Melville and Beckett: A Legacy of Pessimism

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MELVILLE AND BECKETT:
A LEGACY OF PESSIMISM
(TITLE)

BY

JEANETTE ELAINE BAHNKE

THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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MELVILLE AND BECKETT: A LEGACY OF PESSIMISM

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JEANETTE ELAINE BAHNKE

B. S. in Ed., Eastern Illinois University, 1972

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English Education at the Graduate School of Eastern Illinois University

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS
1978
Though separated by nearly a century and by two different cultures, Herman Melville and Samuel Beckett complement each other's concept of man and his world. This concept is the concept of pessimism, which each man adopted and expanded throughout his works.

Both authors lament the concept that man must struggle to attempt unachievable goals, yet both also insist that the only way to maintain a type of balance is to "go on."

The Beckettian-Melvillian hero, consequently, is a "thought-diver." As he strips layers from the Self, he simultaneously strips layers from the cosmos. Thus, the stripping of the Self and the fusing of the Self with the universe become a central theme in these two authors' works. Man, in his descent through the layers of the Self, conceives of a tragic vision; he becomes sorrowful, but paradoxically acquires a "heart," a richness of spirit which could not be attained in any other manner.

The hero is also an orphan in search of the true parentage. He seeks to return to the womb/tomb. It is in the warm, dark, quiet places where he creates his fictions in order to "go on." He must, however, leave the darkness from time to time in order to attempt his quests.

The characters of both authors seek to escape Time, to make an end so that the Self can be reunited with the Whole. All their elaborate fictions are attempts to utter a name which will cause a silence, bring an end.

Both authors owe a literary debt to William Shakespeare,
particularly in regard to the concept of nothingness. Both agree that any attempt to impose meaning into the world could only result in destruction.

The characters of both Melville and Beckett journey a treacherous path bordered on both sides by chasms of suicide and insanity. They must proceed on a solitary quest which will render no final answers. The journey will lead them, each one a unique Ulysses, far across uncharted seas to an Ithaca that does not exist. That these seas are primarily those of the Self is evident.

Time and time again, both authors, through their characters, admit to and lament over a paradox: language is an extremely inadequate and deceptive tool which one ought to avoid, yet it is the only tool available to link the Self with external reality. One may cry about it, berate it, but in the end one will equip oneself with this frail instrument and "go on." The language must continue, the fictions must be formed, and the man must endure the "waiting" as he goes on, ever onward, in "the long sonata of the dead," to the grave.
For us, there is only the trying.  
The rest is not our business.  

T. S. Eliot

We begin to live when we have conceived life as tragedy.  

W. B. Yeats

Who may tell the tale  
of the old man?  
weigh absence in a scale?  
mete want with a span?  
the sum assess  
of the world's woes?  
nothingness  
in words enclose?  

Samuel Beckett

Un dévoilement sans fin, voile  
derrière voile, plan sur plan  
de transparences imparfaites,  
un dévoilement vers l'indévoilable, le rien, la chose à nouveau.  

Samuel Beckett
Though separated by nearly a century and by two different cultures, Herman Melville and Samuel Beckett complement each other's concept of man and his world. This concept is the concept of pessimism, which each man adopted and expanded throughout his works.

In order to comprehend Beckettian-Melvillian pessimism, one must critically examine several contributory elements which, when unified, expose not only the bleakness of man's chances to succeed in the world, but also the desperation of man driven, according to Beckett, to "go on." These elements include the motif of man the "thought-diver," the womb/tomb motif, the motif of man the fiction creator, the nothingness motif, and the quest motif.

Despite their construction of an ubiquitous concept of pessimism, both authors celebrate the man who manages to maintain a balance in a disconcertingly unbalanced universe. Such a man, armed only with the frail and treacherous tool of language, is a rare occurrence in the Beckettian-Melvillian world. Beckett especially further illustrates his uniqueness by endowing him with exaggerated physical traits.

I have limited the scope of this paper to the trilogy (Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable) and Waiting For Godot by Beckett and Moby-Dick by Melville. I selected the works by Beckett because the trilogy is a lengthy account of the quester—the quester aging, the quester dying, and the quester rambling from beyond the grave. Waiting For Godot is a succinct capsu-
lization of the multiloquence of the trilogy. In effect, then, these four works of Beckett are not separate and distinct entities, but rather they are extensions of one another. I determined *Moby-Dick* as the representative Melvillian work because this one work compares in scope to those of Beckett and it affords a similar variety of characters and encounters as do the other four.

With this brief preface, one must now explore in depth several of the elements which link these two authors. By examining my comments and those of the authors through the mouths of their characters, it will become apparent the extent to which these men, though spatially far apart, were conceptually joined in brotherhood.

Melville celebrated not individual men, but a way of life which a man might, through considerable effort, attain. The element which distinguished this way of life was the descent into the Self. To make this descent was to remove oneself from the possibility of achieving a happy life: to see profoundly was to see mournfully: life in its depths was not a thing of joy but of sorrow.¹ Melville accepted Swift's notion that to be happy was to exist in a state of deception, to believe that the secrets of life could all be ascertained on its surface.²

Through Beckett's trilogy and his tragicomedy, *Waiting For Godot*, also runs an obdurate thread of pessimism. For example, as Molloy struggles to introduce himself, he also states the predicament with which man is faced as he descends into his Self in an attempt to define it:
And once again I am I will not say alone, no, that's not like me, but, how shall I say, 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 is, senseless, speechless, issueless misery.3

Through the ramblings of Lucky in Waiting For Godot Beckett articulates his vision of the fate of man: "... it is established ... that man ... wastes and pines ... ."4 Didi enlarges this dark vision: "Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But habit is a great deadener" (p. 58).

This last line relates to Melville's concept of man the diver. To E. A. Duyckinck he wrote:

I love all men who dive. Any fish can swim near the surface, but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more; and if he don't attain the bottom, why, all the lead in Calena can't fashion the plummit that will. I'm not talking of Mr. Emerson now, but of the whole corps of thought-divers that have been diving and coming up again with blood-shot eyes since the world began.5

He believed that the man who became a "thought-diver" had attained the noblest way of life; the non-divers he regarded with scorn.6 In accordance with his own "thought-diver" dictum, Melville's life became a gradual process of unfolding the Self. "Fate" was the term he applied to the irresistible force which drove men, despite all desire to remain in the
bliss of ignorance, to delve ever deeper into the Self. His choice of the metaphysical term "Fate" stemmed from the reasoning that intense scrutiny of the inner Self and intense scrutiny of the universe were similar processes. Once the descent into the Self was begun, each perception of the man was simultaneously a perception of the cosmos. It followed that each layer stripped from the cosmos was a layer stripped from the man. Thus, the cosmos resided in the Self. This stripping of the Self and the fusing of the Self with the universe is also a central theme of The Unnamable. Its benefit is articulated in Malone Dies:

The fear of falling is the source of many a folly. It is a disaster. I suppose the wisest thing now is to live it over again, meditate upon it and be edified. It is thus that man distinguishes himself from the ape and rises, from discovery to discovery, ever higher, towards the light. (p. 254)

Descending through the layers of the Self, Melvillian man conceives of a tragic vision; he becomes sorrowful, but paradoxically he acquires a heart. By "heart," Melville refers to a certain richness of spirit which could not be attained in any other manner. Stanley Geist explains that to illustrate this concept Melville set up an opposition between Head and Heart; it was not, however, a strictly defined opposition of intellect and emotion. Melville realized that the complete man required intense concentrations of both thought and feeling. Without the cooperation of these opposites, man could not comprehend the blackness of life.

Beckett also sets up an opposition of Head and Body. He creates the teams of Molloy/Moran; Malone and his homunculus
Macmann; Didi/Gogo. The Unnamable often envisions itself as a large head, its other body parts, minimal; indeed, its story is cut off as it has degenerated to a large, babbling mouth. Each of these characters, or character teams, is engaged in what Frederick Hoffman has termed "a continual exercise in self-definition." Glicksberg called Beckett's characters "picaresque ghosts in a nameless region, wandering lost in a fugue of wretched and invariably futile self-awareness, seeking an identity or an illumination of meaning that forever eludes them." Molloy speaks of looking at his surroundings not only outwardly, through the eyes, but, more importantly, inwardly, through "all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns, where thought and feeling dance their sabbath. . ." (p. 10). The futility of the process is also underscored by Molloy:

And truly it little matters what I say, this, this or that or any other thing. Saying is inventing. Wrong, very rightly wrong. You invent nothing, you think you are inventing, you think you are escaping, and all you do is stammer out your lesson, the remnants of a pensum one day got by heart and long forgotten, life without tears, as it is wept. (pp. 31-32)

For what reason, then, ought man to continue such an arduous quest? Molloy responds: "The fact is, it seems, that the most you can hope is to be a little less, in the end, the creature you were in the beginning, and the middle" (p. 32).

The Beckettian-Melvillian characters are orphans. Molloy is drawn on his quest by a drive to find his mother; yet the reader, and even Molloy, has difficulty believing that the miserable Mag is that mother. Malone has no family save "suck-
ing Moll," and she too dies, leaving him alone at his end.

The Unnamable elaborates at great length on his spiralling search for his family. Upon his arrival, he discovers they are all dead:

Finally I found myself, without surprise, within the building, circular in form as already stated, its ground-floor consisting of a single room flush with the arena, and there completed my rounds, stamping under foot the unrecognizable remains of my family, here a face, there a stomach, as the case might be, and sinking into them with the ends of my crutches, both coming and going. To say I did so with satisfaction would be stretching the truth. For my feeling was rather one of annoyance at having to flounder in such muck just at the moment when my closing contortions called for a firm and level surface. I like to fancy, even if it is not true, that it was in my mother's entrails I spent the last days of my long voyage, and set out on the next. No, I have no preference, Isolde's breast would have done just as well, or Papa's private parts, or the heart of one of the little bastards. (pp. 323-324)

One should note the womb/tomb structure, the lack of remorse over his loss coupled with the momentary wish to return to mother, the immediate rejection of the notion. Was this really the Unnamable's family, his mother? Similarly, after the destruction of the Pequod, Ishmael, kept afloat by the paradoxically life-affirming coffin, remarks: "It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan." (Epilogue) Ishmael visualizes the ship as a mother gathering children to her bosom, yet he suggests that he will forever remain an orphan to the world.

Where, then, are the lost parents whom these orphans seek? To answer this question, one must explore the womb/tomb motif utilized by both authors. In Moby-Dick the sea affords both
comfort and terror, and it exercises an almost magnetic attraction on a man. The salty sea, could it not be the womb, the safe and comfortable haven of the preconscious (those areas of the mind not in immediate awareness but capable of being recalled readily into consciousness)? Is it not also treacherous and deadly, the tomb of many? One should also listen to the musings of Ahab: "Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them: the secret of our paternity lies in their grave, and we must there to learn it."

In a ritual scene with the candles, Ahab further reveals his quest for true paternity. He also exhibits a desire to fuse with a creative force that he sees transcending man's mortal limits. There is also a hint of his desire to become godlike, to worship and to be worshipped. Ahab, mesmerized by the flames, cries:

I own thy speechless, placeless power; said I not so? Nor was it wrung from me; nor do I now drop these links. Thou canst blind; but I can then grope. Thou canst consume; but I can then be ashes. Take the homage of these poor eyes, and shutter-hands. I would not take it. The lightning flashes through my skull; mine eye-balls ache and ache; my whole beaten brain seems as beheaded and rolling on some stunning ground. Oh, oh! Yet blindfold, yet will I talk to thee. Light though thou be, thou leapest out of darkness; but I am darkness leaping out of light, leaping out of thee! The javelins cease; open eyes; see, or not? There burn the flames! Oh, thou magnificent! now I do glory in my genealogy. But thou art but my fiery father; my sweet mother, I know not. Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her? There lies my puzzle; but thine is greater. Thou knowest not how came ye, hence callest thyself unbegotten; certainly knowest not thy beginning, hence
callest thyself unbegun. I know that of me, which thou knowest not of thyself, oh, thou omnipotent. There is some unsuffusing thing beyond thee, thou clear spirit, to whom all thy eternity is but time, all thy creativeness mechanical. Through thee, thy flaming self, my scorched eyes do dimly see it. Oh, thou foundling fire, thou hermit immemorial, thou too hast thy incommunicable riddle, thy unparticipated grief. Here again with haughty agony, I read my sire. Leap! leap up, and lick the sky! I leap with thee; I burn with thee; would fain be welded with thee; defyingly I worship thee!

(Chap. CXIX)

Beckett's characters also seek to return to the womb/tomb. They seek primarily warm, dark, quiet places where they create their fictions in order to "go on." They cannot always remain there, however, for there is the quest to be attempted. As Molloy affirms:

And in the morning, in my cave, and even sometimes at night, when the storm raged, I felt reasonably secure from the elements and mankind. But there too there is a price to pay. And which you pay willingly, for a time, but which you cannot go on paying forever. For you cannot go on buying the same thing forever, with your little pittance. And unfortunately there are other needs than that of rotting in peace, it's not the word, I mean of course my mother whose image, blunted now for some time past, was beginning now to harrow me again. (pp. 75-76)

It is significant that as Malone Dies draws to a close, Malone invents a sea journey for Macmann, a journey on which he is to die. Malone interrupts his story with a terse phrase, "gurgles of outflow," informing the reader that as he invents the death of another at sea, as the boat flows out with the tide, so Malone's own body fluids are flowing from his body. Additionally, in Waiting For Godot, Pozzo echoes Ahab's orphan speech as he remarks: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (p. 57). Ishmael's insight removes him from the realm of the uninformed
masses as he observes: "All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halteres round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life" (Chap. LX). Man's time is brief, from grave to grave.

This leads to another similarity. Both authors are concerned with the concept of Time and its implications for man. Ahab is obsessed with overcoming his own mortality; he has taken, and hastily abandoned, a "young girl-wife" to bear his child, in an attempt to defy the natural rhythms. Significantly, for Ahab

the reputedly unassailable and allegedly immortal Moby-Dick appears as an embodiment of the time continuum itself operating within and upon the processes of nature. For crazy Ahab, to stop leviathan, to slay him—be he "principal" or "agent"—would mean correspondingly to check the heretofore inexorable and malign passage of time, thereby nullifying the relevance of question of mortality and initiating for himself a new unconditional existence in a state of idealized stasis. 12

Listening to his carpenter at work, Ahab cries, "Rat-tat! So man's seconds tick! Oh! how immaterial are all materials! What things real are there, but imponderable thoughts?" (Chap. CXXVII). The aged Ahab has become "a solitary Leviathan," but, unlike the sea creature, he has not learned to take "Nature...to wife in the wilderness of waters" (Chap. LXXXVIII). With his harpoon he thrusts not love but death, and nature is swift and inexorable in her repayment.

In Waiting For Godot, Didi questions Pozzo:

Vladimir: What is there in the bag?
Pozzo: Sand.

This concept is elaborated on in The Unnamable.
...the question may be asked, off the record, why
time doesn't pass, doesn't pass from you, why it piles
up all about you, instant on instant, on all sides,
deepener and deeper, thicker and thicker, your time,
others' time, the time of the ancient dead and the
dead yet unborn, why it buries anything, no knowledge
of anything, no history and no prospects, buried under
the seconds, saying any old thing, your mouth full of
sand, oh I know it's immaterial, time is one thing,
I another, but the question may be asked, why time
doesn't pass, just like that, off the record, en pass-
ant, to pass the time, I think that's all for the
moment, I see nothing else, I see nothing whatever,
for the time being. (p. 389)

Again one notices the impossibility of escaping to a haven out-
side Time, for Time in a sense entombs all men from the moment
of conception. Perhaps some of the voices heard by the Beckett-
ian characters are like the taps of Ahab's carpenter's hammer,
the rhythmic reminders of Time.

There is a sense of tragic loss in man's inability to
escape Time. The Self can be nothing if it is not free from
the determinism of a cycle. Ahab pronounces a lengthy lament
on this subject:

What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly
thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master,
and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me; that
against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep
pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself on all the
time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own
proper, natural heart, I durst not so much as dare?
Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this
arm? But if the great sun move not of himself; but
is as an errand-boy in heaven; nor one single star
can revolve, but by some invisible power; how then
can this one small heart beat; this one small brain
think thoughts; unless God does that beating, does
that thinking, does that living, and not I. By
heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this
world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the hand-
spike. And all the time, lo! that smiling sky, and
this unsounded sea! Look! see yon Albicore! who
put it into him to chase and fang that flying-fish?
where do murderers go, man! Who's to doom, when the
judge himself is dragged to the bar? But it is a
mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky; and the air
smells now, as if it blew from a far-away meadow; they have been making hay somewhere under the slopes of the Andes, Starbuck, and the mowers are sleeping among the new-mown hay. Sleeping? Aye, toil we how we may, we all sleep at last on the field. Sleep? Aye, and rust amid greenness; as last year's scythes flung down, and left in the half-cut swaths. . . .

(Chap. CXXXII)

The autobiographical connection between Melville and his character Ahab is readily apparent in the previous excerpt. One cannot fail to witness the sorrow over the phrase "rust amid greenness." Now part of a letter penned by Melville on June 1, 1851, must be examined:

. . . . I am like one of those seeds taken out of the Egyptian Pyramids, which, after being three thousand years a seed and nothing but a seed, being planted in English soil, it developed itself, grew to greenness, and then fell to mould. So I. . . .

Didi and Gogo also attempt to explain the problem.

Estragon: No use struggling.
Vladimir: One is what one is.
Estragon: No use wriggling.
Vladimir: The essential doesn't change.
Estragon: Nothing to be done. (p. 14)

Despite their articulations, the tramps accept the concept of the Unnamable.

The essential is never to arrive anywhere, never to be anywhere, neither where Mahood is, nor where Worm is, nor where I am, it little matters thanks to what dispensation. The essential is to go on squirming forever at the end of the line, as long as there are waters and banks and ravening in heaven a sporting God to plague his creature, per pro his chosen shits. I've swallowed three hooks and am still hungry. (p. 338)

No matter how horrible an end may be, not to end is equally devastating, for this means that the Self cannot escape from Time, and can, therefore, not be reunited with the timeless Whole, the Whole for which Molloy asserts there is no name,
Malone's laborious fictions, and even the Unnamable's rushing flood of words from beyond the grave, are attempts to utter the name which will cause a silence, bring an end, where no one need ever speak again.14

Man must suffer for the sin of being born. The characters of Melville and Beckett are as predestined to suffer as was Adam to fall. One does not arrange one's birth, certainly, but by surviving, by "agreeing" to live, one condemns oneself to both sin and suffering. The only end to the suffering will come when life itself ends, when the Self should return to the Whole. The Self should regain its Paradise, as Adam's seed have sought to regain the Garden.

The position of the Self in the Beckettian-Melvillian world would have been greatly diminished and obscured without the contributions of a great English playwright. Both Melville and Beckett owe a literary debt to William Shakespeare. Melville viewed Shakespeare as the greatest of all the "thought-divers." For both Melville and Beckett, King Lear, in particular, exerted a profound influence on the formation of these authors' tragic visions. Beckett even created a modern Lear, whose impact is more immediate because Molloy appears to be a common tramp one could encounter on any road. There are several elements in Lear which also recur in the works of Melville and Beckett. The primary elements are the image of a whimsical god; the portrayal of men as beasts; and repeated use of the words "nature" and "nothing."15

In Act IV, Scene i, of King Lear, Shakespeare through Gloucester uttered a pessimistic summation of the play:
As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. 
They kill us for their sport. (ll. 38-39)

Melville did not concern himself with the principle of "fate"; he did, however, wrestle with the concept of men destroyed while pursuing noble motives, as though some malignant, or at times supremely indifferent, power presided over their destinies. Also, as in Lear, the hero's intense suffering issued not so much from the situation itself as from the recognition of the situation, not so much from physical agonies and punishments as from the tortures of a mind experiencing piercing visions.

Beckett creates a voice for Moran to hear, a baffling experience which occurs rather late in his life. He expresses both his intense dislike for the voice and the realization that he will react, much like a puppet or a trained beast, to whatever it orders from that day forth:

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. But I follow it none the less, more or less, I follow it in this sense, that I do what it tells me. And I do not think there are many voices of which as much may be said. And I feel I shall follow it from this day forth, no matter what it commands. And when it ceases, leaving me in doubt and darkness, I shall wait for it to come back, and do nothing, even though the whole world, through the channel of its innumerable authorities speaking with one accord, should enjoin upon me this and that, under pain of unspeakable punishments. (Molloy, pp. 131-132)

In The Unnamable not only the whimsicality, but the inscrutability of God is stressed. It hesitantly speculates:

Yes, I have a ponsus to discharge, before I can be free, free to dribble, free to speak no more, listen no more, and I've forgotten what it is. There at last is a fair picture of my situation. I was given a ponsus, at birth perhaps, or for no particular reason, because they dislike me, and I've forgotten what it is. But was I ever
told? (p. 310)

Since God is inscrutable, it is also within the realm of possibility that he too is limited in power. The Unnamable considers this possibility:

My master then, assuming he is solitary, in my image, wishes me well, poor devil, wishes my good, and if he does not seem to do very much in order not to be disappointed it is because there is not very much to be done or, better still, because there is nothing to be done, otherwise he would have done it, my great and good master, that must be it, long ago, poor devil. Another supposition, he has taken the necessary steps, his will is done as far as I am concerned (for he may have other protégés) and all is well with me without my knowing it. (p. 312)

Man, however, does not cease trying to determine the nature of his God. The Unnamable cries, "But who are these maniacs let loose on me from on high for what they call my good, let us first try and throw a little light on that" (p. 326). It is even conceivable that there may be more than one god, as there are a multitude of impressions of him.

In Waiting For Godot the image of a whimsical god is even more evident. Didi and Gogo would like to leave their solitary location, but they are unable to move on because, "We're waiting for Godot." Each day they wait and each day they are disappointed by Mr. Godot, who "didn't say for sure he'd come" (p. 10). Becoming worried about their condition, Gogo queries, "We're not tied? We're not---" (p. 13). He fears to supply the word "puppets." What would happen to the faithful pair if they relinquished their quest? Didi asserts, "He'd punish us!" (p. 59).

Shakespeare's concept of man as beast is also integral to
the works of Beckett and Melville. In *King Lear*, man becomes at various times hog, wolf, fox, dog, and lion. Shakespeare appears to insist that most men exist on the bestial level; only a few escape to redeem nature. Melville portrayed Ishmael as fascinated with the equilibrium of the whale, meditating on its dual vision of the world. He also perceived the world as a vast sea filled with many horrible monsters waiting to devour the unsuspecting victim. Beckett's most notable contribution are his description of Molloy as a shaggy, lumbering, bear-like creature, and the creation of Worm in *The Unnamable*.

Beckett's superior example would be Lucky of *Waiting For Godot*, whom Pozzo addresses as "Pig" or "Hog." In this radically split team, one sees creative thought starved in order that an inflated ego may indulge in selfish pursuits for material gain. When Didi questions Pozzo about the possibility of Lucky both dancing and thinking, Pozzo replies, "By all means, nothing simpler. It's the natural order!" (p. 26). However, the natural dance of the universe has become perverted and unrecognizable. Lucky, in his rambling and disjointed discourse, professes that God loves man "from the heights of divine apathy" (p. 28), a contradictory statement juxtaposing love and total indifference. Neither Lucky or his "master" Pozzo will escape from "The Net," the name aptly applied to Lucky's strained little dance.

Nature in *King Lear* wears many varied disguises: the affectionate goddess, the wild goddess, the "natural" man-beast. In *Moby-Dick* there are three views of nature, as
symbolized in "the whiteness of the whale": it is the benevolent agent of Emerson and company; it is the malevolent agent of Ahab; it is the incomprehensible nothingness of Ishmael. Only by accepting the third view can man hope to avoid destruction and maintain balance. Pozzo, of Waiting For Godot, accepts Ahab's view. Later it is evident that he has lost his balance.

But--but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging and will burst upon us pop! like that! just when we least expect it. That's how it is on this bitch of an earth. (p. 25)

In Beckett's works, nature and the constant stream of sensory phenomena, men's voices, and even man's inner voice produce an almost unbearable cacophony of "gibberish." Each character struggles against insurmountable odds to discover where he is, what is happening to him, and what is his niche or function in the scheme of the universe. He constantly is confronted with contradictions; he is attempting to assemble an intricate puzzle which lacks some vital pieces. He is doomed to failure; the only temporary balance is to "go on" in the assurance of inevitable failure. The Unnamable, who is "truly bathed in tears" (p. 305), describes his plight:

Is there really nothing new to try? I mentioned my hope, but it is not serious. If I could speak and yet say nothing, really nothing? Then I might escape being gnawed to death as by an old satiated rat, and my little tester-bed along with me, a cradle, or be gnawed to death not so fast, in my old cradle, and the torn flesh have time to knit, as in the Caucasus, before being torn again. But it seems impossible to speak and say nothing, you think you have succeeded, but you always overlook something, a little yes, a little no, enough to exterminate a regiment of dragoons. And yet I do not despair, this time, while saying who I am, where I am, of not losing me, of not going from here, of ending here. What prevents the miracle is the spirit of method to which I have perhaps been a little too
This rather lengthy self-examination is interesting for several reasons. First, the Unnamable mentions the impossibility for man to speak without "naming" reality. This is man's attempt to order the universe. However, it is not the "naming" itself which is dangerous, but it is the believing of a name as ultimate truth which destroys man. Second, it must be noted that the Unnamable also rejects the hope offered by the concrete number of years which terminated the torture of Prometheus. Numbers, measurements, are also attempts to impose an artificial order on the cosmos. Third, the Unnamable makes it a point to distance itself from Prometheus, the benefactor of mankind. Beckett and his characters are solipsists, dwellers of an inner world, who would not be inclined to "oblige humanity," especially the bestial masses. Fourth, man is referred to as "denatured clay." Over and over again modern man is pictured as having lost or perverted his original ties, his original destiny; man is unnatural. Fifth, these questions provide bases for 'going on,' which is all that man can do.

The entire tragedy of King Lear proceeds from the word "nothing." Nothingness is also an essential element in the tragic visions of Melville and Beckett. Melville was convinced
that any attempt to impose meaning into the world could only result in destruction. Ahab raves about discovering what lies beyond the "pasteboard mask," but Ishmael knows that what is there is nothingness. The element which separates Ishmael from Ahab and others like him is the knowledge that it is easier to live in a malicious world governed by a malicious god than it is to continue in a world of nothing where no one either loves or hates you. Ishmael concedes the imperviousness of nature; it is too dark to be fathomed by any man and, by attempting to bridge the chasm between man's knowledge and nature's essence, man can only become more conscious of his inability to ever comprehend. 

Even if man were able to glimpse the truth, what effect would this have on him? Ishmael concedes: "But clear truth is a thing for salamander giants only to encounter; how small the chance for the provincials then? What befel the weakling youth lifting the dread goddess's veil at Sais?" (Chap. LXXVI). It should be noted that Molloy concurs with Ishmael on his observation of the burden of truth and self-encounter:

Physically speaking it seemed to me I was now becoming rapidly unrecognizable. And when I passed my hands over my face, in a characteristic and now more than ever pardonable gesture, the face my hands felt was not my face any more, and the hands my face felt were my hands no longer. And yet the gist of the sensation was the same as in the far-off days when I was well-shaven and perfumèd and proud of my intellectual's soft white hands. And this belly I did not know remained my belly, my old belly, thanks to I know not what intuition. And to tell the truth I not only knew who I was, but I had a sharper and clearer sense of my identity than ever before, in spite of its deep lesions and the wounds with which it was covered. And from this point of view I was less fortunate than my other acquaintances. (p. 170)
Beckett further realizes that not only is this nothingness unfathomable, but that man would greatly fear to approach this "néant" in himself.\(^24\) It is especially in *The Unnamable* that one sees the brutal confrontation of the Self with its essence. Molloy, however, best articulates what comes of this search for the Self:

For to know nothing is nothing, not to want to know anything likewise, but to be beyond knowing anything, to know you are beyond knowing anything, that is when peace enters in, to the soul of the incurious seeker. It is then the true division begins, of twenty-two by seven for example, and the pages fill with the true ciphers at last. (p. 64)

Like Ishmael, Molloy also realizes that it is only when man gives up asserting that he can "know" anything that he may truly begin to profit by his experiences in the world. Malone expresses a longing similar to Ahab's, that is, a glimpse beyond the "pasteboard mask." "But before I go I should like to find a hole in the wall behind which so much goes on, such extraordinary things, and often coloured" (p. 237). The term "coloured" is especially worthy of note, for it is man who commits the disastrous error of attempting to "colour" reality. He further endangers himself by accepting these "colours" as real, rather than as refractions from his own mind. Ishmael warns of the dangers of accepting illusions:

> There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gently rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror. Over Descartian vortices you hover. And perhaps, at mid-day in the fairest weather, with one half-throttled shriek you drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever. Heed it well, ye Pantheists! (Chap. XXXV)
Malone asserts: "Nothing is more real than nothing" (p. 192).

Didi and Gogo in Waiting For Godot conduct a series of interesting speculations concerning Christ and the two thieves. One conversation centers around the discrepancies in the gospels' reports of the two thieves.

Vladimir: One out of four. Of the other three two don't mention any thieves at all and the third says that both of them abused him.
Estragon: Who?
Vladimir: What?
Estragon: What's all this about? Abused who?
Vladimir: The Saviour.
Estragon: Why?
Vladimir: Because he wouldn't save them.
Estragon: From hell?
Vladimir: Imbecile! From death.
Estragon: I thought you said hell.
Vladimir: From death, from death.
Estragon: Well what of it?
Vladimir: Then the two of them must have been damned.
Estragon: And why not?
Vladimir: But one of the four says that one of the two was saved.
Estragon: Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it.
Vladimir: But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?
Estragon: Who believes him?
Vladimir: Everybody. It's the only version they know.
Estragon: People are bloody ignorant apes. (p. 9)

Again, one must remark upon the obsession with numbers. Gogo, however, shows a flash of insight when he comments on the ignorance of most people as they deceive themselves with such number games. Didi has earlier said that the thieves were to be saved from hell; he then changes to the statement that they were to be saved from death. Gogo has also picked up on this change. Could physical death be more horrible than the death-in-life to which the masses are condemned? Are not these living dead already in hell? If Didi or Gogo joins "every-
body," if either accepts one man's account as ultimate truth, then that one also becomes a "bloody ignorant ape."

A later conversation expands this concept:

Vladimir: But you can't go barefoot!
Estragon: Christ did.
Vladimir: Christ! What has Christ got to do with it? You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!
Estragon: All my life I've compared myself to him.
Vladimir: But where he lived it was warm, it was dry!
Estragon: Yes. And they crucified quick. (p. 34)

The comparisons with Christ are interesting here. First, Christ was a loner, a seeker interested in the inner man. More importantly, He was God become man, entering the world bloody from the womb of woman. Most of Beckett's and Melville's characters are attempting to step outside the natural order, to become more than that creature commonly referred to as man. Ahab becomes the most blatant example: "'I am immortal then, on land and on sea,' cried Ahab with a laugh of derision;---'Immortal on land and on sea!'" (Chap. CXV).

Ahab's obsessive compulsion later becomes more evident as he imparts to Starbuck his conviction of the holy mission for which he was prepared and sent to sea:

Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders. Look thou, underling! that thou obeyest mine. --Stand round me, men. Ye see an old man cut down to the stump; leaning on a shivered lance; propped up on a lonely foot. 'Tis Ahab--his body's part; but Ahab's soul's a centipede, that moves upon a hundred legs. I feel strained, half stranded, as ropes that tow dismayed frigates in a gale; and I may look so. But ere I break, ye'll hear me crack; and till ye hear that, know that Ahab's hawser tows his purpose yet. (Chap. CXXXIV)

He is the leader; he assumes he has disciples. Notice the
height from which he believes he looks: he addresses Starbuck as "underling." On the third day of the chase, Ahab admits two items: the loneliness of the man on a quest and the certainty that death-in-life is more to be feared than the most terrible physical death. Also to be noted is the comparison of Christ's offering up His spirit on the cross to Ahab's giving up of the spear. Ahab, however, is still defiant:

I turn my body from the sun... Oh! ye three unsurrendered spires of mine; thou uncracked keel; and only god-bullied hull; thou firm deck, and haughty helm, and Pole-pointed prow,—death-glorious ship! must ye then perish, and without me? Am I cut off from the last fond pride of meanest ship-wrecked captains? Oh, lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief. Ho, ho! from all your furthest bounds, pour ye now in, ye bold billows of my whole foregone life, and top this one piled comber of my death! Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last, I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! Thus, I give up the spear! (Chap. CXXXV)

The interest in the concept of crucifixion is evident in the work of both authors. The agony is primarily that of the inner man, although there are many physical manifestations of his torture. Ahab has been maimed, and bears a scar which runs deep into his soul. Molloy and Malone have numerous physical disabilities, while the Unnamable is grotesquely deformed, as are most of the characters which inform his story.

What accounts for the pervasive sense of agony? The answer lies in the final difference between Christ's crucifixion and that of modern man. In Christ's day, men were crucified by other men. However, the characters of Melville and Beckett are
self-crucifiers. They force themselves to set out on quests, the ultimate goals of which are self-knowledge and self-unity. These goals are not to be realized, as the questers acknowledge, yet they must undertake them, must endure a lifetime, and perhaps past a lifetime (the Unnamable), of disappointment, pain, and frustration. The agony at times is nearly unbearable. Ishmael realizes this as he observes aboard the Pequod:

Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under the water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure. Consider also the devilish brilliance and beauty of many of its most remorseless tribes, as the dainty embellished shape of many species of sharks. Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began.

Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appall ing ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return! (Chap. LVIII)

The intensity of the pain leads to contemplation of suicide. Ahab, bent on the destruction of the White Whale, realizes that at any time the whale may also destroy him. He wills to follow a course which will lead not only to his own destruction, but also to the utter annihilation of his ship. Didi and Gogo openly consider a speedier form of destruction.

Vladimir: Hand in hand from the top of the Eiffel Tower, among the first. We were respectable in those days. Now it's too late. They wouldn't let us up. (p. 7).

In the quotation, Didi acknowledges that the time for suicide
is past; he even implies that they are not worthy candidates for such a rite. One must, however, wonder about that en-
croaching "they." Is the term not used as a method of pro-
jecting Lidi's own desire not to die, or his realization that he must continue his own personal Calvary, onto a shadowy "they"?

Joyce Carol Oates has remarked that in the trilogy "we have only the self-conscious 'I' and the progressive movement inward to zero, in this case the primary zero which is the first and in a very important sense the final state of the individual's existence;[the 'I'] moves inward to a frank, brutal... consciousness of its own essence."25 Gogo sums up man's situation in one short phrase, "No, nothing is cer-
tain" (p. 35).

What position, then ought a man adrift in this nothing-
ness adopt? An ambiguous position is selected as the last hope for maintaining one's rather tenuous balance in the pre-
carious and varied situations in which one finds oneself. Melville depicted Ishmael's absorption in the dimensions of the whale, his drive to get into a skeleton and measure it in an attempt to place boundaries upon and to restrict reality.

Beckett creates within his characters an intense interest in mathematical computations, for instance, Molloy's intricate plan for rotating his sucking stones from pocket to pocket. Malone and the Unnamable both attempt to define reality in terms of projected images. In the end, all such efforts are not only futile, but destructive. Reality cannot be pinned down and studied, like an insect on a card. Those who insist
on such a course sign their own death warrants; one need only recall Ahab in *Moby-Dick*. The death need not be physical, either; Didi and Gogo remind us of the masses of living dead. Moran is, at first, of a kind with Ahab; however, during his dark night of the soul he adopts the vision of a morally ambiguous universe and is not destroyed. The Unnamable recognizes that many snares will be set up along the journey through life, snares in the form of philosophies or ideas, but that once man accepts just one he is doomed:

I am he who will never be caught, never delivered, who crawls between the thwarts, towards the new day that promises to be glorious, festooned with lifebelts, praying for rack and ruin. (pp. 338-339)

Once again in this speech there is a warning against accepting a truth as the Truth. The word "caught" also evokes another image of men-beasts and a whimsical god, of the fisherman-god delighting in the conquest of his little victims, the fishes. One also must note a link between this survivor, "festooned with lifebelts," and the "orphan" Ishmael, kept afloat by a coffin.

Man, with his great desire to know, experiences excruciating agony under the weight of eternal moral ambiguity. He, therefore, resorts to naming things, thinking that what the mind names, it controls. Thus, the White Whale "is" in one sense to Ahab, in another to Ishmael, to Queequeg, to each member of the crew, and to each reader. Ultimately, however, it "is" itself, and this self is what cannot be named, ordered, or structured. *Moby-Dick* cannot even truly be said to be "nothingness," for then again it is named. The whale can also
be said not to come to itself until it is brought into focus by Ishmael; in this context, then, the White Whale is simply a fictional contrivance of the storyteller Ishmael.  

Beckett continually calls into question the value of meaning, but the aesthetic adopted by his characters is meaning-centered. Man's curiosity must be in turn stimulated, frustrated, and suspended. Beckett will, through a character, question the meaning of something, appear to adopt a response, and then quickly undercut the value of the response. This entails a "logical circularity--the term employed is itself the point of the dispute." An excellent example of this art of undercutting occurs at the end of Molloy. One has been attempting to discover the relationship between the beginning and ending of the Moran section. Just as one thinks a clue has been offered, the clue is undercut and the story ends. Moran concludes:

I have spoken of a voice telling me things. I was getting to know it better now, to understand what it wanted. It did not use the words that Moran had been taught when he was little and that he in his turn had taught to his little one. So that at first I did not know what it wanted. But in the end I understood this language. I understood it, all wrong perhaps. That is not what matters. It told me to write the report. Does this mean I am freer now than I was? I do not know. I shall learn. 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. (pp. 175-176)

The word to note here is "free(r)." Freedom is a very difficult state to achieve in a hostile world; it would probably be correct to assume that such a state cannot be achieved in the outward world. Man must, therefore, heed the voice and move in an inward direction. Through such an experience he
will, as Moran avows, constantly "learn," he will continue to peel away the layers of the onion skin, he will achieve some form of peace and freedom.

The perplexity of man attempting to deal with a morally ambiguous universe is articulated by Malone. He bewails his situation:

Live and invent. I have tried. I must have tried. Invent. It is not the word. Neither is live. No matter. I have tried. While within me the wild beast of earnestness padded up and down, roaring, ravening, rending. I have done that. And all alone, well hidden, played the clown, all alone, hour after hour, motionless, often standing, spellbound, groaning. That's right, groan. I couldn't play. I turned till I was dizzy, clapped my hands, ran, shouted, saw myself winning, saw myself losing, rejoicing, lamenting. . . . I say living without knowing what it is. I tried to live without knowing what I was trying. Perhaps I have lived after all, without knowing. . . . There is no use indicting words, they are no shoddier than what they peddle. (pp. 194-195)

He recognizes the impossibility of ever successfully naming anything, and yet he cannot resist the urge to try. Indeed, Beckett seems to advocate that this stance is perhaps the only balanced pose that may be struck in an unbalanced universe. The Unnamable also attempts to deal with the "naming" quandary.

And I see myself slipping, though not yet at the last extremity, towards the resorts of fable. Would it not be better if I were simply to keep on saying babababa, for example, while waiting to ascertain the true function of this venerable organ? (p. 308)

Molloy, too, exhibits a certain comprehension: "The shadow in the end is no better than the substance" (p. 26). Even Pozzo at the end of his ravings admonishes Didi and Gogo to
"forget all I said. I don't remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn't a word of truth in it" (p. 23). For man, once he grasps at the straw of his own created fiction and names it truth, will have assured himself of destruction.

Melville created the metaphor of "going to sea to see." Ishmael is compelled to go to sea in an attempt to create meaning from emptiness. He acknowledges that the only truth is that which man has experienced, and that it is dependent on each man acting out his own particular vision. As the Unnamable asserts, "Ah a nice mess we're in the whole pack of us, it is possible we're all in the same boat, no, we're in a nice mess each one in his own peculiar way" (p. 372). Ishmael becomes another "mental traveller" who attempts to accept with a minimum of defense mechanisms the solitary position of the human condition, man adrift in the overwhelming world of experience. The Unnamable becomes Ishmael's "confrère" as it admits:

... you try the sea, you try the town, you look for yourself in the mountains and the plains, it's only natural, you want yourself, you want yourself in your own little corner, it's not love, not curiosity, it's because you're tired, you want to stop, travel no more, seek no more, lie no more, speak no more, close your eyes, but your own, in a word lay your hands on yourself, after that you'll make short work of it. (p. 400)

As in Moby-Dick Melville established the metaphor of his Tahiti/Paradise to which, after man has set out to experience the world, he may never return, so Molloy also admits having journeyed forth upon the treacherous sea. "And I too once went forth on it, in a sort of oarless skiff, but I paddled with an
old bit of driftwood. And I sometimes wonder if I ever came back, from that voyage" (p. 69). Once man has journeyed outward, he can no longer accept the safe, but false, view of reality offered by Tahiti.

Beckett appears to have adapted the metaphor of "going to sea to see" to Thoreau's admonition to "be a Columbus of thyself." Most of the seas with which his characters have to contend are inner ones. Each character on his solipsistic journey is charting the undiscovered territory of the Self.

The Unnamable underscores the necessity of the voyage:

Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak. No one compels me to, there is no one, it's an accident, a fact. Nothing can ever exempt me from it, there is nothing, nothing to discover, nothing to recover, nothing, that can lessen what remains to say, I have the ocean to drink, so there is an ocean then. Not to have been a dupe, that will have been my best possession, my best deed, to have been a dupe, wishing I wasn't, thinking I wasn't, knowing I was, not being a dupe of not being a dupe. (p. 314)

The Unnamable thus expresses a realization which it took Ishmael a long and perilous sea voyage to discover. Man can and will be deceived by appearances; perhaps his best gift to himself consists of not deceiving himself about the fact that he can be deceived. The fate of Ahab and the crew of the Pequod is a violent illustration of the result of such deception.

Melville recognized the danger of the independent man. There is a need for a brotherhood with his fellow man by which the independent man protects himself not only from the onslaught of an alien universe, but also from the perils of unrestrained egoism. Relying too heavily on the Self severs the
bonds with humanity and renders man incapable of purposeful action. It is also not to be overlooked that total isolation could drive man to insanity or suicide. Thus, Melville created a sort of marriage between Ishmael and Queequeg. Ishmael concedes man's need for man:

Squeeze! squeeze! squeeze! all the morning long; I squeezed that sperm till I myself almost melted into it; I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say, —Oh! my dear fellow beings, why should we longer cherish any social acerbities, or know the slightest ill-humor or envy! Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves universally into the very milk and sperm of kindness.

Would that I could keep squeezing that sperm for ever! For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fireside, the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti. (Chap. XCIV)

Beckett, in one manner or another, "weds" each of his characters to an antithetical self.

Estragon: Didi.
Vladimir: Yes.
Estragon: I can't go on like this.
Vladimir: That's what you think.
Estragon: If we parted? That might be better for us.
Vladimir: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (pause)
Unless Godot comes.
Estragon: And if he comes?
Vladimir: We'll be saved. (p. 60)

Both men have previously admitted that they are not really
happier together, but it is the togetherness which allows them to continue. They discuss suicide, but they do not attempt to follow through with their plans. Again, their brotherhood allows them to divert to a future date any self-destructive plot. It is not the coming of Mr. Godot which will save the two comrades; it is their cameraderie.

There is, in the works of both authors, an expressed drive to continue. No matter the degree of apprehension that is felt at the outset of the journey, nor the conviction that one's attempts are doomed to failure, one must continue. John Fletcher has established a correspondence between Beckett's works and Ecclesiastes. As Steven J. Rosen comments, "Lamenting the inexplicably absurd and dolorous spectacle of life, the Preacher concludes that man must, nonetheless, persist in dutiful observances. Beckett's trilogy, which ends with the words, 'You must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on', expresses much the same attitude." The Unnamable elaborates on this concept:

Unfortunately I am afraid, as always, of going on. For 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, but of which little by little, in spite of these handicaps, I shall begin to know something, just enough for it to turn out to be the same place as always, the same which seems made for me and does not want me, which I see, to want and to not want, take your choice, which spews me out or swallows me up. I'll never know, which is perhaps merely the inside of my distant skull where once I wandered, now am fixed, lost for tininess, or straining against the walls, with my head, my hands, my feet, my back, and ever murmuring my
old stories, my old story, as if it were the first time. So there is nothing to be afraid of. And yet I am afraid, afraid of what my words will do to me, to my refuge, yet again. (pp. 302-303)

For Molloy, also, there proceeds, from deep within the Self, an inescapable urging to move onward, to move inward. "For in me there have always been two fools, among others, one asking nothing better than to stay where he is and the other imagining that life might be slightly less horrible a little further on" (p. 48).

The only way to continue is by inventing fictions. Through Ahab, Melville illustrated the danger of accepting one metaphysic as ultimate truth. Ishmael accepts the fact that there is no such thing as history, there are only histories; there is no one point of view; there are only points of view. Thus, he becomes an equilibrist resting in "manhood's pondering repose of If" (Chap. CXIV).

The Unnamable also recognizes the necessity of inventing fictions. "I shall have company. In the beginning. A few puppets. Then I'll scatter them, to the winds, if I can" (p. 292). One must invent fictions, but one must never hold to one as absolute truth. Despite all barriers erected in his path, the "thought-diving" man must proceed, stripped as much as possible of illusions, in his definition of Self. To do otherwise would be not to live. To this proposition the Unnamable also addresses itself:

Ah but the little murmur of unconsenting man, to murmur what it is their humanity stifles, the little gasp of the condemned to life, rotting in his dungeon garrotted and racked, to gasp what
it is to have to celebrate banishment, beware. No, they have nothing to fear, I am walled round with their vociferations, none will ever know what I am, none will ever hear me say it, I won't say it, I can't say it, I have no language but theirs, no perhaps I'll say it, even with their language, for me alone, so as not to go silent, if that is what confers the right to silence, and it's unlikely, it's they who have silence in their gift, they who decide, the same old gang, among themselves, no matter, to hell with silence, I'll say what I am, so as not to have been born for nothing. (pp. 325-326)

The inevitable progression in Beckett is from birth to darkness and the grave. Pozzo insists: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more" (Waiting For Godot, p. 57). Most men merely exist in this night, unaware of Pozzo's (and later Didi's) observation. Once a man becomes aware, once he attains the tragic vision, there are only two available responses to the "waiting": suicide or continuing. Beckett's characters form alliances to prove their existence; they do "go on," accepting "waiting" as a condition of the human experience interposed between birth and death.32

The characters of both Melville and Beckett journey a treacherous path bordered on both sides by chasms of suicide and insanity. They must proceed on a solitary quest which will render no final answers. The journey will lead them, each one a unique Ulysses, far across uncharted seas to an Ithaca that does not exist. That these seas are primarily those of the Self is evident, both in the analogy of Macmann's sea voyage and Molloy's body fluids rushing out of the orifices as he dies, and in the repeated references to residing in either the head, where the brain is suspended in
liquid, or in the womb with the floating fetus. These analogies continually underscore the necessity and importance of the ongoing quest of the essential Self.

Perhaps the Unnamable best sums up the predicament of the Melvillain-Beckettian hero:

It's a lot to expect of one creature, it's a lot to ask, that he should first behave as if he were not, then as if he were, before being admitted to that peace where he neither is, nor is not, and where the language dies that permits of such expressions. (pp. 334-335)

Time and time again, both authors, through their characters, admit to and lament over a paradox: language is an extremely inadequate and deceptive tool which one ought to avoid, yet it is the only tool available to link the Self with external reality. One may cry about it, berate it, but in the end one will equip oneself with this frail instrument and "go on."

As the tramps discover:

Estragon: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?
Vladimir: Yes, yes, we're magicians. (p. 44)

It is "a lot to expect," but the language must continue, the fictions must be formed, and the man must endure the "waiting" as he goes on, ever onward, in "the long sonata of the dead," to the grave.
FOOTNOTES


2 Ibid.

3 Samuel Beckett, Three Novels (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1955), p. 13. (Hereafter, all subsequent references from Molloy, Malone Dies, and The Unnamable are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically within the body of the thesis.)

4 Samuel Beckett, Waiting For Godot (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954), p. 29. (Hereafter, all references to the play are cited within the body of the thesis.)

5 Geist, p. 22.

6 Ibid., p. 23.

7 Ibid., pp. 14-15.

8 Ibid., pp. 31-32.


10 Glicksberg, quoted in Copeland, Ibid.

11 Herman Melville, Moby-Dick: Or, The Whale (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), Chap. CXIV. (Hereafter, all references from Moby-Dick are cited parenthetically within the body of the thesis.)


17. Ibid., p. 21.


25. Ibid., pp. 176-177.


29. Ibid.
30 Seltzer, pp. 97-98.
31 Rosen, p. 21.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


