describe. He would vastly prefer an absolute ego in absolute space and time, a state of being characteristic of classical cosmology and psychology. In the light of the "distant analogy" of the non-eternity of hell, which
dates from the revolt of the fallen angels, Unnamable decides to "think of myself as being here forever, but not as having been here forever," (Un 296) inside his indeterminate space. He further speculates about space-time, wondering whether his space came into being prior to himself or the reverse, but concludes that their beginnings more probably coincided. (Un 296) It will be recalled that Newtonian space is absolute, independent of the masses which orbit in it. Relativity theory, on the other hand, defines space in terms of the warpings and curvature fields of force created by masses orbiting. It is this concept of space for his ego that Unnamable adopts, although he would prefer to postulate his creation prior to that of the space he fills. If he could believe this, his ego would have a permanence denied the space-time flux in which it is placed. If both come into existence simultaneously, both must participate in the hated flux. Unnamable concludes that one's impression of one's unchanging entity is illusory. What is unchanged in all states of the ego is the radical inability to determine whether one truly exists or not, and, if so, in what state. The only constant is the indeterminacy of being.

unable to go forward or back, now knowing where you came from, or where you are, or where you're going, or that it's possible to be elsewhere, to be otherwise, supposing nothing, asking yourself nothing, you can't, you're there, you don't know who, you don't know where, the thing stays where it is, nothing changes, within it, outside it, apparently, apparently. (Un 370)
simultaneous reciprocal changes of space-time variables and the
go may give the illusion of a kind of permanence, but it is an
illusion. Flux is the only constant.

The ego-field of Unnamable may be defined as a matrix
of voices in a perpetual process of composition, and since the
field of the environment registered by the self is changing,
while, simultaneously, the self and its powers are dwindling, it
follows that the ego is shrinking to nothing. The process of
interaction between organism and environment is declining toward
a limit of nothingness. The narrator believes that is a question
of finding, at last, his own voice somehow, the voice of him "who
has none, by his own confession." (Un 347) In any event,
drowned out by his surrogates, the core ego has not yet spoken
and never will.

Attempting to define his experience of the self he is
seeking, Unnamable suspects the truth that makes any attempt to
locate a capsule, absolute ego absurd. What if he is, in reality,
a kind of recording diaphragm on which is imprinted the cease-
less, changing spray of sensory phenomena. On one side the
world impinges; on the other a mind observes what the film
records. And the transparent, dimensionless foil trapped in the
middle is the ego--a relativity ego--trapped between the observer
and the field of observation,

an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps
that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in
two, on the one side the outside, on the other the
inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one
side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either . . . (Un 385)

In other words, the ego has no more solidity than a wave-packet. It is a vibrating field of energy. Although Unnamable quickly denies that this is the sensation he feels, it is the most accurate definition of the process ego he is able to arrive at, even if its indeterminacy is repugnant to him, revealing his quest as absurd. No ego is definable under these conditions, and he is unwilling to accept such a conclusion after so much frenzied effort. If he is merely a recording device, he is a neutral thing that need look no longer for the meaning of his existence. He records, therefore he is, or rather, he becomes. He is a process, simply.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the narrator is not a reliable recorder. Earlier, he was puzzled by the apparently clockwork orbit of Malone revolving around him, whereas the lights he perceived wavered constantly, or seemed to waver. He speculates that the indeterminacy may be traceable to the varying wave-lengths of observed lights themselves, or, on the other hand, that "they are perhaps unwavering and fixed and my fitful perceiving the cause of their inconstancy." (Un 294) Both observer and observed are, in fact, in flux. The speed of light is constant, but the wave-length varies across the spectrum. The narrator-observer is also changing, possibly his state of motion, and certainly his state of vision, which now extends, he thinks,
only to very close ranges. Although nothing appears to change because change itself is the constant in his space-time field, should future change occur, he would feel inclined to attribute it to a "principle of disorder already present, or on its way." (Un 294) He has no transformation equations to synchronize observation; therefore, the "principle of disorder" is unadjusted relativity variance. Although Unnamable thinks all change "fatal" in his space-time enclosure, it is the precise reason he cannot formulate a stable ego in the flux of all being. Randomness and not law appear to reign over all being and make any kind of fixity or stability impossible.

Later, as the truncated Mahood stuffed in a jar to advertise a restaurant's menus, another doubt clouds the search for an ego. It is that no one appears to observe him, even though the stench of his body ought to attract some attention when people have to bend close to him to read the menus. Why should one attempt to know oneself if there is no evidence that one exists—or if there is presumptive evidence of one's non-existence from the lack of verification by other observers.

Can it be out of discretion, and a reluctance to hurt, that they affect to be unaware of my existence? But this is a refinement of feeling which can hardly be attributed to the dogs that come pissing against my abode, apparently never doubting that it contains some flesh and bones. (Un 341)

He does not consider the attentions of the flies that settle on him sufficient evidence of his existence, since they would "settle with equal appetite on a lump of cowshit." (Un 341)
Besides the suggestion here of Berkeley and also of modern quantum physics that unobservables do not exist, Mahood fears he may go to the trouble of breathing his last without being sure he ever breathed his first. Even death cannot be taken as evidence of preliminary life. He will leave the world willingly only if some third party will give him "some kind of assurance that I was really there, such as a kick in the arse, for example, or a kiss, the nature of the attention is of little importance, provided I cannot be suspected of being its author." (Un 342)

Not only does the fact of existing as a recording foil between the external world and an observer inhibit a stable identity, but the quest is further complicated by the discontinuity between the segments of the world-line of the Unnamable narrator: Mahood and Worm. The only reason the narrator suffers their usurpation of his identity is that they represent steps toward the core ego, or so he hopes. Yet, he fears the infinite regression implied by the descent from Mahood to Worm.

But perhaps I have been too hasty in opposing these two fomenters of fiasco. Is it not the fault of one that I cannot be the other? Accomplices therefore. That's the way to reason, warmly. Or is one to postulate a tertius gaudens, meaning myself, responsible for the double failure? (Un 338)

Will he be forced to suffer through another fifty pseudo-egos, only to discover that he is still "short of a fifty-first, to close the circuit?" (Un 338) There is no more continuity between these entities than there is between a series of fish hooked by "a sporting God" angling for the souls of men. (Un 338)
Apparently, Unnamable wonders if each of his personae qualify as individual souls. God, the fisher of men, having thus far hooked Mahood and Worm, a third line falls plumb from the skies, it's for her majesty my soul, I'd have hooked her on it long ago if I knew where to find her. That brings us up to four, gathered together. I knew it, there might be a hundred of us and still we'd lack the hundred and first, we'll always be short of me. (Un 339)

The narrator hears discontinuous communications at long intervals allegedly about him, but "no connected statement. Faint calls at long intervals." (Un 336) These calls issuing "by the same channel as that used by Malone and Co for their transports" (Un 336) communicate no truth about his existence. With no "I" present in the first place, the narrator is powerless to receive the fragmentary messages, true or not. In any case, Unnamable does hear voices which insist that he assume an ego. The voices are all past egos who have moved through their transitory state of fictive identity into a state of fraudulent permanence. They are in a state of being outside the flux of space-time, and hence, outside of reality. However, Unnamable refuses to join his "vice-existers" in the guise of Worm. Perhaps he might succeed in being born by starting with his reptilian Worm-ego and then follow him patiently through the various stages, taking care to show their fatal concatenation, which have made him what I am . . . Mahood I couldn't die. Worm will I ever get born? It's the same problem. But
perhaps not the same personage after all. The sytheman will tell, it's all one to him. But let us go back as planned, afterwards we'll fall forward as projected. (Un 352)

But it is precisely the "fatal concatenation" which does not exist between the ego-segments. No continuous history of the field of the self is possible, given the various physically and psychically truncated specimens with their inexplicable and apparently causeless losses. Unable to utter his ego, Unnamable then speculates that he may be using the wrong orifice, and that his true ego might perhaps "sneak out by the fundament, one morning." (Un 352) Reason is powerless in this absurd task, and the narrator's only chance may be some day to "guess right." (Un 374) If the ego is subject to random change, probability theory might give him long odds that he might chance on the exact expression corresponding to his precise state at that given moment. But then, his thoughts wander, his words wander, and there is always the chilling possibility that a self is to be found not in the words, but rather in the silences between the words. If so, he could be nothing, nowhere, and "that would be a blessed place to be." (Un 374)

The narrator's sense of identity is complicated further by the fact that he is in a state of motion which does not initiate from him. Yet, he does move, change, even though "I don't yet know how to move, either locally, in relation to myself, or bodily, in relation to the rest of the shit." (Un 350) He is not in control of his relative motion in space-time, and
therefore not in control of his own ego. If man can be said to have evolved, or moved from his primitive animal state to his present state, his increased sense of suffering indicates that this progress has not been an unmixed blessing.

Not only is the narrator in a state of motion which he cannot detect and which he assumes, for convenience, to be a state of rest, but all his former egos appear to orbit around him as a center, although only Malone is visible in space. The discontinuity of the selves is evident from their spatial separation and the total lack of communication between even the closest in space-time, Malone, and Unnamable. Furthermore, it is impossible to determine which of two inertial systems is in motion to an observer stationed on one. Consequently, Malone "passes before me at doubtless regular intervals, unless it is I who pass before him." (Un 292) Although he affirms that his is the privileged state, or rather assumes it for convenience, in relativity theory there are no privileged states. There is no state of absolute rest. In Unnamable's space "there are no days," (Un 292) though he uses the expression. He is thinking in terms of psychic time, which has no regularity. Unnamable thinks that perhaps the figure orbiting may be Molloy rather than Malone. Obviously, it would make little difference which one it is, though the closer in space-time to Unnamable should be Malone. The narrator further assumes that all his previous ego states, however invisible, also orbit within his psychic space, "at least from Murphy on." (Un 293)
Orderly motion is not necessarily the law governing the orbiting egos of Unnamable. He recalls that on one occasion two of his egos called Mercier and Camier collided, and Unnamable speculates that the next time "they enter the field, moving slowly toward each other, I shall know that they are going to collide, fall and disappear, and this will enable me to observe them better. Wrong." (Un 297) It is evident that the ego series is not given to orderly orbits within the ego field. Their orbits curve and warp with no more regularity than the space field itself which is twisted and distorted by the masses moving in it and determining its Protean properties. It seems perfectly clear that the Unnamable ego system is far from a Newtonian mechanism. It is, rather, the perpetual motion space-time system of Einsteinian relativity.

Unnamable is visited by someone resembling Macmann wearing the brimless hat with the broken crown. Like Saposcat visiting the Lamberts long ago, Macmann brings small presents which he does not give, but leaves. The narrator wonders if, like Mercier and Camier, the visitor will ever collide with Malone in orbit. It is possible because their coming is governed by an "erratic interval." (Un 299) Since there is no observable law governing the series of orbiting egos in his psychic microcosm, a collision "would not necessarily be a violation of the order prevailing here." (Un 299) Put bluntly, there is no order at all. Somehow the motion of the egos started, like that
of the cosmos, in an absurd system in which "one starts things moving without a thought of how to stop them." (Un 299) There is no way to arrest universal motion in space-time. The Lorentz Transformations synchronize measurements taken on different inertial systems, but they do not provide a state of rest. Equally, in the consciousness there is no stability or permanence. Its field is also constantly changing, eluding definition. Observing all this motion in his field, Unnamable feels impelled to measure the periods of the orbits he observes in order to work out an ego-satellite law.

For if I can work out to within a few inches the orbit of Malone, assuming perhaps erroneously that he passes before me at a distance of say three feet, with regard to the other's career I must remain in the dark. For I am incapable not only of measuring time, which in itself is sufficient to vitiate all calculation in this connexion, but also of comparing their respective velocities. (Un 299)

No psychic observation can predict the collision of the visitor and Malone because their space-time movement in the consciousness resists accurate measurement. All that can be said is that they move at erratic intervals relative to each other. Nor is any other psychic law governing the revolution of the egos possible. Observation is therefore pointless when no precision is possible. In any case, by the end of Unnamable the orbiting egos are already far from their putative nucleus ego, or sun, in outer space, leaving the narrator deserted in his space. The analogy with macrocosmic recession is obvious. Even if one were capable of plotting the paths and velocities of all the masses in space-time,
the question of the meaning of all this movement would still remain unanswered. Neither would the meaning of Unnamable become clear if he were able to work out the trajectories of his field-egos.

Time alone, conceived as the measure of cosmic entropy, will deliver Unnamable from the innumerable series of pseudo-egos, his tormentors, and induce in him a state of psychic entropy, final stasis.

How all comes right in the end to be sure, it's thanks to patience, thanks to time, it's thanks to the earth that revolves that the earth revolves no more, that time ends its meal and pain comes to an end . . .

(Un 381)

In the meantime, the narrator's ultimate ego is the victim of the succession of selves who invade him one after another and provisionally usurp his being. The ultimate purpose of each usurpation and discharge into their space-time orbits is to bring the absurd process to an inconclusive halt in a kind of psychic death. Self-knowledge is an unattainable limit if each incremental ego is not even a rough approximation of the underlying reality—if it exists. Ego entropy and sensory entropy provide me at least with a vague idea of the elements to be eliminated from the setting in order for all to be empty and silent. That was always the way. Just at the moment when the world is assembled at last, and it begins to dawn on me how I can leave it, all fades and disappears. (Un 334)

No field construct can long remain "assembled" in the space-time flux of perception, cosmic or psychic. Nothing remains fixed long enough to determine meaning. The concept of a static ego
in relativity terms is an absurdity. Space-time values are a function of states of motion and account for the narrator's experiencing the perplexity of "these sudden shifts of time and age" (Un 334) and the resulting discontinuities of the self. Perhaps the true ego is to be found somewhere in these unaccountable lapses of consciousness, just as it may exist not in the words and stories of the narrator, but in the periods of silence between the words.

The "I" is a construct unexpressible in words because it is composed of the ebb and flow of perceptions of the world flowing onto the ego-recording "foil" and disappearing instantaneously. Thus, the pseudo-egos are "made of words," (Un 386) and

the whole world is here with me, I'm the air, the walls, the walled-in one, everything yields, open, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I'm all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder, wherever I go I find me, leave me, go towards me, come from me, nothing ever but me, a particle of me, retrieved, lost, gone astray, I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling, no sky for their dispersing . . . (Un 386)

Unnameable seeks the impossible: to freeze the field self into an absolute essence. His being is without beginning, middle, or end in space-time as the "seconds pass, one after another, jerkily, no flow, they don't pass, they arrive, bang, bang, they bang into you, bounce off, fall and never move again." (Un 395) Time is, thus, not continuous, but rather a series of discrete quantum particles that erode the ego. Unnameable cannot conceive
of this pile of instants as constituting what men term a lifetime.

somewhere under this pile of instants and the corresponding pile of egos may be buried the nucleic ego for which Unnamable vainly searches. He wonders why

time doesn't pass, doesn't pass from you, why it piles up all about you, instant on instant, on all sides, deeper and deeper, thicker and thicker, your time, others' time, the time of the ancient dead and the dead yet unborn, why it buries you grain by grain neither dead nor alive, with no memory of anything, no hope of anything, no knowledge of anything, no history and no prospects, buried under the seconds . . .

(Un 389)

In desperation, Unnamable speculates on the possibility of simply postulating a core ego rather than continue his absurd quest, whose "vast cretinous mouth, red, blubber and slobbering, in solitary confinement, extruding indefatigably, with a noise of wet kisses and washing in a tub, the words that obstruct it."

(Un 390) He must rid himself of all the "old buffers" (Un 391) that, from Murphy on, have obstructed a final solution to the mystery of the self. He will endow his newly postulated self with a "brand-new soul and substantiality" (Un 390) and give it a place to occupy in space,

ah yes, I nearly forgot, speak of time, without flinching, and what is more, it just occurs to me, by a natural association of ideas, treat of space with the same easy grace, as if it were not bunged up on all sides . . . (Un 390)

However, this postulated, absolute self is subject to the changes that plague the postulator, who cannot escape upon the fluctua-
tions of the space-time warp of the relativity cosmos.
With both the observer and the field of observation constantly changing, the narrator cannot believe that the relativity self has any more meaning than the relativity cosmos: "It's all a bubble," and it would be a blessing to have "a world without spectator, and vice versa, brrrr! No spectator then, and better still no spectacle, good riddance." (Un 375) This passage suggests Sir James Jeans' famous image of the relativity cosmos which pictures it as a vast space-time bubble with an irregular shape, warped ("bunged up") in the region of all the orbiting masses receding constantly outward from the primordial "big bang" beginning. Similarly, the field-ego is an empty bubble of being constantly changing in space-time, inflated by words no sooner uttered than they belie the shifting reality of the field consciousness. His past egos have blown up the narrator "with their voices, like a balloon," (Un 325) with no other result than a series of collapses. He has no more meaning or reality than that of his series of "miscreated puppets," (Un 325) changing in time, their "notion of time." (Un 325) Rather than employ the first-person pronoun as "too red a herring" (Un 343) in attempting to describe his ego-field, the narrator would need a relativity process pronoun, some sort of fourth-person singular (or plural).

The expression of a self is vitiated by the unbridgeable time-lag between field-being and utterance. Furthermore, stable identity requires the exercise of memory. Prodded into speech
by his vice-existers, Unnamable realizes the impossibility of achieving existence in these terms:

The dirty pack of fake maniacs, they know I don't know, they know I forget all they say as fast as they say it. These little pauses are a poor trick too. When they go silent, so do I. A second later, I'm a second behind them, I remember for a second, for the space of a second . . . (Un 268)

Language is inadequate to describe the unfolding succession of simultaneous being and non-being. The field phases of the "me" are no sooner expressed than the real "me" is already a different field of perceptions, and the time-lag aborts any attempt to speak "first of the creature I am not, as if I were he, and then, as if I were he, of the creature I am." (Un 335) A language composed of words and parts of speech implies an order of events, an order of essences. It can only fail in any attempt to depict a flow-essence, or a state of becoming. Still, no other recourse seems open to him than to continue to transmit the words as received, by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole, in all their purity, and in the same order, as far as possible. This infinitesimal lag, between arrival and departure, this trifling delay in evacuation, is all I have to worry about. (Un 349)

And this is a great deal to worry about, since Unnamable is attempting to know his present state. Throughout, the same difficulty faces the narrator trying to express a relativity ego in a language which assumes the existence of absolute essences, cosmic as well as psychic. Infinite regression is absurd, as absurd as the Chinese-box chronicle of the dog killed by the cook
for stealing the crust of bread, and on whose tombstone is carved endlessly the crime, the punishment, and the interment by the other dogs. So also the field ego will be "a multitude, a thousand, ten thousand," (Un 379) an unlimited series. The true "I" will never be born. Perhaps the true "I" is a spermatozoon, "that should singularly narrow the field of research, a sperm dying, of cold, in the sheets, feebly wagging its little tail, perhaps I'm a drying sperm, in the sheets of an innocent boy." (Un 379) Once humanly alive and absorbed into the movement of the field, being is swallowed up in becoming.

Turning now to the past field egos of Unnamable throughout Beckett's fiction, the narrator condemns them one and all as evasions of the true self, despite a certain transitory resemblance. They were inventions, anodynes for the pain of seeking and failing to find himself. "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." (Un 303) The stories of all the short-lived beings, his "troop of lunatics," seem to have come from "the resorts of fable." (Un 308) All his past egos now seem no more to have lived and spoken than the dummies of a clumsy ventriloquist. His egos throng about him with their chatter about "being and existing," (Un 348) as if their brief appearance in the forests or streets could be described as life. Unnamable repudiates all the people he has
been and who distracted him from his putative essence, neither
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, not the slightest
connexion. (Un 326)

All the past egos Unnamable suspects to be orbiting about
him like Malone, are in a changeless, quasi-divine state,
liberated from human flux. Since they are immutable, Unnamable
thinks of himself alone as man, "and all the rest divine."
(Un 300) However fictive their existence, they have attained a
condition of stasis through the medium of their narrator's
words. "Impassive, still and mute, Malone revolves, a stranger
forever to my infirmities, one who is not as I can never not be.
I am motionless in vain, he is the god." (Un 300) Once liberated
from the flux of being, the past egos assume the function of
forcing Unnamable to assume a stable identity also. Apparently,
a master checks the transcript to determine if the narrator has
had any success in hitting on the right formulation by the
process of "happy speculation." (Un 369)

Besides temporarily usurping Unnamable's identity and
enforcing the continuation of his quest for his precise identity,
another function of the past egos was to force-feed him with
various spurious systems, useless theological, anthropological,
and mathematical constructs that bore no conceivable relation to
reality. The theology he knows comes "on the reliable authority
of his agents at Bally," (Un 298) an obvious reference to
Molloy's home district and Moran, Youdi's agent. He also failed in his researches, Unnamable rejects all these lectures and courses because they assume order exists, even though "some of this rubbish has come in handy on occasions, I don't deny it, on occasions which would never have arisen if they had left me in peace. I use it still, to scratch my arse with." (Un 298) Plainly, there is not a scintilla of evidence for order in this mess misnamed the cosmos. His wounds have been caused by his frenzied search for orderly system, a search his avatars could have spared him by telling him the truth that only one law is operative: randomness.

Another cause of ego discontinuity is that Unnamable's vice-existers frequently halt their dictation and resume their narration at a much later stage of the world-line of the field. Therefore, Unnamable speaks of the one-armed and one-legged wayfarer, Mahood I, and the human trunk that becomes Mahood II as being probably "simply two phases of the same carnal envelope, the soul being notoriously immune from deterioration and dismemberment." (Un 330) But it is not only his body that suffers a series of subtractions. His identity also changes, and hardly for the better. On the other hand, it might be simpler to assume that he has only one identity, "the confusion of identities being merely apparent and due to my inaptitude to assume any." (Un 330) His one identity would then be non-entity, and this conclusion is close to his true condition. The one
certainty about his present state as Unnamable is thus: "I have dwindled, I dwindle." (Un 331) At his present rate of decrease, he may soon not have to play hiding games in his jar as Mahood II, nor to carry on much further these researches into his identity. Strangely, Unnamable never inquires into the causes for his physical dwindling or his psychic dwindling. He merely records the specific loss stoically, and not without a certain sense of satisfaction, because he realizes that perhaps the true solution to his abortive researches is his disappearance--the final solution.

In a parody of the Last Judgment, Unnamable, immured in his gray skull-space, wonders if the "master will punish his egos for their inability to force him to assume a stable identity." (Un 365) If the soul is really a series of souls evolved in space-time, perhaps some will be punished and others pardoned for reasons that are not altogether clear. But what is clear? In any case, the egos are forced to insist on Unnamable's assuming some sort of identity on orders from the master: "He is there, says the master, somewhere, do as I tell you, bring him before me, he's lacking to my glory." (Un 368)

Each surrogate from Murphy on suffers progressive mutilation in the drive of the narrator to penetrate the essence of his being. The two penultimate ego-segments who precede the virtually non-existent consciousness named Unnamable are Mahood in two stages of truncation, and Worm, the last reptilian
pseudo-ego. Mahood I has one arm and one leg. Mahood II is a human trunk encased in a jar.

Initially, Mahood was Basil, a conventional person like Moran with conventional ideas of orderly, constant space and time. He attempts to remedy Unnamable's lack of identity without success. In Unnamable's present space he has lost even the conventional notion of time as a measure of the earth's orbit, a concept his consciousness no longer comprehends: "Years is one of Basil's ideas." (Un 309) Basil fades into the past and becomes Mahood, who, in his turn, attempts to dictate a self into Unnamable's ear and lend him some sort of self-knowledge: "I always liked not knowing, but Mahood said it wasn't right. He didn't know either, but it worried him." (Un 309) Although the narrator notes a distinct voice resemblance between Mahood's and his, Mahood's recession into a past state makes the present voice a distinctly weakened grade. He is a rather late segment of the world-line:

Mahood, Before him there were others, taking themselves for me, it must be a sinecure handed down from generation to generation, to judge by their family air . . . Mahood, this caricature is he. What if we were one and the same after all, as he affirms, and I deny? (Un 315)

Considering the weakness of the narrator's memory, it is improbable that he could prove Mahood wrong in the tale he tells of a weird spiral-motion trip. Mahood is traveling back to his family after a tour of the world on crutches. Whatever it is that he has discovered, Mahood struggles back to his parents, wife and
children, who all live in a rotunda-shaped house. Needless to say, he does not travel in a straight line, but rather in an inverted spiral path, like that of the helixes of a screw. His headway, consequently, since he is constantly screwing himself to a standstill, is not noteworthy. At this point, near his home, he estimates he has only "two or three centuries to go."

(317) Once screwed to a standstill at the point of his helical path, he reasons that by launching out in the opposite direction from his center, "should I not normally unfold ad infinitum, with no possibility of ever stopping, the space in which I was marooned being globular, or is it the earth." (317) His curved motion parodies the geodesic of any mass moving in the space-time continuum caused by the fields of force, the space curvature of relativity theory. There is no such thing as an Euclidean straight line on earth or in Einsteinian space. Meanwhile, inside their rotunda home his family watches his progress through slits in the wall, and "so we turned in our respective orbits, I without, they within." (318) For years he spirals in the ashes and dirt of the yard under their watchful eyes. They never speak to him or throw him food. At night Mahood hears their hymns: "Safe in the arms of Jesus, for example, or Jesus lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly." (319) Nevertheless, Mahood does not reach them until after they all die of ptomaine poisoning. Once inside, he crushes the corpses to a pulp with his foot and the tips of his crutches.
The most probable interpretation of this tale is that Mahood's mythical journey is a quest for cosmic order. His peculiar helicoidal geodesic path is in parody of an inertial system in a relativity cosmos. Relativity theory, whatever its insistence on the uniformity of physical laws on all inertial systems regardless of their state of motion, shows that all values are variables (except the speed of light). The absolute universe of invariable masses in regularly housed orbits in invariable space and time have vanished. On Mahood's spiral inertial system time slows in proportion to his speed, but to those in the rotunda Mahood seems to take years (in terms of their relatively stationary system) to traverse the yard. The rotunda existence of Mahood's family, on the other hand, represents the shelter of an absolute system in accordance with unvarying religious and social codes. Nevertheless, these codes are no protection against the fundamental randomness at the heart of nature. Regardless of their nightly hymns to Jesus, He does not help them escape the poisoned sausage. Chance, one law of nature that is invariant, proves their systems false.

It should be noted that Mahood's strange navigation is an absurd attempt to synchronize his motion with that of the space-time universe of relativity theory. Although observers see the paths of heavenly bodies as ellipses in space, nevertheless, if the time dimension is added, planetary motion is helicoid. Furthermore, if entropy points the direction of the time-arrow,
then the radius of the space-time helix is constantly shrinking. The space-time geodesic of all bodies is therefore screw-like.

Mahood's helicoidal motion is not in his power to control: "The only problem for me was how to continue, since I could not do otherwise, to the best of my declining powers, in the motion which had been imparted to me." (Un 320) He has an obligation to persevere "in obedience to the figure assigned to me." (Un 320) His motion is no more free than that of Alpha Centauri. Rid of his family and of his useless past, he has only one goal in mind, and that is to continue on his quest away from the rotunda of corpses, and "get back to me, back to where I am waiting for me." (Un 321) His problem is to continue his absurd relativity navigation and spiral off to find his relativity ego. The world having shown no sign of natural order or system, Mahood's setting off in the opposite direction is an attempt to engage in a more apparently fertile research. He has concluded that perpetual motion, pain, death, and decomposition appear to be "the natural order of things, such as I had come to know it." (Un 322)

The narrator then denounces Mahood's tale as a fable, and all the information about "bodies and trajectories" (Un 324) as incomprehensible. "It's of me now I must speak, even if I have to do it with their language." (Un 324) Conventional language is inadequate to describe the space-time relativity cosmos and also the variable ego. Yet he must make the attempt,
as much under some obscure compulsion as is his peculiar state of motion. Perpetually unfolding in space-time, he will find the ego no more tractable to conventional language than the external world. Nevertheless, he dreams that "within, motionless, I can live, and utter me, for no ears but my own." (Un 325)

The narrator, however, is forced to detour from his quest to narrate yet another segment of his world-line, that of Mahood II, who is now reduced to a virtually motionless existence as a human trunk stuffed into a jar. Like the Unnamable narrator, Mahood II weeps automatically and without grief. Like the narrator, also, Mahood's field of vision is sharply restricted, becoming more so later when a cang is fitted around his neck to compensate for the bodily shrinkage which threatens to lower him out of sight beneath the lip of the jar. Bereft of locomotion, the disintegrating Mahood II moves ever closer to a state of cosmic harmony with universal chaos.

The narrator finally abandons his Mahood surrogate to invent a more reduced ego-variant he names "Worm," and from

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36 Both Jeans and Eddington use worm metaphors to describe man's incapacity to understand the universe. Jeans thinks that probability theory in quantum physics is a probability of ignorance. We are as incapable of grasping sub-nuclear events which may involve more than four dimensions as a race of blind worms aware of only two dimensions attempting to fathom the reason for wet patches of earth left by rain from a third dimension. Similarly, speaking of the concepts of becoming and entropy, the direction of the time-arrow, Eddington describes a human being as a four-dimensional worm in space-time. Human life in How It Is explores more fully this concept of human life. Sir James Jeans, The Mysterious Universe, pp. 132-3, and Arthur Eddington, The Nature of the Physical World, p. 87.
whom he hopes for more reliable information on the subject of a self. He has, however, little faith in the words Worm will utter at the behest of his circle of past egos eager for the creation and liberation of yet another pseudo-ego.

But let me complete my views, before I shit on them. For if I am Mahood, I am Worm too, plop. Or if I am not yet Worm, I shall be when I cease to be Mahood, plop. (Un 338)

Unfortunately, the time-span of the Worm ego is so short that in the course of his decantation in words, Unnamable is forced to admit that "I've forgotten who Worm is, where he is, what he's like, I'll begin to be he." (Un 348)

Worm is much closer in shape and faculties to the present narrator than the previous Unnamable egos. He has an ear and a head, "a transformer in which sound is turned, without help of reason, to rage and terror." (Un 356) He is apparently enclosed in a space as reduced as the skull-like (or womb-like) space of the narrator where he appears to be a "tiny blur." The problem of the fictive egos ringing this space is how to force Worm out of Unnamable to join them. More insubstantial than any previous segment, the ego at this point appears to have no more solidity than a wave, and is as difficult to detect with any precision. The fictive past egos peer into Unnamable's tiny space and "see gray, like still smoke, unbroken, where he might be, if he must be somewhere, where they have decreed he is." (Un 359) Worm, therefore, is a barely detectable micro-ego, elusive as an electron. However, Worm can only come into being
and develop sufficiently to be discarded if time can be introduced into his space. But Worm's eye is "trained on the same tiny field" (Un 361) of gray light where no point-events occur. Time, therefore, cannot be measured. Worm's pit is a micro-world, a kind of monad "with something of everything here, as in every world." (Un 362) But it needs a point-event, say a face, passing in orbit once a month in order for time to exist and pass, like Malone in orbit before the eye of the narrator.

And even should the notion of time dawn on his darkness, at this punctual image of the countenance everlasting, who could blame him? Involving very naturally that of space, they have taken to going hand in hand in certain quarters, it's safer. And the game would be won, lost and won, he'd be somehow suddenly among us, among the rendezvous, and people saying, Look at old Worm, waiting for his sweetheart . . . (Un 362-5)

A notion of conventional space-time through regular point-events would lead Worm to conventional existence, and the game of the fictive egos would be won and Unnamable's lost. However, there is no head, not even a ball, to roll by so that Worm might begin to "learn to count, the minutes, the hours." (Un 363) Worm, therefore, is a vacuous entity, neither vegetable nor mineral, "kingdom unknown." (Un 363) Worm is nothing but a consciousness which can barely be said to exist, a recording diaphragm-ego with no environment to record beyond a vague grayness. How then can space be said to exist in this micro-pit without bodies or events to define it? In Einsteinian terms such a space is meaningless. It might equally well be vast or infinitesimal: "I see my place, there is nothing to show it, nothing to distinguish
it, from all the other places, they are mine, all mine, if I wish, I wish none but mine, there is nothing to mark it." (Un 364)

Henceforth, the only space-time events will be the sound waves of Unnamable's words.

The final state of the Unnamable ego isolated in space is one of utter wretchedness. He fears to "die a stranger in the midst of strangers," (Un 396) not having discovered his own ego, and having lived a life with no more meaning than a series of "visions, mingling and merging in one another." (Un 397) He is appalled at his situation in indeterminate space and interminable time, a state which he could only overcome if I could put myself in a room, that would be the end of the wordy-gurdy, ever doorless, even windowless, nothing but the four surfaces, the six surfaces, if I could shut myself up, it would be a mine, it could be black dark, I could be motionless and fixed, I'd find a way to explore it, I'd listen to the echo, I'd get to know it, I'd get to remember it, I'd be home, I'd say what it's like, in my home, instead of any old thing, this place, if I could describe this place, portray it, I've tried, I feel no place, no place round me, there's no end to me, I don't know what it is, it isn't flesh, it doesn't end, it's like air, now I have it, you say that, to say something, you won't say it long, like gas, balls, balls, the place, then we'll see, first the place, then I'll find me in it, I'll put me in it, a solid lump. . . (Un 399)

The narrator has nothing with which to measure his space. Consequently, he has the impression of being in a vacuum in space-time, lacking any other relative measure. He has no solidity, or sense of substance. The narrator wearies of his perpetual ego-motion:
I go on as best I can, if it begins to mean something I can't help it, I have passed by here, this has passed by me, thousands of times, its turn has come again, it will pass on and something else will be here, another instant of my old instant, there it is, the old meaning that I'll give myself, that I won't be able to give myself, there's a god for the damned, as on the first day, today is the first day, it begins . . . (Un 400)

In fact, the relativity ego is in a state of perpetual beginning, or of perpetual ending, depending on the point of view. The self is a "slow boundless whirlwind," (Un 401) of becoming, an ego made up of meaningless perceptions, vague and unknowable. Unnamable knows nothing about time: "I understand nothing about duration, I can't speak of it." (Un 407) Obviously not, since he has never experienced a self as an enduring entity at any point of his existence. Since conventional language is not constructed to express the flux of the self, the narrator thinks that he might perhaps create a language of inarticulate murmurs improvised to parallel the improvisation in space-time that is his ego:

I'll laugh, that's how it will end, in a chuckle, chuck, chuck, ow, ha, pa, I'll practice, nyum, hoo, plot, pss, nothing but emotion, bing bang, that's blows, ugh, pooh, what else, oooh, aaah, that's love, enough, it's tiring . . . (Un 408)

No matter how hard he looks, however, he cannot determine whether there is really an "I" behind the voice that so incessantly speaks, the voice that insists it is an "I" only to deny it a moment after. Both the affirmation and the denial are obviously true of a relativity ego. In the meantime, the narrator swears to continue the comedy of the ego series and
impute words to them you wouldn't throw to a dog, an ear, a mouth and in the middle a few rags of mind, they'll see what it's like, I'll clap an eye at random in the thick of the mess, on the off chance something might stray in front of it, then I'll let down my trousers and shit stories on them, stories, photographs, records, sites, lights, gods and fellow-creatures, the daily round and common task, observing the while, be born, dear friends, be born, enter my arse, you'll just love my colic pains, it won't take long, I've the bloody flux. (Un 380)

The egos are all surrealist fabrications. No shred of truth exists in anything he has invented. They are inventions. He is an invention. Perhaps he does not exist. Perhaps no one does. Perhaps time is the villain that aborts all attempts at selfhood. All the talk about a Mahood in a jar is sheer invention: "It is I invented him, him and so many others." (Un 395)

All the procession of egos were "old slush to be churned everlastingly." (Un 403) The self is a formless construct, and consequently "there is no name for me, no pronoun for me." (Un 404) As soon as formulated, the egos collapse into nothingness, suffer a metamorphosis that belies every syllable of the narration as soon as uttered. Therefore, he is the "I, who cannot be I, of whom I can't speak, of whom I must speak." (Un 404) The self is only a series of words by a voice that must be "quick now and try again, with the words that remain" (Un 413) to continue the series of word-events that enable the ego (if it exists) to subsist on the off chance that it may, by accident, stumble on the exact words to express a self. Therefore, the Unnamable concludes with the despairing cry: "I can't go on,
I'll go on." His ego is a process, not a definable, stable substance, a field of perpetually changing values in space time. He can't "go on" because the "I" is an evanescent field-flux, vanishing before uttered. The succeeding "I" that is forced by time to "go on" replaces the preceding "I," and, in its turn, suffers the same failure to express itself ad infinitum in the psychic hell of infinite regression.
CHAPTER IV

THE MYTH OF THE WAVE-EGO: STORIES AND TEXTS FOR NOTHING,

HOW IT IS

1. Stories and Texts for Nothing

The narrators of the three stories included in the volume, Stories and Texts for Nothing, "The Expelled," "The Calmative," and "The End," are all world-line cross-sections of a single ego which continues speaking in the thirteen texts that follow the stories. The narrators' similarity is both physical and psychic. They wear the same hat affixed to a string in the lapel and the same cylindrical overcoat, although the asylum attendants burn them at the beginning of "The End." They are compulsive wanderers on the usual vague quest of their ego, although the narrator of "The End" has finally abandoned hope. They all walk with the weird, Watt gait. They have a large pustule on the skull. Also, the narrators of the first two stories carry a pocket stone, as did Molloy. If we attempt to locate their positions along the world-line of the narrators of the previous fictions, the narrator of "The Expelled" fits near the space-time period of Murphy. The narrator of "The Calmative" fits somewhere between Moran and Molloy. At this point he still

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1 Published first in French in 1958, the English translation was published by Grove Press in 1967.
believes in the possibility of establishing his own identity.
The narrator of the last story, "The End," is physically a Watt. Physically, however, he belongs to the Unnamable period since he finally despairs of establishing an identity. He envisions his consciousness, not as a solid, specifiable nucleus, but rather as a wave-function, and hence as radically variant. In his final vision he glimpses a solution: cancellation of the problem of the universal disorder of wave-being through suicide. His last words about his inability either to end or to continue his existence suggest the final despairing words of Unnamable.

The narrator of "The Expelled" is thrown bodily out of what appears to be his family house for some unspecified reason, and, after a short and unskillful journey on foot during which, like Molloy, he is admonished twice by police for accidental traffic offenses against other pedestrians, he hires a cab to wander about the town. The story ends after he spends the night in a barn resting in the rat-infested cab.

It is clear that this man cannot be subsumed under any system, that his existence is an offense against the very notion of system, above all the apparently gratuitous system that prevailed in what was his home. As he lies in the gutter after being thrown out of the front door, he is grateful that the dwellers refrain from publicly beating him on this occasion, as they perhaps did in the past, in order that the bystanders "might enjoy my chastisement and be edified." (ST 10) In
addition, they had the kindness to sail his hat out after him. "They were most correct, according to their god." (ST 10) The hat is a symbol of the kind of automatic propriety required in the house. His father, for one, is convinced that life is regulated by a Leibnitzian, cosmic order. One day long ago he took his son to buy the unique hat "as though it had pre-existed from time immemorial in a pre-established place. He went straight to the hat." (ST 11) From then on his father required the boy to wear the hat always when outdoors, regardless of his companions' mockery, and to brush it each morning and evening. Considering the boy's other personal habits, this trivial rule of cleanliness is astonishingly pointless. Even at the time of this story, he is still unable to walk on a sidewalk without either falling or jostling the passersby. It is this reeling, tardigrade stagger that earns him brutal lectures from the guardians of public order, the police.

The nameless narrator, whom we will call "X" for convenience, has never understood the meaning of order. Not only is his ejection from the house into the gutter inexplicable, but even the very steps down which he tumbles resist simple mathematical enumeration, since X does not know whether he should count the landing level and the pavement level as steps. Uncertainty about this small matter is typical of more important dilemmas in human life which make all systematic reflection and decision impossibly complicated. If X attempts a normal, human gait, he
instantly falls victim to gravity. Indeed, his motions are as random as those of the inertial systems of outer space. He raises his eyes despairingly to the sky "whence cometh our help, where there are no roads, where you wander freely, as in a desert." (ST 13) Whoever organized this sky would obviously not be able to help x very much. His random walk is not without cause, however, but derives from a habit of his childhood:

I had then the deplorable habit, having pissed in my trousers, or shit there, which I did fairly regularly early in the morning, about ten or half past ten, of persisting in going on and finishing my day as if nothing had happened. (ST 14)

Hence, although his strange walk is contrived to allay the discomfort due to his incontinence, he prefers to explain it as having been caused by precocious rheumatism in order "to put people off the scent." (ST 14) Unable to walk safely, x spends most of the day in a cab he hires, first to go to the zoo but, when he changes his mind, to drive about aimlessly. The cabman tries to organize a methodical search for a room, but x's inquiries after shelter are half-hearted, complicated by his absurd demand that the room contain no stick of furniture other than a bed.

After his night in the barn, x sets off toward the east "to meet the sun," (ST 25) just as in the evening he pursues the sun. He is not avid for physical light, however, but a quest just as futile. All his life his "soul writhed from morning to night, in the mere quest of itself." (ST 11) We will note later
the role of light, which makes the pursuit of the age that of an ever-receding shadow.

In the next story, "The Calmative," X is also attempting to achieve the quest of the self, apparently by introspection, but is seized by the sudden fear that the "I," the field-ego, has somehow died, and he now lies, like Molloy and Malone, in his icy bed passing the time with a story. And yet, something is still dying in him. He is too frightened to "listen to myself rot, waiting for the great red lapses of the heart, the tearings at the caecal walls, and for the slow killings in my skull." (ST 27) His story is that of his subsequent wandering through a town in search of witnesses who will give evidence that he still exists. Should such evidence be lacking, he can then feel free to give up further efforts to define himself.

He calls his story a myth or fable primarily because it deals with an ego that has only fictive existence, one foreign to any present state. It is told in the past tense because "this evening I need another age, that age to become another age in which I became what I was." (ST 28) Time and the perpetually decaying ego are the "assassins, in this bed of terror." (ST 28) Even if he obtains evidence that he does, in fact, exist, the crumbling ego will still pose an insoluble problem. But it will be some progress to achieve at least bodily recognition by external observers. As a child, his kaleidoscopic ego already disturbed him so much that he forced his father to read
him the story of a Joe Breem or Breen every night, though he knew it by heart. Breem, as a fictional character, had the quasi-divine immutability denied the living boy. Joe Breem, as Unnamable observed of the orbiting Malone, is a god immortalized in story. Had the father skipped a single word or changed anything in the story, the boy would have hit him. To this day, X persists in his hatred of his process existence, envying the stable identity of Joe Breem.

In his wandering on foot through the town, X frequently wonders what time it is, and whether the darkness illuminated by artificial light is that of ten or eleven in the evening and three or four in the morning. (ST 38) When he asks directions and the correct time, a passer-by ignores him as if he did not exist. This is indeed his greatest fear: that time has obliterated him. In any event, he never discovers the time. Given the states of different motion of the throngs about him, all strangely moving in the same direction in space, and given their different speeds, their time, in any case, would not correspond to his—given his different rate of speed. Because of the Einsteinian interval of space-time on differing inertial systems and the resultant imaginary (square root of minus one) all the varying versions of time on these human inertial systems will be unreal in the first place, and, in any case, false for his particular system. Furthermore, the self, considered as a function of time is equally unreal, since both values are the functions of an imaginary.
The field ego has no history, properly speaking. \( X \) encounters a stranger seated on a stone. That the man notices his presence gives him encouragement. \( X \) reflects that he undoubtedly exists, or he would not be addressed. He asks the stranger the time: "He said a time, I don't remember which, a time that explained nothing, that's all I remember, and did not calm me." (ST 40) Such information could not be expected to console, though the stranger does offer him a phial, presumably of poison, which can solve the problem of time and the self. Next \( X \) asks to be shown the way. However, it is less a space direction than the way to a self. The stranger then asks for an account of his life history, much to the bewilderment of \( X \), who is not aware of such a possibility. As an illustration, the stranger then gives his own capsule life history, a series of movements from one woman to another, from the present Pauline to a younger, plumper specimen. (ST 41) He defines his life as a series of erections, penis movements, and so appalled is \( X \) at this totally corporeal description of a self that he is surprised not to see a skull "all chalky and channelled as with a gouge." (ST 41) The poison phial represents the stranger's judgment that the narrator's advanced age makes a sexual history impossible, and the stranger can conceive of no other that makes sense. Though \( X \) views his problem differently, he does accept the phial. After all, it could be a solution, an end to non-being. Hurrying away alone, \( X \) shudders at the city clocks
chiming their requiem, not for his body alone, but for his elusive spirit. The thought of the abandoned Pauline flashes briefly through his mind, a vision as evanescent as his own fleeting self wandering in the crowded street:

So I went in the atrocious brightness, buried in my old flesh, straining toward an issue and passing them by to left and right, and my mind panting after this and that and always flung back to where there was nothing. (ST 44)

The self is imprisoned in a prisoner who is, in turn, imprisoned in space-time, not even certain that he exists.

X feels that this evening he must achieve the stable existence he long ago experienced in the Joe Breem story. It would be a metamorphosis to achieve being and some sort of purpose in his movements, he whose body

never met with anything, loved anything, wished for anything, in its tarnished universe, except for the mirrors to shatter, the plane, the curved, the magnifying, the minifying, and to vanish in the havoc of its images. (ST 30)

Constant distortion warps the relativity universe. His sense of his own being, similarly, is a distorted illusion paralleling that of the confused universe. His hope of finding a navigator on the wharves who might direct him is disappointed. Even the mooring "capstans are out of order." (ST 32) He takes refuge in a church and lies before the altar, but he is frightened by a sudden organ peal. He clambers up into a tower and is again terrified, this time by a solitary man and later by a man guiding a small girl in the shadows. X reflects that, at least, because they in some way menaced him, "I was taking back with me the
virtual certainty that I was still of this world, of that world too, in a way." (ST 37) The men that vaguely menaced him, and the "Bears" wandering in the trackless sky prove to him fleetingly that he still exists somehow in both the terrestrial and the sidereal worlds, whatever comfort that is.

He wheels about in a wide semi-circle away from the sea, much like an inertial system in its space-time geodesic. In the meantime, the throngs of other human inertial systems describe their own geodesics, all in the opposite direction. They ignore him completely. Among these human automatons is a man riding a bicycle in the same direction as the crowd, reading the newspaper he holds in his hands. Occasionally, he rings the bell as he pedels. The imperturbable cyclist is the pure Newtonian mechanist, convinced that the absolute order of the clockwork universe insures him against any chance collision with only minimal effort on his part. "All the mortals I saw were alone and as if sunk in themselves." (ST 38) They might as well be sidereal masses, moved and moving in the uncontrollable force-fields of outer space.

Like Mahood in his jar, X needs external observers to assure him that he exists. The church experience helped, as did his nearly inarticulate encounter with a boy and his goat. The boy gave him candy. The stranger gave him a phial. However, still not sure of his existence, X falls flat on the pavement, but nobody walks on him. Although he chooses to interpret this as courtesy, it is obvious that it does not help solve the
problem of his corporeal existence. If anything, it might well prove his non-existence. But with the dawn the old void reasserts itself, and "reality, too tired to look for the right word, was soon restored . . . and I had no need to raise my head from the ground to know I was back in the same blinding void as before."

(ST 45) His experiences with external observers, themselves inconstant in space-time and insulated each in his own peculiar solipsism, render null and void any evidence they might give to attest the reality of X. His existence, as well as theirs, is no more substantial than the metamorphoses of shadows. The spray of phenomena from the outer world, constantly changing, does not suffice to constitute an ego for X, who, as he gropes his way out of the city, "hugged the walls, famished for shadow. To think that in a moment all will be said, all to do again." (ST 44)

It should be noted that the narrator constantly alludes to the blinding light in the mysterious town, and that it is light whose constant speed causes the ceaseless fluctuation of all other space-time values in relativity theory, fluctuations that affect the human ego as well.

In "The End," the last story, the narrator is being released from a hospital or a charitable institution. He is given a small sum of money and outfitted with a suit of clothes which do not fit at the moment, but will, given his rate of shrinkage. Outside in a strange town, or the same town changed by the passage of time, he finds a basement room to live in
after many refusals of shelter which he ascribes to his ugliness and his advanced age. The landlady shortly absconds with what should have been a six-months' advance of rent, and the new owner of the building puts him out to make room for his delicate pig. An old friend with an ass kindly offers him refuge in his cave near the sea. However, X hates the sea and companionship and leaves to live in a ruined cabin in the mountains. Starving, he is forced to leave and become a beggar in the streets. He constructs a hinged begging board on which he hooks his begging cup. When not begging, he lives in a shed near the river, sleeping in an old boat which he fits with a board lid to keep out the famished water rats. The story ends in a dream of suicide depicting X launching his boat to drift out to sea with the tide while he pries a plug out of its bottom and swallows the calmative from the stranger's phial.

X has now abandoned any attempt either to conform to a social order or to discover his ego. He drifts from refuge to refuge dreaming of a final refuge. Rejected by society and abandoned by himself, he is now determined to live as passively and non-committally as possible. This project, too, fails. In the end, he is capable only of a vision of suicide, not the reality.

All order is a gratuitous assumption. When ejected from his basement room, X meets his friend by chance and mounts the ass to travel to the sea-cave. Small boys promptly stone the
grotesque trio, and a ubiquitous policeman charges them with disrupting the peace. The old man's reply is a commentary on the policeman's assumption that order is a law of nature:

My friend replied that we were as nature made us, the boys too were as nature made them. It was inevitable, under these conditions, that the peace should be disturbed from time to time. Let us continue on our way, he said, and order will soon be restored throughout your beat. (ST 59)

Order, however, is not natural. It is a fragile human construct, easily disrupted when natural ugliness chances to encounter natural cruelty. Having arrived at the cave, X soon leaves because the sea with its waves is too painful a reminder of universal chaos with "its splashing and heaving, its tides and general convulsiveness." (ST 60) It suggests the wave nature of all being, the cause of disorder in a cosmos at the mercy of the Uncertainty Principle.

No conceivable change in the social order would be of any help to X. Consequently, he is appalled by the incomprehension exhibited by a Marxist street orator who singles out X as a "crucified bastard," presumably created by capitalism. (ST 67) So utterly beside the point is this assumption that his condition is the result of an unjust social system that X folds up his begging-board and escapes to his shed, thinking the man a religious fanatic or an escaped lunatic. Lying in his boat roofed over by his wooden lid, X reflects on the real problem—the elusiveness of his body and soul. Listening to the pounding of distant waves, he thinks that "I too, when I moved, felt less
boat than wave, or so it seemed to me, and my stillness was the stillness of eddies." (ST 69) Far-fetched as this description of his being may appear at first glance, it is a penetrating insight into the mystery of the field ego. The changing ego is unseizable because, as we have seen, it is a function of time, and both are affected by the Einsteinian interval, which adjusts all values to the invariant speed of light. Time and the self are functions of the ubiquitous imaginary, so much so that the speaker of Text 11 refers to himself as similar to the "square root of minus one." (ST 128)

Marxism and its economic system can do little to regulate the space-time manifold with the inescapable imaginary factor that so tortures X and drives him to despair at the consequent impossibility of his ever attaining stable being in this insane relativity cosmos presided over by the omnipotent space-time imaginary. He is nothing but a fading, relative construct shackled to the speed of light.

To know I had a being, however faint and false, outside of me, had once the power to stir my heart. You become unsociable, it's inevitable. It's enough to make you wonder sometimes if you are on the right planet. (ST 70)

Obviously, the planet wouldn't make any difference. Like Unnamable, oozing out his ego in a constantly changing field of words, X thinks that, in reality, his being is "still between the two murmurs." (ST 70) In a universe so ill-contrived, personal cleanliness is pointless. The true picture of the process universe is that of a pile of faeces, and X's last reaction is
never more to leave the refuge he has contrived.

So I waited till the desire to shit, or even to piss, lent me wings. I did not want to dirty my nest! And yet it sometimes happened, and even more and more often. Arched and rigid I edged down my trousers and turned a little on my side, just enough to free the hole. To contrive a little kingdom, in the midst of the universal muck, then shit on it, ah that was me all over. The excrements were me too, I know, I know... (ST 70)

Finally, he has a vision of his suicide, his wave-being submerged in the waves of the ocean and crushed "in a mighty systole, then scattered to the uttermost confines of space," one with the universal wave of all being, but at last mercifully bereft of consciousness. (ST 72) Nevertheless, X confesses that his suicide is a story fabricated by a man "without the courage to end or the strength to go on." (ST 72) Like Unnamable, he is trapped in the impasse of the ceaseless generation and degeneration of being. He is simply a human wave function without the power to switch off the power.

The subject of Texts for Nothing which follow the three stories is the same as that of the trilogy: the insoluble mystery of the self. The search for stable being renounced by the narrator of "The End" is here resumed. Stories which purport to be fictive segments of the history of the speaker's world-line, however, have virtually disappeared, leaving only a series of thirteen brief monologue meditations on the causes for the indefinability of the self. The conclusion of the speaker is that the self, and all being generally, is enslaved to the
invariant speed of light, to preserve which every other value of any being in space-time motion is condemned to ceaseless fluctuation. Thus, at the heart of the cosmic mess in which man finds himself irretrievably immersed we find the theory of relativity implicated, and a speaker who lacks the ability or the energy to apply transformation equations that might lend at least some transient stability to his wave-like existence. As it is, his world-line in its ceaseless flux can only be expressed, perhaps, in terms of a "single endless word" (ST 111) as devoid of meaning as creation itself, a process existence without any teleology other than final extinction.

The speaker's meditations center primarily on the apparent nature of the ego, the effect of the relativity cosmos on that elusive nature, and on various abortive attempts to define his mysterious state of being.

If the nature of the ego can only be expressed in words without meaning, then it would seem that the nature and the meaning of the ego is a void, and once that position is taken, there would seem to be nothing further to say. However, the speaker is driven to utterance by the conviction that he can quench the absurd process of his existence only by exhausting the words that approximate it.

The field ego is conceived as a succession of selves, a dynastic series of egos having the same voice and the same ideas. At the outset, the speaker acknowledges that "we seem to be more
than one, all deaf, not even, gathered together for life."

(ST 76) Space-time is as indeterminate as the self. It appears certain that the self is indeterminate because its space-time locus is indeterminate, as well as the foil-diaphragm ego vibrating with the sensory data fed into it by an external world in relativity flux.

How long have I been here, what a question, I've often wondered. And often I could answer, An hour, a month, a year, a century, depending on what I meant by here, and me, and being, and there I never went looking for extravagant meanings, there I never much varied, only the here would sometimes seem to vary. (ST 76)

Nothing is constant here in the pit dug by time where he thinks his mysterious ego to exist. Above in the world of the past, he naturally thinks of himself as an invariant, delivered from the ravages of time and therefore of change. His present being is a process like "breathing in and out and saying, with words like smoke, I can't go, I can't stay, let's see what happens next."

(ST 77) He is in a perpetual state of automatic drifting, estranged from the past selves he refers to as "we" or "they."

He is, in fact, composed of words, formless as smoke. Yet, there is always some figment describable as an "I," not a single, capsule "I," but rather a dynastic series whose existences the speaker once fitted out with stories in space:

Sometimes it's the sea, other times the mountains, often it was the forest, the city, the plain too, I've flirted with the plain too, I've given myself up for dead all over the place, of hunger, of old age, murdered, drowned, and then for no reason, of tedium, nothing like breathing your last to put new life in
you, and then the rooms, natural death, tucked up in
bed, smothered in household gods, and always mutter-
ing, the same old mutterings, the same old stories. . .
(ST 78)

Thus, the speaker recalls the ego-stages of Molloy, Moran,
Malone, and all the other ghosts of his world-line with their
varied fates. The speaker thinks of himself as, simultaneously,
his own father and his own son in an endless series of genera-
tions, his present, nascent ego being cradled by that which is
dying: "I'm in my arms, I'm holding myself in my arms, without
much tenderness, but faithfully, faithfully." (ST 79) He
speculates playfully on the complications an ego series will
cause on judgment day, but concludes that "I won't be there,
neither will God." (ST 97) There is no more an essential "I"
existing than there is a God who will judge the series of
fictional souls.

The only constant in this fluxing slush of selves is
change. Certain simple acts, like sitting or standing, give a
momentary illusion of stable being, "when I seem almost restored
to the feasible. Then it goes, all goes, and I'm far again, with
a far story again." (ST 94) The self is too transitory to live
a real life, and if it is to have any semblance of a life, it
must be a fictional facsimile. The speaker has tried everything
to capture his being, but it is elusive and "lighter than air,
like a cloud, in moonlight, before the skylight, before the moon,
like the moon, before the skylight." (ST 107) In his attempt to
think and utter himself into existence, the speaker reflects that it is a process as repetitive and cyclic as the ceaseless ticking of a clock, and about as meaningful. He speculates whether

the wheel in my head turns, I wonder, so given am I to thinking with my blood, or if it merely swings, like a balance-wheel in its case, a minute to and fro, seeing the immensity to measure and that heads are only wound up once, so given am I to thinking with my breath. (ST 109)

The self is not an orderly deist structure susceptible to analysis and accurate description. The quest for a self is, therefore, as hopeless as attempting to conceive a quintessential tick, or pulse, or breath. He is an extrusion in space-time, a human tesseract, a living four-dimensional figure. There is no "lump" self, and "this lump is no longer me." (ST 110) Consequently, although the search seems patently absurd, the speaker avoids this conclusion out of the fear that it might possibly be erroneous. The ego is reduced to an "unbroken flow of words and tears." (ST 111) The only variance the speaker is inclined to suspect is that the voice murmuring his word-self is getting softer and slower with each passing year in an entropic spiral toward the néant. Perhaps, also, there are not even pauses between words, just as there are, perhaps, no breaks in the flow of the ego. Therefore, the words that constitute the self are "for ever the same murmur, flowing unbroken, like a single endless word and therefore meaningless, for it's the end gives the meaning to words." (ST 111) The prospect of a murmured
lifetime of ceaseless change sickens the speaker with ennui: "What variety and at the same time what monotony . . . what vicissitudes within what changelessness." (ST 118) The only alleviation in sight is the interment of the ego under this "avalanche" of "wordshit." (ST 118) Short of death, there is no other alternative open to the speaker.

It is by being embalmed in the changelessness of fiction, like the character, "Joe Breem or Breen," (ST 79) or embedded safely in the past of one's tubular world-line that a self can enjoy a state of permanence denied to one who is oozing out his being in a perpetual present. It is for this reason that the speaker is passionately fond of listening to his father's recital of the same story about Joe Breem night after night. It is a palliative to his own unstable plight. Just as fictional in terms of the human reality perpetually unreeling in its "riot of instants" is any attempt to formulate an abstract, theoretical definition of man the unknown in terms of X, that paradigm of human kind, moving at will, complete with joys and sorrows, perhaps even a wife and brats, forbears most certainly, a carcass in God's image and a contemporary skull, but above all endowed with movement, that's what strikes you above all, with his likeness so easy to take and his so instructive soul. . . (ST 108)

He finds the author of Genesis to have been overly generous in this definition of the mutable and degenerating race to which he belongs, a too-facile and flattering definition which belies the perpetual internal and external movement that is an essential characteristic of a being enthralled by time and change.
A field-ego, conceived as the interaction of the human organism and the flow of phenomena from its environment, might more properly be defined by describing its series of tenant egos. Their being can only be approximated without ever reaching the essence of the mysterious core of the self—if it exists. Each of these temporary tenants attains stable life by dying away from the evanescent present into the past, leaving the narrator no closer to the clue of his own immediate identity.

And none will wait; he no more than the others, none ever waited to die for me to live in him, so as to die with him, but quick quick all die, saying, Quick quick let us die, without him, as we lived, before it's too late, lest we won't have lived. And this other now, obviously, what's to be said of this latest other, with his babble of homeless mes and untenanted hims, this other without number or person whose abandoned being we haunt, nothing. (ST 134)

As the field evolves, the transient series of present "mes" rapidly become past versions of the field as "hims," and there is no pronoun to fit the present, evolving state of the field self. Furthermore, the field is in no sense controllable by any exertion of will. It is an automatic process by which, in the succession of selves, "all dies so fast, no sooner born," and in the process, "the same things recur, they drive one another out, they draw one another back, no need to know what things." (ST 117) The process—ego is purely "mechanical," like the seasons and the movements of the celestial bodies.

Man's being, therefore, is at the mercy of elements over which he has no control. The narrator once hoped "that with
perseverance I'd get at me in the end." (ST 102) All he has been able to discover thus far is a formless "me, a little dust in a little nook, stirred faintly this way and that by breath straying from the lost without." (ST 102-3) Dust moved about at random by the phenomena impinging on his senses from the fluctuating outer world is all the self he has been able to detect, and he longs to end this comedy of a handful of dust made conscious with a bitter "nostalgia for that slime where the Eternal breathed." (ST 103) The truth of the human condition is that man is made in the image and likeness of dust cruelly afflicted with the disease of consciousness, but assuredly not in the image and likeness of God.

A further complication of the ego-field is the subject-object dilemma whereby the speaker feels that he is "the same old stranger as ever, for whom alone accusative, I exist, in the pit of my inexistence." (ST 91) Unfortunately, the "him" who speaks is always a past, and therefore false state of an unlocatable present "me," trapped in an unutterable time-lag sequence. Hence the bewildering confusion: "he wants me there, with a form and a world, like him, in spite of him, me who am everything, like him who is nothing." (ST 91) The present self is necessarily formless and inexpressible by any current speaking self. Only when past and dead, paradoxically, can the ego-field be immobilized for expression in words. In short, this field is prey to an infinite regression. Yet, none of the past, object
egos "like a vulgar Molloy, a common Malone," (ST 92) have shed the slightest light on the mystery of identity. They have been simply stages in the process of achieving non-existence: ideal and stable non-being. The word-self has lost faith in words breathed out "in the same breath to win and lose," (ST 98) win in the sense of motion toward non-being, and lose in the sense of failure to express the true self.

It's a game, it's getting to be a game, I'm going to rise and go, if it's not me it will be someone, a phantom, long live all our phantoms, those of the dead, those of the living, and those of those who are not born. (ST 98)

The field ego, therefore, is a phantom made of words dissolving in air. Each night there will be a requiem service for the phantom ego who has perished that day, and "prayers will be offered for my soul, as for that of one dead." (ST 99)

The field-ego cannot be expressed adequately in words because, conceived as a receptor of sensory impressions, it is analogous to a bulb-grid news sign on which unrolls in constantly shifting pulsations, "the latest news, in slow letters of light, above Piccadilly Circus, in the fog." (ST 101) The words flowing across the sign do not define the essence of electromagnetism, which has nothing to do with the external phenomena, the world events it records. Neither can the self be defined in terms of the spray of phenomena flowing through its senses and fleetingly recorded there by consciousness. Consequently, the speaker deplores his pseudo-life (or lives) as an equally
meaningless stream of "words, mine was never more than that, than
this pell-mell babble of silence and words, my viewless form
described as ended, or to come, or still in progress." (ST 104)
His only hope is to "hit on the right ones, the killers,"
(ST 105) that will finish the absurd process of trying to babble
being into existence when it lacks any evidence of an essence in
the first place. In addition, the only words available to the
speaker are the words invented to express outmoded concepts
derived from the idea of being as divisible into space and time
components. He protests that there are "no souls, or bodies, or
birth, or life, or death, you've got to go on without any of that
junk, that's all dead with words, with excess of words." (ST 125)
Being, as a field process in constant interaction, is not
artificially divisible. The self has no parts like a machine
fully assembled and smoothly functioning. The last alternative
is that the speaker must simply postulate a self: "I'm here,
that's all I know, and that it's still not me, it's of that the
best has to be made." (ST 90) The only way out of such a
dilemma is to assume a definitive, if undefinable, identity and
let it go at that. Let the universe writhe in the absurd grip
of light, but let a human constant be assumed which is provi-
sionally stable.

At the outset, the speaker dimly realizes that the space-
time variance revealed by relativity theory is the basic cause of
the variance and indeterminacy of the ego. Only its past states
are invariant. The problem is the present, where "all mingles, times and tenses, at first I only had been here, now I'm here still, soon I won't be here yet." (ST 78) Again, the "I" is in a state of continual flux, and there is no privileged observer freed from the relativity variance of space-time. Measurement of duration depends on the relative state of motion, and since the state of motion and the changing states of the "I" are indeterminate, so also its judgment of space-time variance. The speaker lays his inability to achieve a satisfactory version of his variant self to space-time relativity. He confesses that he would willingly join in the hunt for a stable identity "if it could be here and now, how is it nothing is ever here and now?" (ST 102) Space-time is in a constant flux of "heres" and "nows." Equally so is the self locked into an "infinite here" (ST 102) which is perpetually changing. The speaker speculates that only to an observer on the star Sirius, 8.8 light-years distant in space, would his perpetual space-time motion seem "short and easy." (ST 107) It is not so to one condemned to suffer the changes resulting from unavoidable motion. Whom can he have offended "to be punished in this inexplicable way, all is inexplicable, space and time, false and inexplicable." (ST 113) All the complex interrelationships of masses in space-time velocity involve the ego in its series of refracted, distorted states of being. It appears always to be another being, foreign to the core reality of the ego. Yet, "it's as him I must
disguise myself till I die, for him in the meantime do my best not to live, in this pseudo-sepulture claiming to be his."

(ST 113) This body-tomb is in a constant state of change as is all being in the unpredictable field of space-time curvature which changes "with every plunge and suck of the sky." (ST 113)

All physical and psychic values elude the baffled speaker, who

confusing here and there, now and then, just as I confused them then, the here of then, the then of there, with other spaces, other times, dimly discerned, but not more dimly than now, now that I'm here, if I'm here, and no longer there . . . (ST 120)

Naturally, at any point in his determinations, he is already dealing with a past state. The old notion of a definitive ego located in absolute space and time has disappeared, replaced by an amorphous being extruding in the four-dimensional space-time continuum of Einstein-Minkowski. The concept of "now" in such a continuum is a much more complicated matter than it was in classical theory. There are as many "nows" as there are points in space. The ego no sooner attempts to grasp his being in the "now" state than the split occurs which situates his statement about the self in the past because the speaker has already evolved into a future space-time state. It might be more accurate to say that he has undergone a quantum leap over a time gap. It is little wonder that tenses and pronouns become confused in the speaker's meditations. He is a vibrating wave and not some sort of psychic nuclear essence.
The speaker's ego is a flow phenomenon, not unlike the space-time continuum itself. The ego, which he refers to as "it," resembles "a minute time switch, a second time switch, or it's like a patch of sea, under the passing lighthouse beam, a passing patch of sea under the passing beam." (ST 128) It is as transient as the passage of tiny segments of time, or the movement of the waves under a passing light beam. We have already noted that $X$, in the story, "The End," refers to his ego as a wave. (ST 69)

Here, the speaker refers to himself as perhaps composed, not simply of words, but of a succession of time periods. In addition, his ceaselessly emergent self appears "like the square root of minus one." (ST 128) In Minkowski's interpretation of the relativity of space-time in transforming observations from one inertial frame to another, he introduces a new version of the time variable in the space-time relativity equation:

$$dx^2 + dy^2 + dz^2 - c^2dt^2.$$  

Relativity time, therefore, is $T = ic t$, in which $i$ is the imaginary, the square root of minus one. Since the world-line of the consciousness in space-time is subject to the fluctuating continuum dominated by this imaginary, and since it is itself a variable continuum, then it clearly can never attain a state of absolute finality or certitude.

Consciousness, like all the variable values of space-time, is enslaved to the invariant speed of light, "their gonorrheal light," that of the outer world. (ST 131)

It should also be observed, in passing, that all wave equations are functions of the square root of minus one, and, if
the ego is conceived of as a wave, it is, therefore, doubly the function of the ubiquitous imaginary. It is doubly unreal. In the speaker's futile efforts to define an absolute self, these implications of relativity theory and wave mechanics condemn him to a state of irreducible impermanence. Physical theory, likewise, accounts for the speaker's hatred of the "gonorrheal light" which condemns him to existence in a perpetual, amorphous flux. Therefore, he loves the evening darkness when light and time motion seem to cease, that blessed interval

of time cloyed, resting from devouring, until its midnight meats, I don't know, any more than then, when I used to say, from within, or from without, from the coming night or from under the ground, Where am I, to mention only space, and in what semblance, and since when, to mention also time, and till when, and who is this clot . . . (ST 129)

Time, therefore, is not only the culprit in the indeterminacy of the speaker's ego and its perpetual metamorphoses, but it is the gradual, destructive element in the entropy of the ego in its space-time sarcophagus. Its motion is a dwindling spiral curve toward "an absence less vain than inexistence" in the absurd process of "watching me approach, then watching me recede." (ST 131) Trapped between "two parting dreams," the past and the future, the speaker is fading away in a present "moment for the time being eternal, which is called here." (ST 131) Space-time coalesces and flows away decanting a kind of shadow-ego in a swift recession like a light-wave without any detectable wavelength.
The self suffers from the same species of space-time distortion as the universe—and from the same causes. Man is constantly groping and changing in the fluctuation of the world, halting, without halting, among the elements, the living. Unless it has changed, unless it has ceased. The things too must still be there, a little more worn, a little even less, many still standing where they stood in the days of their indifference. Here you are under a different glass, not long habitable either, it's time to leave it. (ST 81)

The elements and the living, up above in the light, are in constant motion, and, hence, in a constant state of change in the space-time curved continuum, the "glass." Again, light is the villain of the piece. Not only is the ego in its little psychic pit subject to the continuum fluctuations, but the earth and sky, like all the masses in space-time

create the atmosphere. Between them where the hero stands a great gulf is fixed, while all about they flow together more and more, till they meet, so that he finds himself as it were under glass, and yet with no limit to his movements in all directions, let him understand who can, that is no part of my attributions. (ST 97)

The curvature is the effect of the complex fields of force created by the matter of the universe moving with varying velocities in various space-time geodesics. All these forces are interacting and changing constantly, and although the hero, or ego, thinks his movements unlimited, they are not under his control, but under that of his environment. Also, the movement is in one direction only: constant change in the ultimate direction of the entropy gradient toward eternal rest.
In the meantime, the diaphragm ego vibrates constantly in the flow of phenomena through the senses. But the spray of phenomena is not the self. It is a distraction from the hopeless probing for one. One would wish to blot out the meaningless messages penetrating the ego from the outer flux, if only to be born "so as to begin to die." (ST 95) Unable to isolate a self amid the distraction of variant and discordant phenomena, there is no possibility of any willed action. One is condemned to petty velleities. Only if the speaker can suffocate his senses, at least temporarily, can he attain some confused sense of personal being. Otherwise, he is only a jerry-built construct controlled by the outer space-time flux of all being. Aided by such a sensory respite, he might possibly be able to go on speaking "about number one and his pale imitations." (ST 124)

As we have seen, the ego feels itself the victim of space-time. It is this thralldom which prevents it from ever attaining final being and enslaves it to perpetual becoming. Such a state of being can never be finally grasped for utterance. The space-time fusion produces confusion. The speaker is frenziedly trying to locate and extricate his essential self and speed it with all possible speed to oblivion. This is the only way to get the comedy called life over with. Nevertheless, there is the absurd relativity effect to be reckoned with in any attempt to speed the ego toward temporal dissolution, and this is the retardation effect of time measured on inertial systems by
which increase of velocity succeeds only in slowing time. It is a frightful impasse for the self, eager as it is to perish and be done with the misery of endless, futile utterance. Only if it could pick its way out of the psychic labyrinth, could it begin to move towards its end;

it would be the first step on the long travelable road, destination tomb, to be trod without a word, tramp, tramp, little heavy irrevocable steps, down the long tunnels at first, then under the mortal skies, through the days and nights, faster and faster, no, slower and slower, for obvious reasons, and at the same time faster and faster, for other obvious reasons. . . (ST 118)

Relative velocity on moving systems, which here includes the ego moving toward death, retards the space-time measurement of the point-events on the road to interment. At the speed of light—if such a speed were possible for any system, human or otherwise—time would cease moving altogether and the self would be trapped in eternal stasis. Fortunately for the speaker, the ego does move, though slowly, and this motion is some "proof of animation." (ST 130) One can at least hope for eventual death, if there is prior evidence of life, evidence that the speaker of the Texts often finds painfully lacking.

Past states of the ego-field are irrecoverable, since the speaker lacks adequate memory of these states. Hence, he cannot prove that the present "me" represents a state which is moving toward extinction. Yet, he is convinced that the self is in fact "moving, season after season, toward the last, like the living, till suddenly I was there, all memory gone." (ST 112) The ego is asymptotic, moving toward its zero-limit, but is
barely conscious of its motion, and often aware only of a kind of paralysis. It feels trapped and motionless, without any "clear recollection of how things were before (I was!), and by before I mean elsewhere, time has turned into space and there will be no more time, till I get out of here." (ST 112) This is a clear statement of the space-time manifold which cannot attain movement without spatial point-events that will constitute the world-line of the ego. Lacking point-events to force the present into the past, and recalling no past point-events to convince the speaker that time has indeed passed, he cannot console himself with the hope of ending his absurd state of becoming. The only possible point-events in his psychic pit are the word-events by which he expresses his impotence and ignorance.

And now here, what now here, one enormous second, as in Paradise, and the mind slow, slow, nearly stopped. And yet it's changing, something is changing, it must be in the head, slowly in the head the ragdoll rotting, perhaps we're in a head, it's as dark as in a head before the worms get at it, ivory dungeon. The words too, slow, slow, the subject dies before it comes to the verb, words are stopping too. (ST 82)

Should the words stop, then the ego will feel imprisoned in an eternal second without the slightest movement to mark time. The "others," his past selves, his derivatives, have all vanished from memory. Were he able to remember them, they would at least convince him of the existence of past states through which he had moved into his present apparent stasis, encouraging him to continue despite the imperceptibility of his movement toward dissolution.
The speaker is simultaneously dying and being born without a previous existence having ended or the next properly begun. Somehow, he believes that the being now evolving is mysteriously himself,

and ceasing to be what is more, then quickening my step, so as to arrive before the next onslaught, as though it were on time I trod . . . (ST 119)

The speaker's being is an endless creation which dissolves into non-being before it can be known and expressed. Not only does he lack personal certainty of his own being, but he also sees no evidence that external observers are aware he exists, "except possibly on the part of certain hearse-horses, in spite of their blinkers and strict funereal training, but perhaps I flatter myself." (ST 119) This, of course, refers to the story, "The Expelled," when an earlier version of X watched a funeral cortege passing in which "the horses were farting and shitting as if they were going to the fair." (ST 16) In the speaker's opinion, even this display is not an absolutely reliable cognizance of his existence, however appropriate to his psychic condition such behavior may have seemed at the time.

Having considered the nature of the process-ego and the effects of a relativity universe on the speaker's state of being, there remains to be considered the abortive attempts of the speaker to find himself and some of the causes of their failure. Quite possibly, reasons the speaker, his present state might be comprehensible if he were able to reconstruct not only all of
his own past states, but also the total world-line of the cosmos itself back to the point where the space-time manifold began its warping of existence.

And if I went back to where all went out and on from there, no, that would lead nowhere, never led anywhere, the memory of it has gone out too, a great flame and then blackness, a great spasm and then no more weight or traversable space. (ST 87)

This suggests a capsule history of the universe from the explosion of the Lemaître super-photon to the ultimate state of cosmic entropy and the consequent disappearance of space-time, the force that is responsible for the ceaseless warping of all being, including that of the speaker's ego. Having traced existence back to its primordial origins, all the speaker would have to do until the end of time would be to "dribble on here till time is done, murmuring every ten centuries, It's not me, it's not true, it's not me, I'm far." (ST 87) The ego at each interval would be vastly different, whatever the segment of time arbitrarily chosen for the point-event murmur. However, since memory scarcely exists, past states are virtually irrecoverable. Again, without a reliable memory of past point-events, the speaker has an intolerable sense of perpetual stasis.

Another solution to the problem of being is, of course, the invention of stories in which one's fictive ego-constructs live and act. Yet, he is forced to admit that

all is false, there is no one, it's understood, there is nothing, no more phrases, let us be dupes, dupes of every time and tense, until it's done, all past and done, and the voices cease, it's only voices, only lies. (ST 85)
These inventions no longer serve to distract the speaker from the central focus of his meditation. Their only useful function is to create a series of point-events inside the psychic pit, to force time onward, to "get something to happen here, someone to be here, then put an end to it, have silence." (ST 89)

The very idea that a creation occurred at all is a ludicrous assumption. Though church-goers like Mr. Joly, the clock-winding bell-ringer, may believe in the harmony of the creator's clock-work cosmos and in a concept of absolute regular time, "here at least none of that, no talk of a creator and nothing very definite in the way of a creation. Dry, it's possible, or wet, or slime, as before matter took ill." (ST 83)

The speaker finds being indeterminate primarily because chaos was never really transformed into cosmos. Breathing a living soul into the slime of the earth did nothing but infuse the disease of human consciousness into matter, which, before that calamity, was unaware of its amorphousness. Furthermore, man's physical being is subject to the laws of matter, the very nature of which modern physics has been unable to fathom thus far.

A fortiori, the speaker's research into his spiritual essence. His voice constructs an auditory "I" which is about as substantial as the tracks left by a breeze fluttering tree leaves. He wishes only to abandon his abortive attempts and to "get out of here and go elsewhere, go where time passes and atoms assemble an instant." (ST 138) No, nowhere in the plasmic flux of Beckett's universe can any atoms cohere, whether material or psychic.
If the speaker were able to formulate an ego, even for an instant, he thinks that he might then be delivered from his meaningless stories and words, begin a life which would unfold in order to exhaust his existence. Up to now he feels he has wasted his time, since "a story is not compulsory, just a life, that's the mistake I made, one of the mistakes, to have wanted a story for myself, whereas life alone is enough." (ST 93) However, since the field-ego is a variant, how can it attain the degree of stability necessary for it to live an orderly life in an unruly space-time continuum? The problem is insoluble. The whole process is senseless.

I see what it is, the head has fallen behind, all the rest has gone on, the head and its anus the mouth, or else it has gone on alone, all alone on its old prows, slobbering its shit and lapping it back off the lips like in the days when it fancied itself. (ST 123)

Uttering a self in words is, therefore, a process of excretion of what is no longer oneself, or any part of oneself. The only excuse for continuing the absurd process is that, like Unnamable, one may chance on the right words, the words that may liberate.

The speaker finally renounces the possibility of ever knowing himself and reaches the point of "the extinction of this black nothing." (ST 139) His phase-like ego is impenetrable, and the last text bids farewell to the "last images, end of dream, of being past, passing and to be, end of lie." (ST 139) Absurdly enough, the lie continues to be murmured by the reptilian creatures of How It Is.
In *How It Is* Beckett seems more determined than ever to abort traditional fictional form in his desperate effort to depict psychic chaos. For all practical purposes, the narrator is refining himself out of existence. Sentence structure and punctuation have disappeared, replaced by one- to fifteen-line versets composed of short phrases. In a word, the book is written in discrete, quantized spurts of words. Its form thus mirrors the kind of quantum discontinuity Beckett sees as the ultimate reality of being. The truth the book strains to express might, in fact, exist less in the phrase-spurts than in the white space separating the versets: becoming and not being is all that exists in the psychic as well as the material cosmos, and becoming is inexpressible. Logically, Beckett's next contribution to the asymptotic novel series might be composed of random single words, followed by one using random letters of the alphabet, and concluded by an untitled book of blank pages.

*How It Is* is not a novel, but rather a series of random ruminations that might possibly become worksheets for a novel if the author thought it worth the effort of laboriously backing and filling to bridge the abysses separating the recorded scraps of experience. But this would be to falsify Beckett's essential vision of the immense emptiness of all human experience. A man can only recapture small bits of the experiences that constitute his self, but never enough to construct an ordered self. Indeed,
the whole enterprise of introspection in *How It Is* resembles an attempt to reconstruct the total evolutionary history of some unknown paleolithic mammal from a few splinters of jaw-bone. Perhaps a better analogy to describe the apparent incoherence of this bewildering work would be the labor of reconstructing a coherent public speech, given a bag filled with small, scissored bits of electronic tape, many of which a cyclone whirled away while the author was attempting to stuff them into the bag for the listener (reader) subsequently to piece together. Of all the maddening messes Beckett has thus far concocted to depict the cosmic mess, this book is by far the most maddening.

*How It Is* records the efforts of a naked humanoid to achieve a definitive, essential self. Very simply, a narrator named Bom or Bem crawls in a zig-zag pattern from west to east through a world of liquid mud toward a being named Pim. Bom then tortures Pim into speech in order to annex for himself the history of Pim's life experiences "above in the light." Garbled in transmission and only partly understood by Bom, there are, however, enough scraps of a life story to constitute a pseudo-self. Finally, the narrator named Bom or Bem or pseudo-Pim, having gained pseudo-existence, in turn lies supine in the liquid mud waiting for his own torturer to crawl to him and extort the next ego-version.

There are several preliminary observations to be made about this fable. In the first place, however variously named,
the multitude of monosyllabically labeled egos are all cross-sectional versions of a single ego-field, ceaselessly flowing in a tubular space-time world line. Secondly, every man lives two lives: his false, everyday public life "above in the light," and the life of tortured introspection which is the subject of How It Is. Thirdly, any attempt to form a self out of one's past experiences is thwarted by the inevitable time-lag between past and present reality. The stream of consciousness is constantly negated by the flow of time. Even though the repetition of key phrases throughout the book indicates that there is some sort of ego-continuity as a sub-stratum for the procession of Boms, Bems, and Pims, the only apparent constant linking these slices of the field is that of entropy. Each ego-version is a substantially diminished fragment of any prior version. Yet, the narrator longs for a world of stable being, free from the relativistic writhings of space-time and of the discontinuities of the quantized ego,

and if it is still possible at this late hour to conceive of other worlds

as just as ours but less exquisitely organized (H 143)

Consciousness, in this "exquisitely organized" world, is enslaved to the space-time interval, Minkowski's famous \( \text{ict} \), and it is therefore rendered imaginary and absurd, a function of the square root of minus one. Furthermore, consciousness is crawling a chevron-like course in its west to east world-line. This crawl, therefore, is a wave motion, and equations of all wave phenomena
include the square root of minus one, the ubiquitous imaginary. The final preliminary observation is this: if the ego is conceived as a mass-point in wave motion, then a Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle dominates the psychic field of consciousness. We have seen that a micro-physical particle in wave motion can be localized no more precisely than its wave length. All that can be ascertained about its position is that it is situated somewhere within the wave. For all practical purposes, its space-time position is uncertain, rendering indeterminate any history of this, or any other elementary particle. Under these conditions, therefore, any attempt of Beckett's latest narrator to pin-point his ego-essence is metaphysically impossible—as the narrator himself finally admits at the end of Part III.

Before considering the nature of the pseudo-ego which Bom extorts from Pim, it will be necessary first to describe the repetitive and entropic spiral of ego extraction in its four stages, as well as the conviction of the narrator that the process is a kind of terrestrial damnation. The first stage, Part I, shows Bom crawling his chevron course toward Pim. Bom is without an ego at this point because Bom has just finished torturing it out of him and appropriating it for himself. In Part II Bom reaches the supine Pim and extorts his ego using eight stimuli: 1) nail in armpit (sing), 2) blade of can-opener in buttocks (speak), 3) thump on skull (stop), 4) pestle on kidney (louder), 5) index in anus (softer), 6) clap athwart buttocks (bravo),...
7) thump on skull (lousy), 8) same as one or two. In the last section, Part III, Pim, in his turn, emptied of being, crawls off wave-like to find his victim. In the meantime, Bom awaits his torturer, Bem. While he waits, he speculates on the absurd process of ego-extraction and the causes operating to frustrate introspection. The wave nature of all being is, as we have seen, a major cause of the indeterminacy, and the narrator finally denies any credibility to the fable he is uttering. Like all constructs, the extorted ego is false to the complexity of reality. The only way out of the dilemma is simply to postulate an ego. The narrator, however, cannot. The entire tale of ego extraction and absorption he finally confesses to have been "all balls from start to finish yes this voice quaqua yes all balls yes only one voice here yes mine yes." (H 144-5)

The ceaseless, larval flow of consciousness makes life a terrestrial hell, as shown by the allusions to Dante's Inferno in Part I. In the Purgatorio, Canto IV, Belacqua is condemned to repeat his temporal existence only once, in contrast to the narrator of How It Is, who is condemned to extort and utter his life repeatedly, but with this difference, that each version is an entropic fragment of each prior version, an absurd and impossible attempt to "divide into three a single eternity." (H 24) Wondering about the efficacy of prayer for the damned, the narrator sees no answer other than "in the rectum a redhot spike that day we prayed no further." (H 37) There is here, in
addition, a veiled reference to the adulterous love of Paulo and Francesca in the Inferno, Canto V, when, inflamed by the story of Lancelot's romance, they read no further that day. Like the uncommitted souls in outer hell (Inferno, Canto III) who have never properly achieved human existence, the narrator feels himself the prey of endless process, "only not so warm joy and sorrow those two their sum divided by two and luke like in outer hell." (H 43) Near the end of Part I, the narrator reflects on his process existence and concludes that there is no alternative but to "abandon hope" of achieving being. (H 46) The earth is an "Erebus" and its true philosopher is Heraclitus the Obscure with his doctrine of a world composed of fire, a world of perpetual dialectical process. (H 34) Were Bom able to attain any kind of stasis, even that of hell, he would not be tempted into the slightest motion ever again, not even to raise a finger "to be wafted straight to Abraham's bosom I'd tell him to stick it up." (H 38)

The narrator frequently erupts into scatological outbursts of hatred against the absurdity of existing as a human process without origin, end, or purpose. The "vast stretch of time" phrase-motif recurs throughout the book because there is scarcely any periodicity of events to make time appear to move, aside from minimal events such as the symmetric crawl, the breathing, the extorted words. Bom feels that he is a kind of "breath-clock" with "time sucked down spewed up." (H 19) Bom speculates
if this so-called mud were nothing more than all our shit yes all if there are not billions of us at the moment and why not the moment there are two there were yes billions of us crawling and shitting in their shit (§ 52)

Obviously, there could be billions of alter-egos in the monstrous, reptilian world-line tube of selves, depending on the thinness of the space-time cross-sections. Each ego-segment drags along an identical gunny-sack of canned fish for food to continue the absurd extrusion of discrete selves. The nonsense of existing as a mere food- and fecal-tube parallels that of the imaginary ego-series which is forced to transmit the latest news of its fictive existence from one segment to the next like a "faery who drinks that drop of piss of being and who with his last gasp pisses it to drink the moment it's someone each in his turn." (§ 152)

This is a powerful image of disgust at the prospect of ego-decantation, picturing the evolving self in terms of human waste.

Yet, the procession of selves is non-cyclic and discontinuous.

It is, rather, a

procession advancing in jerks or spasms like shit in the guts till one wonders days of great gaiety if we shall not end one after another or two by two by being shat into the open air the light of day the regimen of grace (§ 124)

In all this discontinuous process there is observable no order, aside from perpetual motion. Field-consciousness is simply a form of psychic diarrhea.

Process existence in How It Is embraces four phases constantly repeated in the entropic spiral: crawling,
torturing, waiting, and suffering. The two stages of torturing and waiting represent attainment of a fragmentary selfhood; the two stages of crawling and suffering represent a loss of selfhood. Nevertheless, the narrator dimly realizes that the trinity of selves named Bem, Bom, and Pim is, in reality, but a single quintessential, unattainable self that remains unfathomable despite the most exquisite torture of introspection. "Bem is therefore Bom or Bom Bem and the voice quaqua from which I get my life these scraps of life in me when the panting stops of three things one." (H 113) The names are simply fictive personifications for what is essentially nameless.

The world-line of the self in space-time is like an extrusion of worms gradually shrinking in size, separate, but at the same time mysteriously linked, a "migration of slime-worms then or tailer latrinal scissiparous frenzy days of great gaiety." (H 112) Furthermore, in quantum theory observations of micro-states always disturbs the system being observed, as is obviously the case in introspection when a subject-self attempts to probe his object-self and record the findings with any kind of precision. The narrator is nothing but a voice-construct: "I am an instant that old ever dwindling little that I think I hear of an ancient voice quaqua on all sides." (H 108) The ego is composed of dwindling waves of sound-energy quanta, little packets of ever-fading being. There is, in effect, no essence at all. Therefore, Bom or Bem quite properly observes: "I'II
never have a past never had." (H 54) Even such a simple obser-
vation about whether or not he still has his sack of canned goods
in his hand suffers from the familiar time-lag: "I am right I
was right." (H 55)

Like his ancestor Unnamable, who feels that one can't
go on but does go on nevertheless, Bom dimly realizes that,
however "one" manages to crawl on, it is never the same "one." In
addition, as Bom tortures Pim's ego out of him and absorbs the
words that lend him transient being, he wonders "when Pim stops
what becomes of me." (H 90) Do Pim's pauses and silences
represent holes in being? Perhaps what is needed for perfect
continuity of being is one interminable word. Sleep, with its
temporary lapse of consciousness, is the narrator's sole comfort.
The ultimate comfort, of course, would be ideal non-existence:

a little less is all one begs
a little less of no matter what no matter how no matter
when a little less of to be present past future and
conditional of to be and not to be (H 38)

The only sense in continuing the process is to bring it to an end
at last.

Bom defines human nature as a precarious clinging to
one's species through the tenuous medium of words: "a word from
me and I am again . . . a fart fraught with meaning issuing
through the mouth." (H 26) A self made up solely of a word field
means that silence within one's consciousness is non-being. One
must continually recreate oneself in words in order to bring
about dissolution, to "make it work my undoing forever." (H 94) The word-quanta ego, "Pim's then quaqua of us all then mine alone . . . nothing but short waves three hundred four hundred yards per second." (H 94) Thus, the self is a provisional, perpetually collapsing construct of waves enduring only as long as the speed of sound at mud level. What is worse, the ego-construct is badly flawed by the fact that the words composing it are only "bits and scraps ten seconds fifteen seconds ill-heard ill-murmured ill-recorded my whole life a gibberish garbled six-fold." (H 134) This, then, is the confused anti-ego transmitted down the great chain of non-being that is Bom's fleeting consciousness. "Pim quick after Pim before he vanishes never was only me me Pim how it was before me with me after me how it is quick." (H 105) But the words cannot be uttered fast enough to describe any state of the consciousness field.

Even if utterance were able to reach the speed of consciousness, say the speed of light, for instance, it would still fail to recapture "my life last state" and would have to be content with a problematic "present formulation." (H 7, 8) Only a "millionth part" (H 15) of that myth that purports to be a life can ever be formulated in words, and only a perpetual memory lapse can lend an air of truth to the ego myths which "maintain us in some kind of being without end." (H 139) Outside observers cannot assure Bom's being because they can glimpse the facade of the human specimen at only one stage of its existence,
and their versions of his being would be, therefore, no more faithful to the evolving reality of his life than a taxidermist's trophy mounted on a wall. Human consciousness is doomed to a limitless regression going from "bad to worse bad to worse steadily." (H 9)

Bom does manage to gather a few scraps of his past life in the light above. In infancy he fouled his crib. As a child he delighted in scissoring butterflies' wings. He recalls being forced by his mother to recite the creed. His next "scene" at the age of sixteen is that of a gambol in the fields with a girl and a dog. The next memory fragment is that of being drunk with his foot wedged in an elevator cage. Next, he has a confused recollection of the illness and suicide of a wife he calls Pam Prim. At a much later period, when he is fifty, sixty, or eighty years old, he recalls the sound of a wagon and hooves late at night during harvest time. No coherent life history can be constructed out of these discrete segments of his consciousness. Furthermore, even these fragmentary scenes become progressively less specific in detail in the first two parts of the book, and by the third, Bom can recall no more "scenes" and concentrates exclusively on the temporal flow of consciousness.

The ego itself is split into four functions. Bom-subject tortures Pim-object under the scrutiny of a witness named Kram and a recorder named Krim. Since all these functions are subject to the same process of flux, the narrator gives them dynastic numbers. Kram the Ninth, for instance, is the greatest of the
dynasty because he has had the good fortune to have gone insane. (H 83) It is clear that if the individual ego is an illusory field of fluctuation, then human history in its totality is as unreliable a record of man's being and doing, as is *How It Is.* Being is nothingness somehow subsisting in space and time, and each human being a "tenement of naught from top to bottom."

M (H 36)

Bom neither hears nor understands his own murmurings clearly. Because of "so many words lost," (H 95) together with the virtual unintelligibility of those that do get through, there is little to choose between the state of word-being and the state of nothingness during the silences. In any case, all the persona are fraudulent. There is "no Pim no Bom I alone my voice no other it leaves me I leave me it comes back to me I come back to me."

(H 95) Names assigned to the ego-segments are arbitrary. Imprisoned somewhere in the middle of these fictive creatures is the real "me." The order is "Bom then me and Pim me in the middle." (H 114) There is no true self. The self is "all imagination."

We have already seen that the wave motion of the crawling and the Einsteinian interval affecting all periodic processes, including consciousness, are functions of the square root of minus one and are therefore imaginary in the mathematical sense. Likewise, the world-line of the chevron crawl is the hypotenuse of an isosceles right triangle and is therefore an incommensurable,
a surd. Significantly, it is precisely the motion appropriate to an absurd world of relativity distortion and quantum indeterminacy. Because of this wave motion in space-time of both the crawling and the sound, a kind of quantum discontinuity infects all phenomena, leaving the narrator unable to detect any continuity of states: "here all discontinuous journey images torment even solitude . . . all discontinuous save the dark the mud." (H 126) Yet, however indeterminate, all the selves are mysteriously glued together in a continuum that can never achieve stable being. Only contiguous versions of the self are knowable, more or less, and any knowledge of oneself becomes progressively more unreliable in direct ratio to the space-time distance into the past of the field, in addition to the previously noted unreliability of transmission and reception during the torture process. In short, the ego is nothing more than a "rumor transmissible ad infinitum in either direction." (H 120) When any ego of the series describes one member of the chain to any other, "he is merely in fact describing himself to two lifelong acquaintances." (H 120) So much for self-knowledge when the ego is conceived as a tubular space-time world-line where "we are one and all from the unthinkable first to the no less unthinkable last glued together in a vast imbrication of flesh without breach or fissure." (H 140)

The only observable constant, besides the wave motion through the mud, is that of entropy, such that over the "centuries I can see me quite tiny the same as now more or less
only tinier quite tiny." (H 17) Poor transmission and reception of the word-ego construct insure that each version of the field is only two-fifths accurate each time it is formulated. Thus, if Beckett continued How It Is beyond three parts, each successive repetition of ego discovery would be reduced in authenticity by sixty percent in an asymptotic approach to total non-being. Note the following closed system of four ego-versions extorting an ever dwindling life history and pseudo-essence. Each absorbs a differently fragmented and diminished ego-version from its respective victim. Obviously, the four could be a million or a billion. (H 117-18)

1 tortures 2 to attain #2 ego
2 tortures 3 to attain #3 ego
3 tortures 4 to attain #4 ego
4 tortures 1 to attain #1 ego

Consequently, all the versions of the field ego in this series absorb discrete fragments of the same ego. All become part of the ego series transmissible up and down the chain. In principle, therefore, one variously mutilated history of a self pervades this, or any similar series, regardless of its extent in space-time. It should be clear from the chart how the various versions gradually become more and more attenuated as time passes.

The ego, conceived as an unlocalizable micro-particle within its accompanying wave, is a discontinuous function in space-time by analogy with quantum mechanics. Besides conceptions
of the self that suggest quantum theory, the mystery of the self is compounded by the relativity of space-time which unimaginably warps and writhes in order to preserve the constant velocity of light. The wave-ego exhibits similar distortions as it unceasingly flows and changes at the mercy of space-time variance. This is a major reason for the constant references to a life lived in the light, and the references to time in terms of outer-world days, that is, to time as measured by planetary motion in contrast to psychic time as measured by introspection. It is significant that the narrator speculates on the source of "my notions of mathematics astronomy and even physics they have marked me that's the main thing." (H 41) Indeed they have. This, of course, is not to say that physical theory has enabled the narrator to fathom any mysteries of being--his own or any other. If anything, modern physical theories serve as a Q.E.D. for chaos on all levels of existence. Relativity theory, for instance, solves no mysteries of space and time for the puzzled narrator, who "always understood everything except for example history and geography," (H 41) or, in other words, time and space.

Psychic time exhibits a discontinuity parallel to that of the ego, in contrast to the illusion of continuity which time appears to have in the commonsense world of clocks and planetary rotation. Inside Bom's dark psyche time is capable of inexplicable quantum leaps by which "my days my nights my seasons
and my feasts it says Lent everlasting then of a sudden Hallowmas
no summer that year if it is the same." (H 17) Somehow, in the
meantime, Bom's cans of fish also are inexplicably halved.

Needless to say, Bom's consciousness similarly shrinks during the
time-gap. On the other hand, time sometimes grinds by so slowly
that Bom speculates whether his psychic day is not really a
"compact of a thousand days." (H 39) Given such abrupt
acceleration and retardation, Bom finds no use for Pim's wrist-
watch, suggesting as it does an absolute regularity of time, and
he resolves to "count no more the unforgiving seconds measure no
more durations and frequencies." (H 59) Experience in the
psychic pit give the lie to assumptions of uniform periodicity.
A more accurate gauge of discontinuous, real time would be the
clock-wise dartings of a humming-bird, "the humming-bird known as
the passing moment." (H 103) It is such irregular spurts of
time quanta that are responsible, in large measure, for the
discontinuous consciousness.

Space-time becomes increasingly vague in How It Is, and
Bom-Pin finds "all measures vague yes vague impressions of
length length of space length of time vague impressions of
brevity between the two." (H 51) As in relativity theory, the
narrator senses the close bond uniting space and time, something
quite foreign to the regular rhythm of solar time, "the time that
means to those under whom and all above and all about the earth
turns and all turns." (H 106) Psychic time can move variably
when Bom induces periodic breath-events and word-events. However, though these events force time to seem to pass, they themselves leave little or no trace of their passage. Bom recalls little of Pim's extorted life history except the "few minutes on and off added up vast stretch eternity same scale of magnitude nothing there almost nothing." (H 104) Time flowing into eternity is an obliterator of all but a vague sense of interminable duration. In its passing, time confuses tense sequences in the consciousness, the "various times before during after vast tracts of time." (H 107) Perhaps the changes time works on the voices of Bom, if they are not simply tricks of the imagination or lapses of memory, really occur because the voice is "recordings on ebonite," (H 107) like Krapp's life history tapes. A confusion in the order of the records might then account for the discontinuous series of voices and times.

Bom's concept of time shifts in such a way as to affect all other concepts he has, including that of the self and the sack of fish cans. One change in a value of the field affects all other values. For Bom, the conventional time denoted by "day" means nothing: "hear day say day murmur it don't be ashamed as if there were an earth a sun." (H 110) Even the sack he drags seems to change in the inexorable slippages of time. So also, the narrator reflects on the three tenses that comprise his life, "the three lives the life you had the life you have the life you'll have." (H 129) The first two versions fade almost
instantly, while the third is a non-existent. Man's transient life is a summation of unreliable data composed of "refreshing alternations of history prophesy and latest news." (H 129)

Since point-events in the form of words fail to move time uniformly, and since it seems propelled by an irrational dynamic of its own, perhaps it would be advisable to curse God, and like Robert Ingersoll, note the time and wait for the punishing bolt from heaven as a final solution. Instead, Bom wearily resumes his chevron course toward Pim, aware that

I can't have deviated more than a second or so from the direction imparted to me one day one night at the inconceivable outset by chance by necessity by a little of each it's one of the three from west strong feeling from west to east (H 40)

His wave-like impetus across the world-line of his inertial motion leaves behind in its muddy westward wake that multitude of larval selves slain by time, and the ego of Bem-Bom-Pim continues the absurd generation of quasi-imaginary wave-selves, no sooner generated than aborted.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Brother I. Pius has been read and approved by members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

21 May 1971

Signature of Advisor