The Drama in the Text

Beckett's Late Fiction

ENOCH BRATER

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New York Oxford
Oxford University Press
1994

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland Madrid

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

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Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.,
200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Brater, Enoch.
The drama in the text : Beckett's late fiction / Enoch Brater.
p. cm. Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-19-508892-1 (cloth)
1. Beckett, Samuel, 1906-1989—Fictional works. 2. Oral
interpretation. I. Title.
PR6003.E282Z57674 1994
843'.914—dc20 93-30405

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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Earlier versions of short sections in the present study have appeared in *Contemporary Literature*; the *Journal of Modern Literature*; and in two collections: *Samuel Beckett: Humanistic Perspectives*, ed. Morrris Beja, S. E. Gontarski, and Pierre Astier (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), and *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for Company*, ed. James Acheson and Kateryna Arthur (London: Macmillan, 1986). The author is grateful to the editors and publishers of these volumes for permission to reprint the material in a revised form.

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For my son, Jonathan,
my best piece of poetry

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Preface

The Drama in the Text is a book about the principal role of sound in Beckett's late fiction. In completing this study I have become increasingly aware of the subjective nature of the enterprise. In spite of this—and perhaps because of it—I have decided to forge ahead, inspired, no doubt, by the same author's "No try no fail."

Difficult to *read* in any conventional sense of the term, Beckett's post-trilogy fiction becomes, for this reader at least, surprisingly accessible when recited aloud. That virtue of the stubborn and enigmatic text that lies before us as if etched in stone has been a continual temptation to a growing number of theater practitioners who have transformed these hard and precise pieces into the more flexible reality of a live stage presentation. I say "text" here with some trepidation, for the more accurate term in the case of Beckett's writing is likely to be "script." The former sounds ominously monumental, even *finished*, while the latter makes its appeal to a theatrical sense of potential, something imminent, performable, something always on the verge of *becoming* each time we take words—Beckett's words—in hand. "On." "Nohow on." Anyhow, *on*.

This study represents an attempt to clarify the chameleonlike quality of Beckett's strange journey from the body of words to a voice's embodiment in words. Reader now turns Listener as the tension between text and script, the vocable and the verbal, is always in the process of writing itself down.

Beckett's fascination with the art of radio serves as a remarkable gateway to his fictional exploration of the question of voice, sound and, above all, tonality. In this mechanical medium, dedicated to the art of embodying rather than analyzing, the musicality that has always been inherent in his "text" achieves a rare spontaneity in what he once called the "rhythm of a labouring heart." Such evocative acts of enunciation transcribe words from page to electronic recording tape, then back from tape to page again, constructing a complete inventory of aural effects that

achieve their full maturity in the late work written in what looks like prose but sounds like . . . something else again.

Beckett has always been one step ahead of his critics. "This craze for explicitation! Every i dotted to death!" Poststructural theorists have fared no better (and certainly no worse) than their predecessors, for, as I argue here, the Beckett script outlasts every attempt to pin "it" down: despite fashions to the contrary, this author is no deader than the spontaneity he brings to every "text." That is, in fact, the real-life drama to be staged and encountered here.

I have been thinking and writing about Beckett for some time now and I still find the same repertory "inexhaustible." For just what *are* those "wonderful lines"? In my various attempts to come to grips with this question—not the least of which is the present task of bringing this project to (temporary) closure—I have been vastly enriched by the fine work of an international community of Beckett scholars. For their generous support (richly documented along the way) I wish to express my heartfelt thanks. Foremost among them is that Beckett legend Ruby Cohn, who read the manuscript for this book scrupulously, always urging me to get "it," "this this—," and "this this here—" more or less right. My thanks, too, to three strong editors: Bill Sisler (now at Harvard University Press), Susan Chang (now at Cambridge University Press), and Liz Maguire, still holding up the fort for me at Oxford University Press. For the rest I would suggest, like the compelling drama I still find in these texts, "not guilty."

Ann Arbor, Mich. E. B.
September 1993

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The Drama in the Text

"More . . ."

—*Rockaby*

1

Still Beckett

Let us begin not with a recently published Beckett work, or even with what has been elsewhere explored in the later Beckett oeuvre, but rather with the sound of that vintage Beckett of the much-traveled "Molloy country":[1]

> She had a somewhat hairy face, or am I imagining it, in the interests of the narrative? The poor woman, I saw her so little, so little looked at her. And was not her voice suspiciously deep? So she appears to me today. Don't be tormenting yourself, Molloy, man or woman, what does it matter? But I cannot help asking myself the following question. Could a woman have stopped me as I swept towards mother? Probably. Better still, was such an encounter possible, I mean between me and a woman? Now men, I have rubbed up against a few men in my time, but women? Oh well, I may as well confess it now, yes, I once rubbed up against one. I don't mean my mother, I did more than rub up against her. And if you don't mind we'll leave my mother out of all this. But another who might have been my mother, and even I think my grandmother, if chance had not willed otherwise. Listen to him now talking about chance. It was she made me acquainted with love. She went by the peaceful name of Ruth I think, but I can't say for certain. Perhaps the name was Edith. She had a hole between her legs, oh not the bunghole I had always imagined, but a slit, and in this I put, or rather she put, my so-called virile member, not without difficulty, and I toiled and moiled until I discharged or gave up trying or was begged by her to stop. A mug's game in my opinion and tiring on top of that, in the long run. But I lent myself to it with a good enough grace, knowing it was love, for she had told me so. She bent over the couch, because of her rheumatism, and in I went from behind. It was the only position she could bear, because of her lumbago. It seemed all right to me for I had seen dogs, and I was astonished when she confided that you could go about it differently. I wonder what she meant exactly. Perhaps after all she put me in her rectum. A matter of complete indifference to me, I needn't tell you. But is it true love, in the

> rectum? That's what bothers me sometimes. Have I never known true love, after all?
>
> (*Molloy*, pp. 75–76)

But by the late forties and early fifties Beckett had abandoned the upper-class Dublin syntax of his native Irish-English and was writing in French, as he said at the time, "pour faire remarquer moi."[2] In December 1957 he wrote, "there is something in my English writing that infuriates me and I can't get rid of it. A kind of lack of brakes." Nine years earlier, on December 15, 1946, he announced to his friend George Reavey, "I do not think I shall write very much in English in the future"—a statement that Time, "that double-headed monster of damnation and salvation," proved to be false.[3] "Perhaps only the French language can give you the thing you want, perhaps only the French can do it," remarks Belacqua's friend, Lucien, in the "virgin chronicle" called *Dream of Fair to Middling Women.* Later in the same early novel "Bel" will himself be forced to concede, "In French I can write a fine stinger, but in English I overdo it."[4] To Herbert Blau Beckett confided that French "had the right weakening effect"; to Richard Coe he said that he was afraid of English "because you couldn't help writing poetry in it"; to Nicklaus Gessner he admitted that in French it was easier to write "sans style." He told Israel Shenker of the *New York Times* that he switched to French because he just felt like it; it was a different experience from writing in English: "It was more exciting for me—writing in French."[5] The change in language, however, also marked an important change in artistic direction, one that achieved its most eloquent expression in the English/French prose writings undertaken by fits and starts in the seventies and eighties.

Let me return to my long citation from *Molloy,* "Englished" by Beckett himself with the not always welcome assistance of a young novelist living in Paris named Patrick Bowles. ("I felt bad," he admitted later, "having to change what someone else had translated.")[6] What is so remarkable about this passage, *qua* passage? *Molloy* is full of such exquisite verbal arpeggios: "The room smelt of ammonia, oh not merely of ammonia, but of ammonia, ammonia. She knew it was me, by my smell. Her shrunken hairy old face lit up, she was happy to smell me."[7] I would like to suggest that those moments we remember from *Molloy,* like those other purple passages we recall from the rest of the trilogy, are remembered precisely because they are so wonderfully *speakable:* they are written for the performative voice, a resonant human voice, and they attain their full spontaneity only when spoken aloud. Sound literally makes sense here. *The room smelt of ammonia, oh not merely of ammonia, but of ammonia,*

ammonia. How else are we to understand the limits and possibilities of such an outrageous line of supposedly narrative discourse?

Beckett's real energy as a writer of prose is based on a single assertion: the line is written primarily for recitation, not recounting. What should concern us here is diction rather than syntax. If a story emerges—and sometimes it will despite Beckett's stubborn insistence that there is nothing to communicate and no vehicle for communication—it will be more celebrated for its *telling* rather than for anything that might get itself *told* along the way. Each of Beckett's encounters with the mechanisms of prose shares the same dubious fate as the one he doles out to his intrepid walk-talker in *From an Abandoned Work:* "I have never in my life been on my way anywhere, but simply on my way."[8] The human voice—rather than what is being voiced—is, miraculously, the vehicle of communication here. To be is to be heard.

In Derridian terms Beckett therefore privileges speech over writing, to use that overused nonverb that in some critical circles still resists being a verb.[9] Or, rather, in this instance writing—inscription—is conceived as a form of heightened speech: a "script" for that absent voice—*mirabile* and very much *dictu*—that once was in your mouth. Beckett's terms are far more compelling—and far more to the point. "You complain," he wrote in defense of James Joyce in 1929, "that this stuff is not written in English. It is not written at all. It is not to be read—or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to."[10] Beckett's agenda as a writer of prose is to take the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake* quite literally at his own word. Embracing language as his one true persona, Beckett turns his "wordy-gurdy"[11] into a dynamic force that everywhere insinuates itself *per sona,* through sound.

Beckett did not come upon this solution easily. The fiction he composed in English up until the end of the Second World War—that is to say through the completion of his novel *Watt,* which was written in Roussillon, in the south of France, during the years he was hiding from the Nazis[12]—can't quite figure out what it wants to be. For example, an anonymous reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* found *More Pricks Than Kicks* "uneven. . . . [T]here is a definite, fresh talent at work in it, though it is a talent not yet quite sure of itself." Edwin Muir, writing in *The Listener,* was much more to the point. Noting that the vitality of the story "is in the presentation, which is witty, extravagant and excessive," Muir emphasized Beckett's ability to reduce everything to intellectual fantasy, to "*extremely good and calculated and quite impossible talk*" (emphasis mine). The reviews of *Murphy* were only slightly more upbeat. Dylan Thomas, reviewing it for the *New English Weekly,* observed that its author

was "a great legpuller and an enemy of obviousness." But Thomas was troubled by the novel's inability to establish and sustain a consistent new voice of its own: "[T]he story never quite knows whether it is being told objectively from the inside of its characters or subjectively from the outside."[13] D. Powell, writing in the *Sunday Times* in March 1938, concluded: "The book may be sterile, but it is not negligible."[14] Academic and in some places downright clumsy, Beckett's mannerist style of this period—as he recognized a decade later when he was working on *Molloy*—threatens to be undone by the pervasive influence of someone else's prose:

> I who had loved the image of old Geulinx, dead young, who left me free, on the black boat of Ulysses, to crawl towards the East, along the deck. That is a great measure of freedom to him who has not the pioneering spirit. And from the poop, poring upon the wave, a sadly rejoicing slave, I follow with my eyes the proud and futile wake. Which, as it bears me from no fatherland away, bears me onward to no shipwreck.
>
> (*Molloy,* p. 68)

"Joyce had a profound effect upon me," Beckett once acknowledged. "He made me realize artistic integrity." He told John Montague, "He might surprise you when the light is fading."[15]

Beckett's sudden and quite unpredictable turn to French offered him a rendezvous with language that no one had ever had before, not even his fellow speaker of Irish-English, James Joyce. ("I vow I'll get over J.J. ere I die," he wrote to Samuel Putnam as early as June 28, 1932.[16]) By the time Beckett returned to his small Paris apartment at number 6, rue des Favorites, in 1946, after working nearly six months at the Irish Red Cross Hospital in Saint-Lô, Normandy, he had been living in France for nearly a decade. Those first French lessons—begun under the watchful eye of Monsieur Alfred Le Peton at the Earlsfort House School in Dublin and continued (when Beckett was not out on the cricket field) at the Portora Royal School in Ulster—had borne considerable fruit. French had become something rather different from the very literary medium he had studied at Trinity with Thomas Rudmose-Brown: it had become his daily language. The sound of French was now Beckett's link to the outside world, *langue* transformed into *parole*.[17]

I want to emphasize here *the sound of French,* how an English speaker—in this particular case, an Irish-English speaker—first encounters a new language before making it his own. Beckett's adoption of French as his literary métier is, in the broadest sense, a rediscovery of the aural possibilities of language for the instants of communion they offer. "Mo-

ments. Her moments, my moments. . . . The dog's moments,'' as Beckett will much later make *his* language—English, this time around—sound in *Krapp's Last Tape.*[18] Such moments, chiseled into the event of words, this writer's words, need to be *looked at and listened to,* as Dina Sherzer has reminded us concerning *The Unnamable.*[19] Sound precedes sense. Stories were spoken before anyone ever thought of writing them down. ''Saying,'' as Beckett has stated first in French and then in English, ''is inventing.''[20]

Beckett, of course, had read the *symboliste* poets, as even the most casual reader of Beckett's work and criticism about it can see at first hand. Allusions to Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Verlaine are by this time part of the familiar tapestry, providing his writing with a network of allusion that has kept several belle-lettrists busy, especially those with a taste for intertextuality. Mallarmé's idea behind ''Hérodiade,'' which he described in a letter written to his friend Henri Cazalis, seems to inspire much of what happens in Beckett's investigation of prose: ''I'm inventing a language which must of necessity burst forth from a very new poetics, which I could define in these few words: paint, not the object, but the effect it produces.''[21] And yet the sound–sense relations for which the Symbolist poets are famous, creating a realm in which moods and ideas are suggested but never made explicit, reflect the dimensions of their own language—French—from within. Beckett's particular framework, ''which insinuates more than it asserts,''[22] is the anomaly. He remains, in this regard, the perennial outsider; in French *his* word of Mouth, so to speak, is always at one step removed. The sound–sense relations his language fosters forever cast him in the unenviable role of *L'Absent,* the working title for the story that eventually became *Malone Dies.*[23] Mediated by his own Irishness, as Mary Lydon has ably argued,[24] Beckett's shift from English to French turns him into his own (Jacques) Moran, with the accent on the first syllable. Beckett's exile, unlike Joyce's, is strictly in the forced march of words.

What is at stake here, especially when Beckett returns to English, is nothing less than an encounter with language that insists on being *heard* new: the sound of words, which has always constituted its appeal to ''literary folk,'' as well as its primary site of power. What is at stake, too, is the crucial link between Beckett's work in fiction and drama.[25] Writing for the voice is what makes dialogue possible in the theater. Seen in this light, fiction and drama—at least Beckett's fiction and drama—turn out to be, to quote Shakespeare's Troilus, ''a thing inseparate.''[26] The word wasn't a word until it was made flesh, that is, until a voice said ''it.'' ''A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.''[27]

In *Molloy* Beckett's attempt to write for the performative voice is still

tentative, though he was certainly aware, as he said at the time, that his monologuist's love scenes there "might arouse some response."[28] Despite its verbal histrionics, like the passage with which this chapter opens, the text of Beckett's novel keeps wanting to remind us that it is, in actuality, something written down—something, in fact, not unlike "a disquieting sound, that of soliloquy, under dictation" we may have read about earlier in *Watt*.[29] And Beckett is quick to remind us in the very first paragraph of his novel that Molloy is, after all, writing a report. That is where he leaves Moran, too, as this two-part invention concludes: "Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining."[30] As a reward for staying with him for the rest of the trilogy, Beckett lets us hear the many ways in which the cluttered mechanisms of his previously baroque fiction begin to break down. This is work-in-regress, "progress" having been given a peculiar new twist by the steady laundering of language to "First dirty, then make clean."[31] Malone makes quite a "mess" of his decease, and the unnamable finally settles down in search of that fragile, elusive, but seemingly authentic voice that will allow him to *say* "me," "it," "on," or anything else that comes to mind—can openers up the arse notwithstanding. "I say *it* as I hear *it*," about which we will soon hear much more in *How It Is*.[32] Paring down his fictional enterprise to what a story has always been—a voice speaking aloud—Beckett has in *The Unnamable* reached the point where his real energy as a writer of prose is about to begin.

Much has been said by Beckett and about Beckett concerning the impasse that followed hard upon his completion of the trilogy. The work, he wrote, "finished me or expressed my finishedness." He began to talk at the time of having no "nominative," no "accusative," and no "verb"; no "I," no "have" and, above all, no "being." He was, he observed, "not so much bogged down as fogged out." He did not, however, stop writing. He composed *En attendant Godot* between October 1948 and January 1949 as a form of "relaxation" between *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, mostly to get away, as he told Colin Duckworth, from the "awful prose" he said he was writing at the time. "It wrote itself," he told Peter Lennon, "with very few corrections, in four months." Asked why he chose to work on a play in the midst of working on fiction, Beckett replied: "I didn't choose to write a play. It just happened like that." He was, he said, "in search of respite from the wasteland of prose."[33] And yet the "wasteland of prose" continued, even after he reached the "threshold" of his story in *The Unnamable*. In French he labeled as *nouvelles* the stories we know in English as *The End*, *The Calmative*, and *The*

Expelled, borrowing his title for this minor trilogy collectively titled *Textes pour rien (Texts for Nothing)* from ''mesure pour rien,'' a musical term signifying a bar's rest.[34] These works, he said, were nothing more than ''the grisly afterbirth of *L'Innomable.*'' ''Short abortive texts,'' they ''express the failure to implement the last words'' of *The Unnamable.*[35] How they fail to do this Beckett would not say, referring us instead to the stunning conclusion of his novel: ''I can't go on, I'll go on.''

By the end of *The Unnamable* Beckett, who easily fits Georges Duthuit's description of Sam Francis as an ''animator of silence,''[36] had written everything out of his prose fiction with the exception of a voice. His problem now was to figure out just what to do with it. How does a writer make prose simply ''say it, not knowing what''? Less is more, as I have argued elsewhere with regard to Beckett's dramatic repertory since *Not I,* but only if that less is in the right place.[37] *How It Is* is, in this respect, a rather ambitious attempt on Beckett's part to make his Reader, now turned Listener, hear a voice that murmurs in the ''so-called mud.'' ''I say it,'' we remember, ''as I hear it'': ''tohu-bohu,'' ''quaqua,'' ''Pim Pim,'' ''Bom Bem,'' ''Pim Bim,'' ''Pim Bem me Bem,'' ''Skom Skum,'' ''B B to C,'' ''1 to 3 four,'' ''subject object subject object,'' ''drivel drivel,'' ''777777.'' Oh Lucky, where are you now that we need you most? In the same play Gogo had complained about ''no laces''; here there are ''no commas.'' And yet the ''essential would seem to be lacking,'' especially in English, which misses the bold power of the pun heard whenever one utters the French title: *Comment c'est,* literally ''how it is,'' is also *commencer,* ''to begin.'' *How It Is* (there's English for you) is ''ill-inspired,'' but it is also—and fatally—''ill-told,'' ''ill-spoken,'' ''ill-murmured,'' ''ill-heard,'' ill-seen, and ill-said. *Something wrong there.*

Beckett's experiments in shorter fiction—including such transitional works as *Enough, Imagination Dead Imagine, Ping, All Strange Away,* and *Lessness*—reflect his pursuit of seemingly contradictory voices, moving freely from this style to that, as critics like John Pilling, Susan Brienza, Steven Connor, Carla Locatelli, P. J. Murphy, and Leslie Hill have persuasively shown.[38] In these minute but precise pieces Beckett surprises us by pursuing ''the point where invisibility itself becomes a thing.'' Such excavations in prose offer us, as he said in a 1936 review of Jack Yeats' novel *The Amaranthers* for *Dublin Magazine,* ''no symbol,'' ''no allegory,'' only ''stages of an image.''[39] Full of intentional disjunctions, spatial inconsistencies, and flourishes that may be downright *meaningless,* these ''lyrics of fiction,'' to borrow Ruby Cohn's telling phrase,[40] also contain passages of unmistakable eloquence: ''Figment dawn dispeller of figments and the other called dusk.''[41] As the voice speaks on, now in one register,

now in another, vivid patterns and fortuitous images emerge: "Now I'll wipe out everything but the flowers. No more rain. No more mounds. Nothing but the two of us dragging through the flowers. Enough my old breasts feel his old hand."[42] This is Beckett's "blue celeste" of poetry.[43] Subtler, humbler, and more poignant than *How It Is,* these short works revere no single perspective, make no claim to being authoritative, and reflect in their insistent diversity the texture and textuality of some chaotic real world. The longest prose work of this period, *The Lost Ones,* creates a seemingly omniscient voice that deconstructs myth in the process of positing an exacting geometric landscape. Here Beckett's chilling sensibility is highly analytic: the suspect dimensions of a flattened cylinder, "fifty metres round and sixteen high for the sake of harmony,"[44] expose us to our spiritual pretensions as well as our own intellectual fantasies, fetishes, and limitations.

But in Beckett's hands such fiction, whose most characteristic sound will be that of "syntaxes upended in opposite corners,"[45] soon "fizzles" out. The voice "still" wants to be a *text:* its rich, melodious *texture* keeps calling attention to the writer's "art and craft" which sets "it all" in motion, "for to end" we are tempted to scan "yet again."[46] Beckett's voice ultimately will not be liberated from such sentimental attachments until the composition of *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said,* and *Worstward Ho,* three works of the late seventies and eighties in which verse, the kind of "crafted" verse we typically associate with Beckett's liminal prose poems, has been convincingly upstaged by the performative voice.

In *Company,* first written in English but originally published in French, Beckett's prose assumes the recitational force that has been struggling for so long to break free from the tyranny of the "script" we hold in our hands. "A voice comes to one in the dark." Hearing is believing: "Imagine." According to his German translator, the late Elmar Tophoven, Beckett had been thinking of Jeremiah.[47] The tone of this jeremiad, however, is surprisingly somber, the shape dialogic. "The novel as a whole," writes Bakhtin, "is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice."[48] *Company,* however, whose working title, according to Charles Krance, was once "The Voice VERBATIM," demonstrates its theory by its very existence: Beckett's *récit* now gives rapid tempo to the voice of memory, halting rhythm to the voice of reason, then lets them play off one another in vigorous counterpoint. In an outline for the project, the author characterized the piece as "Speech by A overheard by B described by C . . . A, B, C [being] one and the same. . . . A describes A (to A) / A misrepresents A (to A)."[49] Here conflict is realized as language conceived as speech. The drama is in the text.

This "play" of language continues in *Mal vu mal dit* and even more so in Beckett's English translation *Ill Seen Ill Said*. Marjorie Perloff, citing a pattern of allusions that spans *King Lear*, "Ode to a Nightingale," Swinburne, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, has rightly directed our attention to the literary legacy informing the meaning of Beckett's English text. Monique Nagem has located additional echoes, especially those that derive from a late-nineteenth-century French poetic canon.[50] And yet the language we hear in *Ill Seen Ill Said* may be just as rich in the use it makes of a specifically theatrical vocabulary. This may be prose, but it has the life of the theater in it. The mysterious tale of a woman who abandons her cabin to seek precarious shelter in a "zone of stones" depends for its life on "rafters," "boards," and a single "trapdoor" ("Promising this flagrant concern with camouflage"). And the "vile jelly" is only the most notorious reference to dialogue previously written for a mise-en-scène by that master stage craftsman William Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth,* and (by way of Michelangelo) the "regicide" Brutus from *Julius Caesar* are there, too, as is a frail reference to John Milton's closet drama *Samson Agonistes,* one more exercise in a specifically theatrical blindman's buff.[51] The "curtain closes" on this fable, however, with a nod to the "Know wisdom" of *Ecclesiastes:* in this case Beckett transforms "wisdom" into "happiness." But closure in this instance depends on an act of enunciation heard at the same moment it is said: "Know happiness" is a pun that can only take place as an act of heightened speech, like Hamlet's "Not so, my lord; I am too much i' th' sun."[52] There can be "no happiness" in *this* "zone of stones" when a voice sets our sight on Golgotha, "the place of the skull," where, as we recall from *Waiting for Godot,* "they crucified quick."[53]

Worstward Ho, which Beckett did not translate into French (that task has been left to other hands, in this case Edith Fournier for *Cap au pire*),[54] confronts us with a language that may very well be unreadable, though it is not therefore unsayable—even when that saying requires of us considerable linguistic acrobatics:

> To last unlessenable least how loath to leasten. For then in utmost dim to unutter leastmost all.[55]

Language has its own internal fury; but even in its most abstracted form it also has firm textual detail. Here the range of sound can be thrilling, even, one might say, encyclopedic. This is indeed a discourse that must be *looked at* and *listened to*. Saying is inventing, "ununsaid," even when the "so-said" is the "missaid," "Said nohow on." Strange English, this.

It is in fact not really English, at least not English as we are used to hearing it "said" and performed. Everything oozes: "Inletting all. Outletting all." "Beyondless," "thenceless," and "thitherless," the sound here is not, strictly speaking, the King's English, and certainly not French, nor even the Irish-English melody with which this writer's "better than nothing" began.[56] Written for recitation, not recounting, *Worstward Ho* reconstructs English only to make it sound new. "The worst is not," Edgar says in an aside from *King Lear* that Beckett singled out in a notebook entry for 1930, "So long as we can say, 'This is the worst.' "[57] Such the sound of Shakespeare; such the sound of Beckett.

No wonder so many theater practitioners have been tempted to adapt Beckett's late prose for the stage. There is indeed a drama to these little texts, one that looks, at first "aperçu,"[58] very much like the Beckett we recognize in the theater. Fiction and drama, theatricality and textuality, seem to come together here. When he wrote *A Piece of Monologue,* for example, the playwright told the actor David Warrilow that he wasn't even sure if he had written a play or a piece of prose. Earlier he had characterized *That Time* as something that existed only at the very edge of what might be possible in the theater.[59] And yet the drama written into prose, based so securely on the sound of the human voice, is not necessarily performable in the technical stage sense. For as it materializes in sound, Beckett's voice is a *mise en abîme* without the accompanying *mise en scène*. Such prose is, in fact, a discourse in sound: no theater image takes center stage. "A voice comes to one in the dark," and though that is where theater takes place, in the dark—as the director Frederick Newmann reminded Beckett when he set about adapting *Company* for *his* company, Mabou Mines—the darkness is in this case more strictly imagined.[60] Sound makes all the sense there is. "A pox on void."[61]

When I asked Beckett if *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said,* and *Worstward Ho* constituted a trilogy, he replied, "I hadn't thought of it as such, but I suppose so—more so than the other works called the Trilogy."[62] The connection between three works is now distinctly and, one is almost tempted to say, exclusively formal; no more journeys in forests or in flattened cylinders, in textbook images or in text-bound words. The "scene" is now the said. There is, then, something stirring in Beckett's late prose. In a work written in July 1986, yet another trilogy first called "Fragments," then "Wholes," then "Still Stirrings," and finally *Stirrings Still,* Beckett continues to keep company with a voice that cries out for theatrical communion. "Who knows?" was Beckett's response, as late as 1987, concerning the status of his unfinished writings. "There may still