

ful to Robert Schmitz for assembling still more references on the subject. About whether these references point to a fear of capacity, or incapacity, we may just have to agree to disagree. I am, of course, properly alarmed at Schmitz's taking Lovelace so fully at his word all along, and about the pregnancy issue. Schmitz quotes Lovelace as ready to be surprised if a pregnancy does not happen, but then Lovelace is no stranger to surprise, for most of the things he expects to happen do not happen. As for the witty conceit that opens the letter's final paragraph, though I am not surprised that Lovelace has confused himself with the Almighty, I am surprised that Schmitz seems to have done so. Wilt's hypothesis, qua hypothesis, lives.

JUDITH WILT
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Misrepresenting the Eighteenth Century

To the Editor:

After propounding the thesis that, "when Blake was a child" (presumably in the 1760s and 1770s), "the ideal of perfect order had dissolved into the asymmetry of the sublime," "mathematical order" was shifting "to the balance of unequal masses as determined by taste or inspiration," and "it was generally accepted that the arts were becoming more natural," Carl Woodring ("Nature and Art in the Nineteenth Century," *PMLA*, 92 [1977], 194) adds some puzzling remarks: "In the gardens at Versailles every alley hath a brother; it is not so in the Alps. To the rebellious children of the nineteenth century, it seemed just like Enlightened Pope to think that the essence of brotherhood was parallel lines destined never to coalesce."

What Pope complains of in his famous denunciation, in the *Epistle to Burlington*, of the mathematical order and unnatural symmetry of Timon's Villa is that

No pleasing Intricacies intervene,
No artful wildness to perplex the scene;
Grove nods at grove, each Alley has a brother,
And half the platform just reflects the other.
The suff'ring eye inverted Nature sees,
Trees cut to Statues, Statues thick as trees.

(ll. 115–20)

The way to do it, Pope says, is rather,

Consult the Genius of the Place in all;
That tells the Waters or to rise or fall,

.

Spontaneous beauties all around advance,
Start ev'n from Difficulty, strike from Chance;
Nature shall join you, Time shall make it grow
A work to wonder at—perhaps a stow.
Without it, proud Versailles! thy glory falls;
And Nero's Terraces desert their walls.

(ll. 57–58, 67–72)

If one is a specialist in the "rebellious children of the nineteenth century," I suppose one has to see that they are provided with something to rebel against. And if this requires misrepresenting the fact that it was Pope and his contemporaries who initiated the English revolt against the symmetrical French and Dutch garden and led the way in "natural," asymmetrical landscape design, misrepresented they must be. Such are the exigencies of maintaining the "periodization" of literature. Though I don't quite know what Woodring's purpose was in changing Pope's colloquial, "natural" *hath* to the artificial, "Romantic" *hath*, as though he were Keats or Wordsworth.

When I and others have protested at the continuing currency of the bizarre legends about the eighteenth century propagated by nineteenth-century (and later) literary historians and textbooks, we have sometimes been charged with flogging a dead horse. Our thanks to Carl Woodring for demonstrating how full of life and vigor the poor beast still is.

DONALD GREENE
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Mr. Woodring replies:

I apologize to Donald Greene for inability to transmit his message to writers of the early nineteenth century or to the Wartons before them. As for our day, I would not wish to obstruct a spirited flogging of error, even when the horses are dead and the donkeys exist only in the eye of the flogger. But assuming a poet as imaginative as Pope who honored reason and order, would he need in 1777 a lingeringly romantic rescue from those who charged him with sanity? Surely Pope supplies the answer: "Let it be seldom, and compell'd by need."

CARL WOODRING
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The Beckett Hero

To the Editor:

The argument of Laura Barge's "'Coloured Images' in the 'Black Dark': Samuel Beckett's Later

Fiction" (*PMLA*, 92 [1977], 273–84) that the Beckett hero retreats inward in order to *discover* the "true self" ignores internal evidence to the contrary and misses the real point of his retreat. For Beckett's Everyman seeks the self only in order to escape it. (For a detailed analysis of the above, see my article "Samuel Beckett: The Flight from Self," *PMLA*, 88 [1973], 41–51).

Rebelling against the necessity of making life's absurd journey from nothing to nothing, the Beckett hero seeks an escape from self-consciousness (which makes him *aware* of his lonely, untenable position) and a return to the unburdened, preconscious state from which he emerged. The problem is that he cannot die until he has been born; that is, until he has accepted the existential necessity of self-creation (his primary task in life) and established an individual identity to escape *from*. Thus—knowing that he has failed to establish his *being*—Malone fears that he has never been born and will "therefore never get dead" (*Malone Dies*, in *Three Novels* [New York: Grove, 1965], p. 225).

But establishing an identity (a "voice" of his own, as the Unnamable puts it) involves an *increase* in self-consciousness, the very last thing the Beckett hero wants. It also involves a union of mind and body that he finds impossible. For Murphy, as for all Beckett's protagonists, the body and the mind constitute two separate worlds that cannot be united, though they may collide or communicate at times. The same is true of the self-as-object and the self-as-subject. In *How It Is* (New York: Grove, 1964) we see the narrator writhing in the mud with Pim (his objective, physical self) in a futile attempt at union. But there is no union possible, only a mutual torment, "glued to him yes tormenting him yes eternally yes" (p. 98). The three divisions of the book—before Pim, with Pim, after Pim—represent three stages in the narrator's consciousness: life before self-consciousness set in; the development of self-consciousness, bringing the awareness of Pim and the futile attempt at self-union; and finally the retreat from the outside world and the objective self, the retreat from Pim.

It is always the same hero, always the same problem, always the same story. "I have my faults," says the Unnamable, "but changing my tune is not one of them." In fact, it is in *The Unnamable*, the third novel in Beckett's trilogy, that it becomes clear that *all* Beckett's fictional characters, past and present, are inventions that the narrator hides behind to avoid the necessity of creating himself, "to avoid acknowledging me." And earlier, Malone himself admits that, when he dies, "it will all be over with the Murphys, Merciers, Molloyes, Morans and Malones" (see *Three Novels: The Unnamable*,

p. 326; *Malone Dies*, p. 236). Later protagonists are similar projections of the unseen narrator. As the gap increases between his inner and outer worlds, so does the tendency of his mental self to view the physical self as one of its fictions.

In his first novel, *Murphy* (New York: Grove, 1957), Beckett describes the three zones of consciousness, the three mental regions to which his later heroes retreat, until at last they reach the dark, innermost recess of the mind, the third zone, where, now freed from the outside world and the outside self, one is shapeless and motionless, "a mote in the dark of absolute freedom" (p. 112). But now the Beckett narrator finds himself trapped in his innermost cell with that nameless, voiceless "I" of consciousness from which there *is* no escape this side of death. Agonizingly aware of his predicament, he longs for the final dark but is afraid of it, bound by man's instinctive will-to-exist that makes him cling to consciousness even when trying to escape it. He knows that he cannot manage "birth into death," as Malone called it, until he has first managed birth-into-life—but he is unable to achieve the latter because he finds self-unity (hence self-creation) impossible. *This* is the cross on which the Beckett hero is crucified.

ETHEL F. CORNWELL
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Ms. Barge replies:

The crucial point of Ethel Cornwell's disagreement with my essay—that the Beckettian hero "seeks the self only in order to escape it"—is a summary of her article, to which she refers in her letter. According to this article, the "Beckett hero does not seek his identity, he flees from it; his quest is for anonymity, for *self-annihilation*" (p. 41). Yearning "perpetually" for self-destruction (p. 41), the hero (as Murphy) seeks "a kind of oblivion" and (as Malone) an escape from being (p. 43). Thus, what Beckett is putting forth is "the rejection of life and the desire for its opposite" (p. 44).

Recognizing the element of paradox in all Beckett's work, we can agree that the hero longs for a release from spatial and temporal consciousness *as he experiences it* and that he is obsessed with any state (life in the womb, insanity, ascetic contemplation, death) that seems to offer relief from the burden (the *angst*) of his *dasein* (his being consciously rooted in the world). The misconception in Cornwell's argument is that the hero's ultimate purpose is to escape selfhood and achieve nonbeing or oblivion, that is, that he wants to ob-

literate the self, to be “born” *in order to* “die.” Although the hero is continually drawn toward a lessening of the burden of existence, he is searching for, not fleeing from, the essence of the self—what I have termed in my essay as “metaphysical reality,” “the ground of being, which is the essence of truth at the core of human experience” (p. 276). Since his quest is nearly always inward, the hero must assume that this reality lies embedded in the core of consciousness. Any assertion that he flees the self must be qualified by the explanation that he is fleeing his present awareness of selfhood in order to understand what human consciousness is all about, to authenticate or give value to his experience of being. Such paradox is not unique in Beckett. Sartre’s *pour soi* continually escapes itself, futilely attempting to become *en soi*, but such an escape is to gain being, not annihilate it. In Christian thought, the self must die metaphysically in order to realize true being or life. As Aquinas explains, no creature can exist in and of itself; only God *is*, and all being is contingent upon, and originates in, him. But by such a death man “saves” (as Christ explains in Luke ix.24) rather than “loses” his own selfhood or life. Without confining Beckett in an existentialist framework or assigning theological implications to his work, we can say that the hero is obsessed with discovering the meaning of selfhood, locating a point of reference for human experience. He is seeking answers to the Unnamable’s questions:

where is man, where are you, what are you seeking, who is seeking, seeking who you are . . . where you are, what you’re doing. (*The Unnamable*, p. 385)

As Ruby Cohn summarizes, the hero is engaged in the “old Greek quest for the metaphysical meanings of the Self, the World, and God.” Such a quest is profoundly distinct from an effort to cease to be.

Proof for the above would take both a negative and positive approach. Negatively, we would show that the regressive states that fascinate the hero are not negations of being, and that negation of being is not his goal. Positively, we would offer evidence that this goal is realizing self-identity, discovering the essence of the self by comprehending its source and meaning. Such a compilation of evidence would make an interesting essay, but I am frustrated here by my thousand-word limitation. Murphy makes obsolete the retreats that fascinate Belacqua—the prenatal state, insanity, drunkenness, and suicide (for neither of these heroes can the occurrence of actual death be considered a retreat; their deaths are not states they seek but events that happen to

them)—by escaping into a third zone. It is not, however, oblivion that Murphy seeks in this zone. Here he finds a “sensation” that is the most “pleasant” of all (*Murphy*, p. 112)—in fact, his “only felicity”—a state of “self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world” (p. 168). Although Murphy’s three inward states are described as a “torpor” (p. 105), careful attention to Beckett’s word choice dispels our notion of annihilation of the self. Murphy is said to have “lapsed into consciousness,” where he discovers “only Murphy himself, improved out of all knowledge” (p. 105). In fact, to be up and about in the macrocosm is not what Murphy understands by “consciousness” (p. 110); only in his mind does he come “alive” (p. 111). Murphy flees from Mr. Endon precisely because the terrible vision of himself reflected in the madman’s eyes defines the self unseen and disappearing—the “last” Murphy will see of Murphy (pp. 249–50). Murphy is seeking a state of bliss and freedom for the self, not one of oblivion.

Considering other heroes from a positive viewpoint, we note that Watt is “more troubled perhaps than he had ever been by anything” by his inability simply to identify himself as a man (*Watt*, p. 82) because what he has hoped to gain by his sojourn at Mr. Knott’s is an identification, a naming, of the macrocosm with himself as the point of reference (pp. 40–41). The hero of *Stories* states that his soul is in quest of itself (p. 11), and the voice of *Texts* tries to define the self through the creation of art (p. 85). Moran stalks Molloy (his mythic self); Malone, after remarking that he cannot “get born” and therefore “get dead,” reveals his basic concern—that he must go on forever “not knowing what it is I do, nor who I am, nor where I am, nor if I am” (*Malone Dies*, pp. 225–26)—and the Unnamable claims that “the alleviations of flight from self” are “simply to find within himself a palliative for what he is” (*The Unnamable*, p. 367). This final hero of the trilogy defines the problem precisely,

there is no name for me, no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, (p. 404)

and offers the only solution possible in Beckett’s world:

I’ll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me. (p. 414)

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