

Malone Dies and the Beckettian Mimesis of Inexistence

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In his study of narrative, Peter Brooks derives the convention of plot from “the problem of temporality: man’s time-boundedness, his consciousness of existence within the limits of mortality” (xi). As its title suggests, perhaps no novel is more unremittingly concerned with “existence within the limits of mortality” than *Malone Dies*. From his first sentence, Malone, the eponymous first person narrator, foregrounds the inevitability of death: “I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all” (179). But in narrating his own elapsation (“My time is limited” 197), Malone replaces the convention of plot (which concerns a temporal sequence of events tending toward some terminus or end) with the convention of “programme” (269) whose function, unlike that of plot, is not causal but diversionary: “While waiting I shall tell myself stories, if I can” (180).¹ This shift from plot to programme has profound implications. For human temporality or, in Brooks’s phrase, “existence within the limits of mortality,” is now “freed from all responsibility” (231) concerning action and consequence or “cause and effect” (240) in life. In the Beckettian universe, as formulated in *Malone Dies*, the only valid or relevant concern is “[t]o be dead . . . and never have to die any more, from among the living” (264). Here existence is construed as the state of “mortal tedium” (217) endured while the subject “wait[s], before he die[s], for his body to be dead” (198).

But the great paradox of Beckettian mimesis is that the obverse of its reduction of life to the waiting for death is the reduc-

tion of death to the continuation of life: "There is naturally another possibility . . . and that is that I am dead already and that all continues more or less as when I was not" (219). Like the maxima and minima in Beckett's analysis of Bruno ("The maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent" [DBVJ 6]), life and death ultimately coincide: "till you begin to wonder if you have not died without knowing and gone to hell or been born again into an even worse place than before" (MD 227). Like Molloy's different "regions" which "gradually merge into one another" (*Molloy* 65), life and death, for Malone, lose their respective distinctness: "The truth is, if I did not feel myself dying, I could well believe myself dead . . . (183). As Leslie Hill observes, "Living and dying, like extremes, converge to erase all that may have taken place between their confines. . . ." (101). Angela Moorjani concurs: "Throughout the novel . . . it is uncertain whether Malone awaits death or birth" (120). Hence, "existence within the limits of mortality" (Brooks's phrase again) becomes existence without the limits of mortality: "And there comes a time when nothing more can happen and nobody can come and *all is ended but the waiting that knows itself in vain*" (MD 241; emphasis mine).

The result of this predicament is a detemporalizing of time, wherein time continues but without the succession of before and after which is its defining property: "And perhaps he has come to that last 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" (MD 233). Here, to invoke formulations in *How It Is*, it is "the same instant always everywhere" (HII 112), an undifferentiated duration where "all the various times before during after" (HII 107) merge in the same "vast tracts of time" (HII 107), bereft of "subdivisions" (HII 95). Similarly, the Unnamable, who can "understand nothing about duration" (UN 407), observes that "the seconds must all be alike and each one is infernal . . ." (UN 395). Malone expands this notion of the relentless continuity of time to include the idea of time continuing beyond the possibility of change proper to temporality: "And the ticking of an invisible alarm clock was as 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 for ever at last" (203). Here time itself becomes timeless, as if, to invoke Vladimir's *mot* in *Waiting for Godot*, "Time has stopped" (WFG 24). For there can be no more change in it, only a static flux. In his reference to "the indestructible chaos of timeless things," Molloy posits a kinetic version of the same condition (*Molloy* 39).

As Malone observes, there are indeed deaths in Beckettian fiction: "How many have I killed, hitting them on the head or setting fire to them?" (236).² But their result is not to end temporal existence, but simply to change the context of its interminable continuity: "Then it will be all over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloyes, Morans and Malones, *unless it goes on beyond the grave*" (236; emphasis mine). Yet, as the narrator of *Texts For Nothing* suggests, in the Beckettian universe posthumous existence ultimately signifies, not the realm of the afterlife, but the death already in life: "dead like the living" (TFN 91). On passing a "graveyard," Moran makes a similar observation: "If only that were the only perpetuity" (*Molloy* 174). At bottom, this death already in life pertains, not to lack of life, but to either (a) lack of desire for life (as in Molloy's "daily longing for the earth to swallow me up" 80) or to (b) lack of clarity concerning why life must be endured, as in Macmann's quandary: "And without knowing exactly what his sin was he felt full well that living was not a sufficient atonement for it or that this atonement was in itself a sin, calling for more atonement, and so on, as if there could be anything but life for the living" (239). But due to what Molloy calls "the well-known mechanism of association" (48), life under these conditions cannot be distinguished from posthumous punishment, as the Unnamable suggests: "I was given a pensum, at birth perhaps, as a punishment for having been born perhaps . . ." (310).³

Existence as Inexistence

This confusing of life and death ("It's vague, life and death" [225]) is aggravated by the construing of death as birth, as when Malone describes himself as "an old foetus" (225), straining toward "birth

into death" (283). But the difficulty of achieving birth into death derives from the prior failure to achieve birth into life, as the Unnamable indicates: "I alone am immortal, what can you expect, I can't get born . . ." (UN 383). Malone concurs: "I shall never get born and therefore never get dead . . ." (225). Hence, at bottom, existence in the Beckettian universe entails a state of "inexistence" exempt from both birth and death: "I exist, in the pit of my inexistence . . ." (TFN 91); "my inexistence in the eyes of those who are not in the know, that is to say all mankind" (UN 344); "orgy of false being life in common brief shames I am not dead to inexistence" (HII 69). Malone construes this condition as an indefinitely prolonged sojourn in "the great cunt of existence" (283). The *Texts* narrator provides a less vulgar formulations: "I'm dead and getting born, without having ended, helpless to begin, that's my life" (TFN 119); "I am dead, but I never lived" (TFN 130). The Unnamable offers a variation on this theme: "Mahood I couldn't die. Worm will I ever get born? It's the same problem" (UN 352).

In the Beckettian mimesis of human experience, the notion of "inexistence," just invoked, progressively displaces the notions of life and death. Thus *Malone Dies* unfolds a dual project. The first is to bring Malone's life to an end through eventual death: "if I succeed in my breathing my last" (235). The second is to debunk, through the narration of his dying, the "ballsaching poppycock about life and death" (225), and replace it with the notion of that third mode of existence: "inexistence."⁴ In the course of this project, life is deanimated ("they will be almost lifeless, like the teller" [180]), and death is vivified: "weary to death one is almost resigned to—I was going to say to the immortality of the soul . . ." (229). In the novel, it is not so much that Malone dies as that a mimetic convention concerning the representation of life is terminated or, more precisely, terminally minimalized.⁵ Through this reduction of life, Beckettian mimesis is enabled to represent a mode of existence unencumbered by antecedent associations or presuppositions. Hence, the purpose of Malone's stories is not merely, as noted earlier, to provide distraction "while waiting" (180) for death: "That's the style, as if I still had time to kill"

(248). The deeper purpose of Malone's stories is not to kill time but to kill or dispose of the "axioms" (187) regarding purpose and appropriate procedure entrained in conventional notions of life and how to live it.⁶

Malone deploys a variety of devices by which to evacuate the notion of life and thus to render accessible the "stratum" (226) of inexistence. In narrating his own decline toward death, Malone emphasizes the lifelessness of the period preceding it ("I have lived in a kind of coma" [183]), and then applies that same condition to everyone: "Coma is for the living" (194). He also undermines the notion of life by obscuring the transition from living to dying: "As to the events that led up to my fainting and to which I can hardly have been oblivious at the time, they have left no discernible trace, on my mind" (183). Malone further obliterates the significance of individual life by indicating that the only distinguishing factor in any life is the time required to end it: "Here lies Malone at last, with the dates to give a faint idea of the time he took to be excused and then to distinguish him from his namesakes, numerous in the island and beyond the grave" (271).

In Malone's stories of the Saposcats, the Lamberts, and Macmann, the same depletion of life occurs. The adult Lamberts are "grown men and women *embedded deep in life*" (199; emphasis mine).⁷ But that life in which they are ensconced is founded on futility: "At the same time angry unanswerable questions, such as, What's the use? fell from her lips" (202). Similarly, the conventions of life pursued by the Saposcats succumb readily to a *reductio ad absurdum*: "The life of the Saposcats was full of axioms, of which one at least established the criminal absurdity of a garden without roses and with its paths and lawns uncared for" (187). The result is another foregrounding of futility: "It was as though the Saposcats drew the strength to live from the prospect of their impotence" (188). The intervals of movement punctuating Macmann's habitual torpor complete the reduction of life to rudimentary movement with merely functional value: "Because in order not to die you must come and go, come and go, unless you happen to have someone who brings you food wherever you happen to be, like myself" (232). The same notion is later ex-

pressed in anal terms: “only rose again when the élan vital or struggle for life began to prod him in the arse again” (243). In *How It Is*, the spasmodic and exhausting movement of Bom and Pim across the vast tracts of mud, “right leg right arm push pull,” is provoked by the identical stimulus: “stab him simply in the arse” (HII 27, 71).

Transcendentals and the Mimesis of Inexistence

As the “axioms” (MD 187) and conventions regarding the significance of life are debunked or decomposed, the mimesis of inexistence emerges. But as this state of inexistence is riddled with paradoxes, an intellectual device is required to facilitate our analysis of it. The device in question concerns what metaphysics calls “transcendentals.” As Calvin Schrag indicates (with reference to Heidegger), these are defined as a priori and necessary conditions of human experience: “The primary structures or universal determinants of existence” (286). As “ontological structures of existence,” transcendentals “are present in the concrete existent, providing its very condition for being . . .” (Schrag 287, 289). As Ernst Cassirer indicates (with reference to Kant), transcendentals are not of “empirical origin” (KLT 151). That is, they are not derived from experience; instead, as Wilhelm Windelband explains, “lying at the basis of all empirical perceptions,” they determine how we experience what we experience, and thus constrain the boundaries and possibilities of subjectivity (2: 539). Since, according to Schrag, the transcendentals, by definition, concern “universal structures of human being as they show themselves in the actualization of existence” (284), each existent is thus, to invoke Paul Tillich, “the door to the deeper levels of reality” which determine the essential form of human “existence itself” (1.62).

There are, of course, many indications in *Malone Dies* of the universality of the experience depicted: “for he was no more than human, than the son and grandson and greatgrandson of humans” (240-41); “you begin to fancy yourself the last of human kind” (253); “it’s only human” (268). But that experience is founded on and discloses distinctly Beckettian transcendentals or “essentially

necessary structures of experience" (Blackham 87) which redefine the meaning of human being. The transcendental emphasis in *Malone Dies*—and indeed in the entire trilogy—appears in the frequent references to the irrelevance and interchangeability of *particular* experience. That is, all particular experiences merge into and express the same unchanging and fundamental condition whose representation is the ultimate task of Beckettian mimesis: "The noises of nature, of mankind and even my own, were all jumbled together in one and the same unbridled gibberish" (207). Molloy affirms the same idea: "And wheresoever you wander, within its distant limits, things will always be the same, precisely" (*Molloy* 66). Through the representation of particular experiences, the Beckettian narrator intends to disclose the primary structures or "laws of the mind" (*Molloy* 13) ordering—or disordering—all experience. In other words, the mimetic aim here in representing distinct experiences is, to interpolate James Edie's words from a different context, to "search for the ultimate, constitutive foundations of experience" (241) in Beckettian terms.

Many critics, of course, have noted the similarity between Beckettian fiction and Husserl's phenomenology, which is founded on the principle of transcendental reduction by which empirical or sensory experience is reduced to its eidetic or formally structuring components: "Everything . . . is essentially prefigured" (Husserl, *Ideas* sect. 135).⁸ But our own concern here is not to offer another phenomenological analysis of Beckett, but to use the concept of transcendentals as a lens by which (if we may transpose Remy Kwant's phrase from a different context) "to disengage the essential core from the accidental" (381) in the Beckettian mimesis of experience. In this regard, one is reminded of Malone's attempt to describe "the Stick, shorn of all its accidents" (254).

Perhaps the quintessential statement in *Malone Dies* concerning the transcendental project to disengage the essential core from the accidental appears in Malone's dictum: "The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness" (197). In an alternate formulation of the same project, Malone emphasizes the relation between (a) the variant experiences narrated in his stories and (b) the unchanging condition of their narrator:

“Shall I be incapable, to the end, of lying on any other subject? I feel the old dark gathering, the solitude preparing, by which I know myself . . .” (189). The transcendental project to disengage the essential core from the accidental is further suggested by Malone’s ultimate enclosure of the external world inside a head that is not his own: “You may say it is all in my head . . . and that these eight, no, six, these six planes that enclose me are of solid bone. But thence to conclude the head is mine, no, never” (221). That is, the basic concern of Beckettian mimesis, at the level now under consideration, is to represent, neither particular objects nor the particular subjects perceiving them, but instead the impersonal and primordial function by which their very conception is constituted.

So far this sounds remarkably close to Paul Ricoeur’s formulation of “transcendental” as that which pertains to “any attempt at relating the conditions of the appearance of things to the structure of human subjectivity” (76). It also recalls Husserl’s characterization of the transcendental standpoint as that which addresses “how objective unities of every region and category ‘are consciously constituted’” (*Ideas* sect. 86) by noetic or psychical processes whose operation is governed by universal principles. But, as we shall now see, far from mimicking the method of transcendental phenomenology to uncover the functions by which structure is constituted or filled in, Beckettian mimesis, as exemplified in *Malone Dies*, seeks instead to represent the “peculiar logic” (276) by which structure and order are drained and evacuated. The result of these “gurgles of outflow” (287) is a drainage of certainty, not a constitution of it. Whereas, according to Husserl, the phenomenological method begins “in absolute poverty, with an absolute lack of knowledge,” and then proceeds “to genuine knowing” (CM 2), Beckettian mimesis represents unremitting “incomprehension” (UN 325), as evident, for example, in Malone’s “inability to grasp what order is meant”: “For I have never seen any sign of any, inside me or outside me (210).

Further—and very brief—reference to phenomenology will enable us to clarify the implications of inexistence in *Malone Dies* and elsewhere in Beckettian fiction, but in a way that contra-

dicts the very principles by which phenomenology defines that mode of being. Husserl developed phenomenology as the science or logical study of the intrinsic and a priori structures of consciousness. The first principle in this regard is that consciousness *intends* or is directed toward an object—something to be conscious of. As Joseph Kockelmans explains, “all consciousness is consciousness-of-something . . .” (32). Husserl elaborates: “Conscious processes are also called *intentional*; but then the word intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness of something; as a *cogito* to bear within itself its *cogitatum*” (emphasis in original; CM 33). For example, to invoke Franz Brentano, “in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love something is loved, in hate something hated, in desire something desired, etc.” (50). Now, the mental being which an object has in the mind or consciousness thinking or intending it is called *inexistence*, a term which Husserl derived from Scholastic philosophy.⁹ Thus, according to the phenomenological paradigm, consciousness *exists* only if objects *inexist* in it.

Beckettian narration develops a spectacular *reductio ad absurdum* of this phenomenological paradigm where, according to Quentin Lauer, “[t]o be is to be given to consciousness” or “to be present in consciousness” (151). For in the Beckettian dispensation, the supreme object inexistent in consciousness concerns the *lack* of objects: that is, the “void” (234) “absence” (222), or “nothing” (192). But if, as Malone claims, “Nothing is more real than nothing” (192) and the pre-eminent object of consciousness is therefore nothing, then consciousness itself cannot be distinguished from a “vacuum” (222): “in my head I suppose all was streaming and emptying away as though through a sluice, to my great joy, until finally nothing remained, either of Malone or of the other” (224). That is, consciousness is no more than the site where nothingness *inexists*. But without relation to objects through intentionality or directedness toward them, consciousness itself loses its defining function. For in phenomenological terms, as Edie notes, in virtue of “the strict correlativity of subject and object in experience,” consciousness is defined through its

relation to the objects toward which it is directed: “the subject is constituted as subject only through its active involvement with the world” (245). A consciousness in which nothing inexists cannot itself exist as consciousness. For it constitutes an “inverting [of] the natural order” (UN 388).

Malone, of course, dismisses the assumption regarding “the strict correlativity of subject and object in experience” (Edie): “the subject falls from the verb, and the object lands somewhere in the void . . .” (234); “I have to look long and fixedly and give things time to travel the long road that lies between me and them” (237). This dissociation of the terms (subject and object) on whose relation the phenomenological notion of consciousness depends is the indispensable first step by which Beckettian mimesis eventually represents a consciousness in which nothing inexists. The project to covert conscious existence into the inexistence of nothing underpins the unrelenting self-consciousness displayed by Malone: “All my senses are trained full on me, me” (186). Here, Malone becomes the object of his own attention, and hence inexists in it. Consistent with phenomenological practice, Malone plans to define himself, through his long delayed “reckoning” (181), as a consciousness *of*—that is, in terms of his relation to the complete “inventory” (251) of objects in his possession: “For only those things are mine the whereabouts of which I know well enough to be able to lay hold of them, if necessary, that is the definition I have adopted, to define my possessions” (249). But in the course of his narrative, Malone loses many of the objects in his possession and the stick with which he brings himself in relation to them: “I would hook the desired object and bring it over to the bed . . .” (250). In becoming the object of his own attention and thus inexisting in that attention, Malone progressively evacuates himself of all content. Hence, his inexistence in his own attention becomes the inexistence of nothing: “never anything there any more” (288).

Brief investigation of Malone’s exercise-book will clarify the implications of this predicament.¹⁰ At first, the book records the object of consciousness (that which inexists in Malone’s mind).

But then Malone’s thinking undergoes a regress such that the

object of thought becomes the *fact* that he has recorded his thought: "I have just written, I fear I must have fallen, etc." (208). The writing records the object of consciousness, but then itself becomes a secondary object of consciousness, while the original object of consciousness becomes irretrievable: "That is not what I said, I could swear to it, that is what I wrote" (209). This situation anticipates that in *The Unnamable* where consciousness exists as the awareness of a voice or articulating consciousness which it repudiates ("It's not I" [UN 410]) but with which it is exclusively concerned: "Ah if only this voice could stop, this meaningless voice which prevents you from being nothing . . ." (UN 370). That is, consciousness exists through the inexistence in it of a prior consciousness which is not its own but through awareness of which it sustains a minimal being. In alternate formulation, the existence of a primary consciousness becomes inexistence in a secondary consciousness which is conscious only of "incomprehension" (UN 325) concerning it.

Provenance of the Mimesis of Inexistence

It is, of course, impossible to derive the Beckettian mimesis of inexistence from any single factor or precursor. But in so far as Beckettian inexistence concerns the absolute isolation of the object of consciousness from the subject in which it inheres or inexists, one source involves Beckett's own early emphasis, in "Bram Van Velde," on the breakdown of the relation between subject and object or "representer and representee" (BVV 125). The same idea is expressed in a miscellaneous piece republished in *Disjecta*, and applied to "The Waste Land":

The artist who is aware of this may state the space that intervenes between him and the world of objects; he may state it as a no-man's land, Hellespont or vacuum, according as he happens to be feeling resentful, nostalgic or merely depressed. A picture by Mr Jack Yeats, Mr Eliot's 'Waste Land,' are notable statements of this kind. (D 70)

Significantly, *Malone Dies* does contain a passage which almost certainly alludes to the situation described in "The Fire Ser-

mon" section of "The Waste Land" (1922), concerning the "violet hour, when the eyes and back / Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits / Like a taxi throbbing waiting. . . . (Eliot 71). Malone's account emphasizes the sudden spasm of release when office workers, "their long day ended" (229), pour into the streets where "[f]or an instant they cluster in a daze, huddled on the sidewalk or in the gutter, then set off singly on their appointed ways" (229-30). Eliot's comparison, in the typist seduction passage, of lustful expectancy to "a taxi throbbing waiting" is echoed—perhaps even parodied—by Malone: "Some even take a cab to get more quickly to the rendez-vous or, when the fun is over, home or to the hotel, where their comfortable bed is waiting for them" (230). Moreover, the frequent testicular references in the trilogy, epitomized by Malone's allusion to "this ballsaching poppycock about life and death" (225), can also—with some discrete stretching—be related to "The Waste Land." For one of the myths underpinning that work concerns the Fisher King, Anfortas, whose land is blighted because of the wound in one of his testicles.

But, as we have seen, unlike "The Waste Land," whose mimetic project, according to Beckett, is to "state the space that intervenes between [the perceiver] and the world of objects," *Malone Dies* withdraws entirely from that world of objects. Ultimately, in a manner recalling the phenomenological *epoche* (abstention or refraining from judgment), that outer world of objects is bracketed and left out of consideration, while the focus instead is trained on inner experience and imagination: "You may say it is all in my head" (221). Hence, the intervening space between subject and object no longer matters. For concern with objective space has been replaced by concern the subjective experience of time: "What tedium" (187); "Mortal tedium" (217); "the waiting that knows itself in vain" (241). In alternate formulation, concern with objective space is replaced by preoccupation with "all that inner space one never sees . . . where thought and feeling dance their sabbath . . ." (*Molloy* 10). The Unnamable elaborates: "How all becomes clear and simple when one opens an eye on the within, having of course previously exposed it to the without, in order to benefit by the contrast" (*DN* 342-43). But inner experience—

what the Unnamable here terms “the within”—is itself problematized by the condition of Beckettian inexistence whereby consciousness is estranged from its own content which then improvises its own existence by obsessively repudiating the consciousness in which it inexists or inheres.

Inexistence and Kenosis

As we have shown, the hallmark of Beckettian mimesis is the representation of the “psychological commotion” (UN 323) by which consciousness is emptied of the content which inexists in it. Moran describes a forerunner of this process: “Yes, I let them spring within me and grow in strength, brighten and charm me with a thousand fancies, and then 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” (*Molloy* 162). The Unnamable refers to another: “if Mahood was telling the truth when he represented me as rid at one glorious sweep of parents, wife, and heirs” (UN 323). In *Malone Dies*, the *locus classicus* for this evacuation is a passage we have already cited in a different context: “in my head I suppose all was streaming and emptying away as though through a sluice, to my great joy, until finally nothing remained, either of Malone or of the other” (224). In later Beckettian texts, such as *The Unnamable*, *Texts For Nothing*, and *How It Is* (“I say it as I here it” [7]), it becomes evident that, once this drainage has occurred, the evacuated content of consciousness sustains its own rudimentary consciousness of the consciousness from which it springs.

The deeper implications of this remarkable evacuation can be explored by reference to the doctrine of the *kenosis* or *evacuatio* (self-emptying), whereby, according to W.H.C. Frend, Christ “voluntarily divested himself of power in submitting to incarnation for the purpose of conquering death and saving man” (210). The doctrine, derived from 2 Cor. 8:9, is epitomized by Aquinas (here quoting Augustine): “He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, that he might become a servant; yet did He not lose the fulness of the form of God” (ST III, 5, 1, ad. 2). Through *kenosis*, as Aloys Grillmeier notes, Christ chose “a mode of existence which

is a concealment of his proper being" (1.21). The purpose of Christ's *kenosis* is to enable the salvation of man through awakening faith in the redemptive power of divine love.

Eventually, the Christological concept of *kenosis* was transposed to the human dimension in order to define religious morality in higher terms. Here the supreme moral project of the individual, in achieving relationship with God, is to evacuate everything within that springs from or expresses the "[h]uman nature" (*Molloy* 35) which each individual shares in common with all members of the species. As Vladimir Lossky explains, "the perfection of the person consists in self-abandonment [*kenosis*]" by which everything within that pertains to the common human nature is expunged, with the result that "[t]he person is free from its nature, is not determined by it" (144, 122). In this liberated state, as Lossky observes, "the person expresses itself most truly in that it renounces to exist for itself," in terms of the drives imposed by human nature, and instead exists for God (144).

Precisely this kind of evacuation of human nature in the individual occurs in *Molloy*, when Moran repudiates his humanity ("I have been a man long enough, I shall not put up with it any more"), and devotes his existence to heeding the inner voice which now addresses him: "I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted" (*Molloy* 175, 176). By the time the trilogy reaches *The Unnamable*, the kenotic evacuation of human nature associated with the audition of the voice includes, as we have seen, the evacuation of the object of consciousness from the consciousness in which it inexists or resides. At this point, we reach an undiscovered stratum of signification in Beckettian fiction. In some way, in virtue of its kenotic associations, the celebrated disjunction of voice and narrator or consciousness and content has redemptive properties, just as did the *kenosis* of Christ. Indeed, *Malone Dies*, the fiction with which we are principally concerned, abounds in allusions to Christ: (a) Macmann's question, "Why two Christs?" (263), (b) Moll's sole remaining tooth carved "to represent the celebrated sacrifice" (264), (c) the "stations" of Sapo's early suffering in life (206), (d) the "crucifix" affixed to the chimney-piece in the Lamberts' home, and (e) Macmann's cruciform

posture in the rainstorm: "His hands at the ends of the long-outstretched arms clutched the grass, each hand a tuft, with as much energy as if he had been spread-eagled against the face of a cliff" (239).

There is no intention here of linking the notion of *kenosis* with a devoutly Christian interpretation of *Malone Dies* in particular or Beckettian fiction in general.¹¹ Indeed, Malone repudiates "the consolations of some religion or other" (248), and the Unnamable mocks "belief in God" (UN 343). Moreover, the blasphemous strain in Beckett's art very early achieved notoriety, beginning with the attempt of the defense attorney, during the Gogarty-Sinclair libel trial in 1937, to discredit Samuel Beckett (witness for the plaintiff) by citing, according to James Knowlson, a passage from *More Pricks Than Kicks* (published in 1934) as a "blasphemous caricature of Jesus Christ" (DTF 279). A far more vulgarly blasphemous example occurs in the defecation scene in "First Love," where Beckett boldly oversteps the decorum displayed by the Joycean narrator when describing Leopold Bloom's bowel movement in the "Calypso" chapter of *Ulysses*:

At such times I never read, any more than at other times, never gave way to revery or meditation, just gazed dully at the almanac hanging from a nail before my eyes, with its chromo of a bearded stripling in the midst of sheep, Jesus no doubt, parted the cheeks with both hands and strained, heave! ho!, with the motions of one tugging at an oar, and only one thought in my mind, to be back in my room and flat on my back again. (FL 15)

As the above passage suggests, Beckettian fiction offers a scatological interpretation of *kenosis* or "evacuation" (UN 349), not a Christian one. There's only "shit" (UN 365) in the head: "fucking awful business this" (UN 282). The thoughts and feelings which inexist in consciousness are to be evacuated (to borrow a phrase from *Watt*) like a "hard stool" (W 251). That is perhaps the psychological origin of the mimetic *kenosis* we have examined, wherein the Beckettian narrator (whether named or anonymous) is represented in terms of inexistence: in terms, that is, of an object of consciousness, a swarm of thoughts, dissociated from the consciousness in which it inexists or resides.¹² The primary Beckettian

analogue of this predicament is that of words or voice dissociated from the mouth from which they issue:

‘There never was anything, never can be, life and death all nothing, that kind of thing, only a voice dreaming and droning on all around, that is something, the voice that was once in your mouth. (FAW 49)

The kenotic function of this “wordshit” (TFN 118) is to enable the Beckettian narrator to empty himself of himself, to be himself through the negation of himself (“It’s not I” [UN 406]), so that his pain will be suffered at one remove: “I’m far from all that wrangle” (TFN 75); “I shall not speak of my sufferings. Cowering deep down among them I feel nothing” (MD 186). Such is the purpose of Beckettian inexistence. An alternate image for the process of evacuation is vomiting: “I vomit, someone vomits, someone starts vomiting again, that must be how it happens” (UN 409). But this interpretation of *kenosis* in Beckett’s fiction contradicts the deconstructionist view, well epitomized by Daniel Katz, that “Beckett’s characters don’t ‘produce’ thought as much as interpret, translate, and repeat the ‘thought’ to which they are subject” (91). According to that view, “The moment of originary expression is always an echo” (Katz 92).

The Discrepant Aspects of Beckettian Mimesis

We are ready now to reconcile the discrepant aspects of awareness represented in Beckettian fiction and, more specifically, in *Malone Dies*. On the one hand, as we have seen, there is the consciousness of silence or nothing: “Nothing is more real than nothing” (192); “And then all would be still and dark and all things at rest for ever at last” (203). On the other hand, there is the consciousness of noise or distraction attributed to the object of consciousness which, through *kenosis* or evacuation, has been dissociated from the consciousness in which it properly inexists or inheres: “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” (186). These two poles, consciousness of nothing (or silence) and consciousness of distraction (or noise) can be

construed as correlative aspects of the same condition. Viewed in terms of the evacuating agent, the consciousness of nothing pertains to the emptiness in consciousness which results from the *kenosis* by which consciousness evacuates its own content. Viewed in terms of the evacuated product, the consciousness of distraction pertains to the subjectivity attributed to the nexus of thought which, through *kenosis*, has been expelled from the consciousness whose object it is and of which it remains vestigially aware.

Beckettian narration tends to oscillate between these two poles: the void resulting from evacuation and the perplexed subjectivity attributed to the evacuated content. But this mimetic paradigm is complicated by a third factor—the ceaseless effort of the evacuating consciousness to re-establish contact with its evacuated content: “a voice like this, who can check it, it tries everything, it’s blind, it seeks me blindly, in the dark . . .” (UN 410). Beckettian mimesis represents an almost Manichean struggle in consciousness between the need to evacuate and the need to accumulate, the need for awareness and the need for oblivion—a conflict localized in Malone’s celebrated exercise-book which records both consciousness and the gaps in consciousness: “I have spent two unforgettable days of which nothing will ever be known . . . (222).¹³ As Malone suggests, it is the struggle between “the blessedness of absence” (222) and the need to grasp “at last the true nature of absurd tribulations” (224).

Notes

1 Hill interprets Malone’s notion of “play” as “a regressive activity having for him the same function it has perhaps for children [i.e.] a means of exploring the limits between the fictional and the real, self and other, order and disorder, identity and difference” (102).

2 For an early and cogent relating of Malone to previous Beckettian narrators, see Hesla 105-06.

3 For a relating of *Malone Dies* to “the legacy left by *Pilgrim’s Progress* to the tradition of the English novel” with respect to “the inescapable

inheritance of a death that is figured in literary terms as the 'end of the line,'” see Thomas 385.

4 For a poststructuralist interpretation of Malone’s mode of being as “haecceity” or immanent existence (a term borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari), see Uhlmann 120-24.

5 On the Beckettian tendency to undermine mimetic conventions, see Moorjani: “Beckett’s novels from *Watt* onward . . . undermine the classic project of the novel to mirror outer and inner reality, the fiction of transparency” (45). On the tendency, in *Malone Dies*, to “end the tradition of meticulous fictional editing that begins with Richardson,” see Abbott 126.

6 For a relating of *Malone Dies* to a critique of the Western notion of “the progress of history,” see Uhlmann 125.

7 Cohn observes that the name Lambert’ was rendered as ‘les Louis’ in *Malone Meurt*, and refers to Balzac’s Louis Lambert (94).

8 For an application of Husserl to Beckett’s *Company*, see Locatelli 162-66. For an application of the Husserlian device of “bracketting” to Beckett’s fiction, see Butler 78. Regarding Derrida’s critique of Husserl, see Trezise 10-13 and Uhlmann 166-69.

9 See Brentano 50 and Kockelmans 32.

10 For the relation between Malone’s exercise book and the exercise book (now in the Humanities Research Center at Austin) in which Beckett wrote the last pages of *Watt* and the first pages of *L’Absent* (the original title of *Malone Meurt*), see Connor 70. The reference is to Malone’s comments about beginning his entry near the bottom of a page already written on: “The first pages are covered with ciphers and other symbols and diagrams, with here and there a brief phrase” (*Malone Dies* 209). For a seminal discussion of Beckett’s self-conscious art, see Copeland.

11 Cf. Hill on the *topos* of crucifixion in Beckett’s fiction: “the sign of an unsolved conundrum, as a paradigm for the strange impossibility of joining word and flesh together in such a way as to give birth to a speaking human subject in whom name and body share a common bond of identity” (104).

12 For discussion of this paradox in terms of the Cartesian *cogito* and *cogitatum*, see Levy 84-85. For the seminal discussion of the relation

of Descartes to Beckett, see the famous chapter, "The Cartesian Centaur," in Kenner 117-32.

13 For applications of Manichean dualism to Beckett, see (a) Knowlson 445; (b) Moorjani 124; and (c) Uhlmann 117-19.

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